

History of the jim crow laws



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 officially freed African Americans within rebel states. After the end of the Civil war, the Thirteenth Amendment emancipated all slaves. Politicians now faced the daunting task of bringing together a divided country. Under President Andrew Johnson, The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 was established and lasted until 1877. The aim was to reorganize southern states, and to establish a means for which black and white citizens can live together in a non-slavery society. It appeared that the Constitution had finally fulfilled its promise to provide African Americans full citizenship and equal protection under the law. For the first time, African Americans experienced a period where they could vote, participate in political processes, acquire land and seek their own employment. This seemingly peaceful time, lasting around 20 years was beginning to unfold due to those who still opposed equally citizenship and equal rights for all. African Americans would lose all progress they had gained and were denied of their rights once again. This was all made possible due to the installment of racist and bias statutes, also identified as The Jim Crow laws.

The term Jim crow was a slang term used to describe people of color and was than adapted to be the name of any law passed in the South that created different rules for blacks and whites. The Jim Crow laws were a reaction to the Reconstruction Acts and where based on the premise of white superiority. Local communities in a majority of the states passed “ Jim Crow” laws in which a separate but equal status was established for African Americans. These laws were established and maintained between 1874 and 1975, and inevitably condemned African Americans to unjust treatment and inferior facilities. These laws were seen mainly in the southern and boarder

states. Jim Crow was more of a lifestyle backed up by a system that legitimized a hateful, racist and anti-black way of life. Under these laws, the supposedly equal African American citizens were treated as second class and exposed to physical and mental violence from whites daily. Jim crow laws were put in place in order to maintain racial segregation. This segregation started with all forms of public transportation and in schools, but quickly grew into the segregation of parks, diners, shops and theaters. Laws forbade African Americans from living in white neighborhoods. During this time, there would be racist and bias articles written discussing the implied superiority of the white race, and virtually every establishment supported and reinforced these oppressive laws. Pro-segregation politicians would often give eloquent speeches about how there was extreme danger associated with integration.

The promise of equality based on the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendment written in the Constitution was quickly replaced with racism and inequality. The North also experienced many Jim Crow-like laws. Many northern states required African Americans to own property in order to vote, schools and neighborhoods were segregated, businesses often displayed “ whites only” signs. Even during these times of Jim Crow law, there were brave individuals willing to stand up for what is right. One such person was Homer Adolph Plessy.

Homer Adolph Plessy, born on March 17, 1862, was born to a family of mixed race with his great grandmother being African. Plessy would take up activism in the year 1887, and served as vice president to a social club aimed at reforming New Orleans’ public education system. During his work in activism, a law for the segregating of public facilities was developed in 1890.

This inspired Plessy to challenge this law with guidance from a group called the Citizens Committee. This committee consisted of a group of New Orleans citizens led by Mary Aristide and was developed in September 1891. Their goal was to fight against segregation and more specifically, the Separate Car Act. In 1892 Plessy purchased a first-class ticket aboard the East Louisiana Railroad and sat in the segregated section of the train reserved for white passengers only. Once he was seated in this section, he told people that he was a person of mixed race, but he refused to ride in the segregated section. For his actions Plessy was jailed and eventually convicted by a New Orleans court for the violation of segregation laws established in 1890. Plessy would eventually file a petition against the courts and judge John H. Ferguson, claiming his 14th Amendment rights had been violated. After several years had passed, a verdict was finally given in the case known as Plessy v. Ferguson. The decision was that the separate but equal laws were still constitutional, and the protections of 14th Amendment only applied to the civil and political rights and not social rights such as choosing to sit in segregated area. The court's decision was that the segregation of rail cars was not a violation, and no amendments had been violated. This ruling meant that the segregation was deemed legal if the facilities for both blacks and whites were equal. This decision had such a powerful impact because it showed the federal government's unwillingness to challenge segregation and basically justified the oppression of African Americans in the south and reinforced Jim Crow law. Following this decision, the region saw an increase in violence and injustices. An African American journalist named Ida B. Wells would take brave steps in documenting and spreading knowledge about this violence.

