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Wysinger v. Crookshank: the case that ended school segregation of African-Americans in California

In spite of the Amendment to California Code regarding education of African-Americans, the city of Visalia in the Central San Joaquin Valley continued to segregate African-Americans. On October 8, 1888, officials refused to admit Edmond Wysinger's son Arthur to Visalia's only high school. Edmond Wysinger, an ex-slave who had bought his own freedom, sued school superintendent S.A. Crookshank. The case came to the Superior Court of Tulare County in 1889 which ruled in favor of Crookshank. Mr. Wysinger and his lawyers filed for a retrial and when they were denied filed a writ of exception before the Supreme Court of California. The Supreme Court of California ultimately ruled in favor of the plaintiff, Edmond Wysinger. The objective of this research paper is to explore the process of challenging the customs and racial mores of late 19th Century California, and to explain how Wysinger ultimately won his case.

This paper concludes that sometimes there is a great disparity between the law and the realistic enforcement of the law. Often the law can only be put into practices when individual citizens know their rights under the law as well as the necessary steps to see that the law is enforced. Edmond Wysinger's stand in the 1880s to see that the letter of the law was followed made his courageous fight an inspiring example of courage under dire circumstances.