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ARL Partners with NAACP to Commemorate *Brown vs. Board*

by Jerome Offord, Jr., Program Officer for Training and Diversity, ARL

It was 1951 and the United States was simmering with racial tension. African American children were forced to attend segregated schools that were poorer in resources, more crowded, and often further away from their homes than schools designated "whites only." An African American man named Oliver Brown attempted to enroll his daughter in a neighborhood school, considered for whites only, but was denied because of their skin color. Frustrated, Mr. Brown contacted the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and lodged a complaint. Mr. Brown and 15 other parents decided, on behalf of their 22 children, to file a lawsuit against the Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education, challenging the "separate but equal" rule set by the *Plessey vs. Ferguson* case as unconstitutional. This case grew into the landmark civil rights case known as *Oliver L. Brown, et al. vs. the Topeka, Kansas, Board of Education*. On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court unanimously declared school segregation unconstitutional and struck down the "separate but equal" doctrine of *Plessey* for public education.¹

In celebrating the 50th anniversary of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling, the NAACP and Amnesty International will launch a commemorative toolkit on May 17. The toolkit can be used to move individuals toward advocacy as well as help individuals learn more about the *Brown vs. Board* decision. It will include an annotated bibliography compiled by ARL librarians that can be used to identify resources for educational programs to commemorate the landmark ruling. The development of the bibliography illustrates a new outreach initiative launched by the ARL Diversity program to promote research librarianship in minority communities by building linkages between libraries and organizations like the NAACP and Amnesty International. The bibliography project was spearheaded by Jerome Offord, Jr., ARL Program Officer for Training and Diversity, along with Roland Barksdale-Hall, Managing Editor, Newsletter of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association, and Janet Sims-Woods, Assistant Chief Librarian, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. The bibliography will be available on ARL's Web site; the complete toolkit will be available from the NAACP.

Footnotes

1. NAACP, *Brown 50 Years and Beyond: Promise and Progress* (2004), <<http://www.naacp.org/BvBE/>>. [back to text](#)

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Offord, Jerome, Jr. "ARL Partners with NAACP to Commemorate Brown vs. Board." *ARL*, no. 233 (April 2004): 6. <<http://www.arl.org/newsltr/233/brownvboard.html>>.

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