



## Systems of Segregation

### Part 1: Jim Crow Laws in Tennessee (1886–1954)

Dating back to the 19th century, many states enacted their own laws and legislation governing segregation, referred to as Jim Crow laws. The phrase "Jim Crow" is often associated with "Jump Jim Crow," a 19<sup>th</sup> century song that was commonly performed by white actors in blackface. By the 1830s "Jim Crow" had become an expression meaning "Negro." The Jim Crow laws separated people by race in regards to schooling, housing, transportation, marriage and more. The State of Tennessee enacted 20 Jim Crow laws between 1866 and 1955, including the following:

YEAR	TYPE OF LAW	LEGISLATION AND PENALTIES
1885	Public Accommodations	All well-behaved persons to be admitted to theaters, parks, shows, or other public amusements. Proprietors have the right to create separate accommodations for whites and Negroes.
1901	Transportation	All streetcars required to designate a portion of each car for white passengers and also for colored passengers. Penalty: Streetcar companies fined \$25 for each offense. Passengers who refused to take the proper seat fined \$25.
1932	Education	Required racially segregated high schools.
1955	Education	Unlawful for any school or college to permit white and colored persons to attend the same school. Penalty: \$50 fine, or imprisonment from 30 days to six months, or both.
1955	Miscegenation	Prohibited marriage or living together as man and wife between racially mixed persons. Penalty: One to five years imprisonment in county jail, or fine.

### Part 2: *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)



On May 17, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court issued their decision on *Brown v. Board of Education*. This landmark case outlawed separate public schools for black and white students. The case effectively overturned the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896, which allowed state-sponsored segregation on the basis of "separate but equal." Before 1954, there were 17 states that *required* segregation within their public school system.

The above headline is from the May 18, 1954 edition of the *New York Times*, the day after the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Note that the text includes the phrase, "Decision Grants Time To Comply." The Court instructed schools to integrate with "all deliberate speed." Many people criticized the fact that there was no time requirement attached to the desegregation process. As a result, some districts in the South spent years dragging out school integration. Memphis resisted school desegregation, employing legal and illegal measures. As a result, Memphis City Schools remained predominately segregated until the late 1960s, even going so far as to open a racially segregated high school *after* the Supreme Court ruled such schools unconstitutional.