Segregation

The Civil War ended slavery in the United States, but African Americans continued to face discrimination, or unfair treatment. Since the late 1800s, laws and customs in southern states separated whites and blacks. This was called segregation. The 1896 Supreme Court decision related to the court case Plessy v. Ferguson stated that whites and blacks should have separate facilities, but they must be of equal quality. This was often called 'separate but equal'.

African Americans had their own separate facilities, like schools, restaurants, hotels, and parks. African Americans could not drink from whites' water fountains or use the same swimming pools. Blacks had to ride in the back seats of buses and had to sit in the back of theaters.

In reality, it was almost never true that blacks had facilities that were of equal quality to whites' facilities. Black schools were almost always old and overcrowded. African American students didn’t have as many textbooks or supplies as students in the white schools did. In some African American schools, students didn’t even have desks!

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