

The Role of Education in the History of African Americans in the United States of America

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Before the end of the Civil War in 1865, the education of African American slaves was illegal. Even after the Civil War ended, African Americans rarely received education. Then things got even worse. In the 1870's, the Jim Crow laws were being made legal. The Jim Crow laws were a set of segregative laws that forbade blacks from doing specific things that whites could do. The Jim Crow laws had all schools legally racially segregated, so whites and African Americans couldn't go to the same schools.

In the south, during the time of the Jim Crow laws' effects, 'Separate but equal' was a common phrase. It was supposed to mean that blacks and whites were separated, but still all aspects of their lives were equal. Of course, this was *not* true. Many parts of life were made far worse in the black community because of the Jim Crow laws, but one of the most affected was education. Separate but equal... 'Separate' was true; blacks and whites couldn't attend the same schools. 'Equal' was *very* false; black schools didn't receive as much money from the government as white schools did. As a result, the conditions in black schools were worse. White schools could pay for the best educators, books, and supplies, but Black schools could not. Some Black schools weren't even allowed to own textbooks with American texts, such as the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution, because white school boards were afraid that it might lead black students to want freedom and equal rights. It sounds to me like the whites didn't want the blacks to have freedom, just as the English didn't want the Americans to have freedom.

Hypocrisy? In reality, the saying ‘Separate but equal’ was incorrect. A more accurate expression would be ‘Separate and unequal’.

On March 2, 1955, Claudette Colvin was a high school student taking the bus home from school. She had been studying the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence in her school. Unknowingly, she sat in one of the seats reserved for whites. The bus driver told her to get up and move, but she replied, “No! It’s my constitutional right! (to stay here)”. It was true. She had paid her ten cent fare (which was equal to a white fare), and it is described in the Declaration of Independence: “...*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness....*” This episode with Claudette Colvin played a crucial role in the Civil Rights movement because this was the first incident that caught E.D. Nixon’s (a prominent lawyer for the Civil Rights Movement) ear. Although, he waited to take it to court until Rosa Parks said almost the exact same thing nine months later.

After the Civil Rights Movement was successful, black schooling became more equal, as it is today. The American education system is fully integrated today.

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