



Sylvia Mendez

Sylvia Mendez is an American civil rights activist of Mexican-Puerto Rican heritage who, at age 8, was the lead plaintiff in *Mendez v. Westminster*. Her parents filed the federal lawsuit after Mendez was denied enrollment in the local elementary school because of her Latino surname and dark skin. The 1947 case ended school segregation in California and paved the way for the American civil rights movement. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, then an NAACP lawyer, submitted an amicus court brief for *Mendez v. Westminster* citing the inequality of schools segregated by race or ethnicity. Marshall used the brief in 1954 to argue *Brown v. Board of Education*, which ended school segregation nationwide. In 2011, President Barack Obama awarded Mendez the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor. She continues to speak to students around the country about her experience and segregation.



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