

# JUDICIAL COURAGE AND COMMITMENT TO THE RULE OF LAW

During the Civil Rights Movement  
of the 1960s



# Years Before - and After - the *I Have a Dream* Speech

*When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said:*

*“Now is the time to rise from the dark  
and desolate valley of segregation  
to the sunlit path of racial justice.”*



# U.S. District Court Judge Frank M. Johnson, of Montgomery, Alabama, Made Courageous Civil Rights Rulings



# The Dream, Ms. Rosa Parks, and Judge Johnson

Judge Johnson ruled in *Browder v. Gayle* (1956) that Ms. Rosa Parks was within her legal rights to refuse to give up her seat in the Whites-only section of a Montgomery bus.

*Ms. Parks rose “from the desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice.”*



# The Courts' Role in Facilitating Peaceful Solutions

Judge Johnson's decision in Ms. Park's case integrated Montgomery's transportation system, setting the stage for broader measures.

In doing so, he put aside community pressures and prejudice to follow the precedent the Supreme Court set in

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1953).

***Brown v. Board of Education:  
“Separate is Not Equal”***



# The Community Punished the Judge for Following the Law

He and his family were denounced,  
threatened, ostracized, and harassed.

His mother's house was fire bombed.

# A Cross was Burned on His Lawn



# Nothing Stopped Judge Johnson

“If you think I'm going to cave in on something like this, you better go get you something else to look for!” he said.

**“No way. If I can't do what's right, I'll quit.”**

# *In Following the Rule of Law, He Ordered School Integration*

The Judge's 1963 decision in  
*Lee v. Macon County Board of Education*  
Made Alabama's schools the first statewide  
integrated system.



# Saturday Court Sessions Showed that He Meant Business

Judge Johnson held court on Saturdays for six months so that schools had to develop and debate a statewide plan he could approve.

His decisions started to reverse the trend in the South that *Brown* meant only “no segregation.”

The Judge interpreted *Brown* to mean “integration”

# Judge Johnson was Most Proud of this School Integration Decision



*In Following the Rule of Law*  
Judge Johnson also:

Ordered Governor George Wallace in 1965  
to allow the march from  
**Selma to Montgomery.**



*In Following the Rule of Law,*  
From 1961 to 1966, He Ordered Equal  
Voting Opportunities. The Judge:

Declared the state's voting tax  
unconstitutional.

Outlawed discriminatory voting practices.



# Ruled in 1966 that African Americans Must be Permitted to Serve on Juries



# Judge Johnson's Philosophy is Summarized in His Own Words:

“The basic concept that a good judge has to have is to **do what's right,**

➤ **regardless** of who the litigants are,

➤ **regardless** of how technical, or

➤ **regardless** of how emotional the issues that are presented are.”

# ***Today, Judge Johnson and Dr. King Might Ask: How are You Investing Yourself in Your Dream for America?***

**For more about Judge Frank M. Johnson, including videos, go to The Academy of Achievement:**

<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/joh2int-1>

**More about the Judges' Oath of Office (video)**

[http://www.uscourts.gov/Multimedia/Videos.aspx?video\\_url=http://www.uscourts.gov/video/source/EducationalResources/Judges\\_Oath\\_2011\\_High.f4v&video\\_image=/uscourts/video/EducationalResources/judges\\_oath\\_2011\\_preview.jpg&video\\_id=judgesOath](http://www.uscourts.gov/Multimedia/Videos.aspx?video_url=http://www.uscourts.gov/video/source/EducationalResources/Judges_Oath_2011_High.f4v&video_image=/uscourts/video/EducationalResources/judges_oath_2011_preview.jpg&video_id=judgesOath)

**More about the Rule of Law as It Affects Minorities**

<http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/get-involved/legal-concepts/rule-law.aspx>

**More about *Brown v. Board of Education* – A Re-Enactment**

<http://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/get-involved/federal-court-activities/brown-board-education-re-enactment.aspx>