

Name _____

Segregated Schools in America Before Brown

Before 1954, many public schools in the United States were segregated by race. This meant that white and Black students went to separate schools. This system was especially common in Southern states, where laws called “Jim Crow” laws required separation by race in public places, including schools, buses, and restaurants.



The legal basis for segregation came from an 1896 Supreme Court case called *Plessy v. Ferguson*. In that decision, the Court said that “separate but equal” public facilities were legal. This meant that it was okay to have separate schools for Black and white students, as long as the schools were equal in quality. However, in reality, the schools for Black children were often much worse. They had fewer resources, older buildings, and less funding than schools for white children.

Many African American families and leaders knew that separate was not truly equal. Over the years, civil rights groups like the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) began to challenge these unfair laws. One of their biggest efforts was to end segregation in public education. Lawyers, parents, and students all worked together to bring these cases to court, leading up to the famous case of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Comprehension Questions

- 1. What was the purpose of Jim Crow laws?**
a) To improve schools b) To allow all races to go to the same school
c) To separate people based on race d) To increase school funding
- 2. What did the Supreme Court decide in *Plessy v. Ferguson*?**
(Short answer)
- 3. Why were Black schools often not equal to white schools?**
(Short answer – 1–2 sentences)
- 4. Which group helped fight against school segregation?**
a) FBI b) NAACP c) IRS d) NASA
- 5. What was the goal of the NAACP's legal efforts?**
(Short answer)
- 6. In your own words, explain why the idea of “separate but equal” was unfair.**
(Longer written response – 3–4 sentences)