

Jim Crow Laws, which regulated social, economic, and political relationships between whites and African-Americans, were passed principally to subordinate blacks as a group to whites and to enforce rules favored by dominant whites on non-conformists of both races. Beginning with a ban on interracial marriages in Maryland in 1664, the laws spread north, as well as south, but they were neither uniform nor invariably enforced. The campaign against them, initiated by black and white Massachusetts antislavery activists in the 1840s, reached a symbolic end in the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court case that finally ruled anti-intermarriage laws unconstitutional, *Loving v. Virginia*.

The most widespread laws mandated racial segregation in schools and such places of public accommodation as railroads, restaurants, and street cars. Since segregation laws often replaced customary or legal exclusion of African-Americans from any services at all, they were initially, in a sense, progressive reforms. They tended to be adopted earliest and were always more strictly enforced in cities, where diverse crowds intermingled, rather than in the countryside, where other means of racial subordination were readily available.

During Reconstruction in the 1860s and 70s, seven southern states passed laws requiring equal access to places open to the public; Louisiana and South Carolina, as well as seven northern states, promised integrated schools; and after a long struggle over whether to include a school integration provision, Congress in 1875 passed the Civil Rights Act, which prohibited racial discrimination in public accommodations. But in 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Congress had no power under the Fourteenth Amendment to regulate individuals' discriminatory behavior.

While virtually all northern states that did not already ban Jim Crow practices rushed to enact state versions of the invalidated national Civil Rights Act, most southern states during the 1880s and 90s passed laws requiring segregation. The Supreme Court blessed the southern laws in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), blithely accepting assurances that separate accommodations would be equal. Freed of legal restraints, some southern cities and states went on to prescribe separate drinking fountains, restrooms, entrances to public buildings, and even Bibles for use in court. More significantly, they disfranchised the vast majority of African-Americans through literacy and property tests and discrimination against blacks who could pass such tests.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People led the long effort to overturn Jim Crow through lawsuits such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954), as well as by lobbying for new state and federal laws. Beginning in the 1890s and greatly intensifying in the 1950s, African-Americans boycotted segregated transit, sat in at segregated eating places, picketed discriminatory businesses, registered black voters, and braved frequent racist violence in an ultimately successful effort to force Americans to abolish the most blatant legal inequities. The 1964 Civil Rights Act, the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and a host of state and federal court decisions institutionalized the crusaders' victories. The demise of explicitly discriminatory laws, however, was only one giant step on the unfinished journey toward racial equality.

## Bibliography

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