Kenneth B. Clark was brought to New York City by his mother when he was four. He attended schools in Harlem and graduated from George Washington High School in 1931. He received the BS and MA from Howard University and the PhD degree in psychology from Columbia University in 1940.

As a social psychologist, Clark worked with lawyers in the series of cases on equality of educational opportunity that led to the historic 1964 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas decision. His studies on the effects of segregation on the personality development of children were cited by the U.S. Supreme Court in footnote 11 of the decision.

In 1946, Clark and his wife, Dr. Mamie Phipps Clark, founded the interracial Northside Center for Child Development for the treatment of children with personality and learning problems. In 1964, he became a founder and director of Harlem Youth Opportunities (HARYOU), a prototype community development program that sought to increase the participation of low-income groups in decisions on education, housing, employment and training, and economic development.

A member of the faculty at City College of the City University of New York from 1942 to 1975, he was named Distinguished Professor of Psychology in 1971. He was a member of the New York Board of Regents from 1966 until 1986.

A member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi, Clark served as president of the American Psychological Association (1970), of the Society Psychological Studies of Social Issues (1959), and of the Metropolitan Applied Research Center (1967–1975). From 1975 until his death in 2005, he served as President of Clark, Phipps, Clark, & Harris, Inc., a human-relations consulting firm.

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