

NARRATOR:

The Disability & Philanthropy Forum presents Britney Wilson, Associate Professor of Law and Director of the Civil Rights and Disability Justice Clinic at New York Law School.

BRITNEY WILSON:

Black people have always advocated for people with disabilities. And I'm actually working on an article right now about, it's called The Disability History of Brown versus the Board of Education, where I talk about two cases.

One called Miller versus the DC Board of Education, which is a case in which five Black deaf students and their families sued Gallaudet University two years before Brown for the right to be educated at Gallaudet, which at the time only educated white deaf students. And also another case, Brown versus the Board of Education is actually made up of five companion cases.

So the Delaware companion case within Brown, one of the plaintiffs in that case had a heart condition, which is not part of the broader story within Brown that's often told. So her mother actually wanted to file the lawsuit, wanted her to be a plaintiff in the lawsuit to attend the integrated school, not just because she wanted her to go to school with white people.

Because it was actually dangerous to her health for her to have to travel across town to the white school. So this was significant to me, because it showed that Black disabled people were part and parcel of the road leading up to Brown and in Brown itself. And actually I found out that the attorney in the Miller case, the case suing Gallaudet, was actually the attorney in the DC companion case in Brown.

So that to me showed that it was intentional that there was this cadre of Black attorneys that were thinking about disability as also part of what needed to be included in education. But yet when you hear the story of disability in education, it usually starts with these cases, Park and Mills. Where after Brown, disability is something that people were told to be thinking about.

After Brown, where mostly white disability rights attorneys said, "Hey, we've given Black people rights. What about disabled people?" As though race and disability are mutually exclusive.

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