For decades Wells would devote her time and effort on campaigning against Jim Crow law and all the violence associated with it. Wells owned a newspaper, and she would write about what she saw happening to her fellow citizens. As a skilled writer, these stories helped to make known what people were truly experiencing, and she hoped her work would make it so that American society could no longer ignore what was taking place. The information she was collecting, and publishing made Wells a target and she often faced threats and violence. Ida B. Wells was a founder of the National Association of Colored Women's Club, a group dedicated to fighting the issues that dealt with civil rights and women's suffrage. In the article titled , *IDA WELLS BARNETT (1862-1931)*, author Tyina Steptoe mentions how Wells was a founding member of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Steptoe, 2007). Her work was a milestone in American journalism and an inspiration to many other activists. Another notable person who had great influence during the Jim Crow era, and another founder of NAACP, was a man named W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois was an African American writer, historian and civil rights activist. During his life, Du Bois published a vast number of articles, books and essays, on the topic of race relations in America. As well as being one of the founders of the NAACP, Du Bois also founded the Niagara Movement in 1905. This movement was created after Du Bois and others were denied admittance to hotels in Buffalo, New York. The Niagara Movement was mainly focused on the issues of crime, economics and education. This movement and its members truly stood out to the entire country because of its powerful demand for equal rights and the call for an end to segregation and all other aspects of Jim Crow law.

According to Stephanie Christensen, author of NIAGARA MOVEMENT (1905-

<https://assignbuster.com/history-of-the-jim-crow-laws/>

1909), “ The Niagara Movement was considered the precursor to the NAACP and many of its members, such as W. E. B. DuBois, were among the new organization’s founders” (1). A crucial event that helped to counter the harsh and unfair laws in Jim Crows American, was the case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954). A young girl by the name of Linda Brown was denied entry to an all-white elementary school located in Topeka, Kansas. This denial was of course due to the ruling of legalized segregation masked by the term of separate but equal. After this incident, the girl’s father, a man named Oliver Brown file a suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, along with help from the NAACP. This case was a consolidation of four separate class-action suits being filed in four states by the NAACP. They worked on behalf of African American elementary and high school students, all who had been denied admission to all-white public schools. Brown would argue the fact that schools for African American children were no equal to those of whites and furthermore the act of segregating these children due to race was having a negative impact. This case would reach the supreme court where Brown and his team would argue that the impacts of segregation on these children were affecting their self-esteem and over all outlook on life. Being separated made it seem as if they were inferior and as young developing children this can be damaging if a child grows up believing that they truly are inferior. The opposing side would argue that everything was being done to create equality for whites and non-whites. They pointed to the Plessy decision that took place in 1896 and used it to support the segregation policies. They then argued that they had indeed created equal facilities, although the races were segregated. They also argued, discrimination by race did not harm children in any way. With the help of Thurgood Marshall, an experienced civil rights

activist and lawyer as well as help from community activists, parents and students, the case was strongly argued, and a decision was finally reached. A unanimous decision by the supreme court ruled in favor of Brown. They ruled the practice of segregation unconstitutional. The courts refused to apply its decision in the Plessy v. Ferguson case to educational aspects. They agreed that segregation in public education denied African American children equal protection of laws established by the Fourteenth Amendment. They were able to recognize how important the education system is to the American way of life and how it can be seen as the foundation for good values and citizenship in a developing child.

The U. S. Supreme Court's decision on the Brown v. Board of Education case marked a turning point in the history of racism and saw the beginning of the end for segregation and all Jim Crow laws. The decades-long effort of so many brave men, women and children were starting to pay off. President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, which legally ended discrimination and segregation that had been established under Jim Crow laws. The Voting Rights Act established in 1965 helped to put a stop to unjust efforts in keeping minorities from voting.

Things were starting to move in the right direction in the fight for equal rights and equality, though there was still a great need for further improvement. The sacrifices of all civil rights activist who decided to rise and fight in order to gain such progress, will remain a significant part of U. S. history and their names will live on. In the book, *The civil rights reader: American literature from Jim Crow to reconciliation*, therea poem titled, " It's Nation Time", by author Amiri Baraka. I believe this poem does a great job

expressing the over all feeling of African American citizens during the end of the Jim Crow era. It gave the idea of there being a sense of unity and a newfound feeling of progress being made. It was time now more than ever for people to rally together and embrace the potential that was inside of themselves. To keep this momentum going and continue the fight for the equality of all men and women.

Work Cited:

- Steptoe, Tyina. “ Ida Wells Barnett (1862-1931) • BlackPast.” BlackPast, 11 May 2019, [www. blackpast. org/african-american-history/barnett-ida-wells-1862-1931/](http://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/barnett-ida-wells-1862-1931/).
- Christensen, Stephanie. “ Niagara Movement (1905-1909) • BlackPast.” BlackPast, 17 May 2019, [www. blackpast. org/african-american-history/niagara-movement-1905-1909/](http://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/niagara-movement-1905-1909/).
- Armstrong, J. B., & Schmidt, A. (2009). The civil rights reader: American literature from Jim Crow to reconciliation. Athens: University of Georgia Press.