

Jim Crow Laws

The end of Reconstruction saw the federal troops leave the Southern states. This led to Southern politicians passing several state laws that would curtail the rights of African Americans. These actions would be known as the **Black Codes** and they were based on the old slave codes that aimed to keep the newly freed African Americans in conditions once again that were close to slavery.

The Black Codes produced an angry response in the Northern states that helped the passage of the Radical Reconstruction program. Reconstruction governments in the South overturned these codes.

What took place was the creation of the **Jim Crow Laws** where Southern states passed laws establishing social as well as legal separation. It was a separation of people based on race. The passage of the Jim Crow laws in the South after Reconstruction was helped by a narrow interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment by the Supreme Court.

In the 1883 **Civil Rights Cases**, the Supreme Court had ruled that the **Thirteenth Amendment** had abolished slavery but it did not prohibit discrimination and that the **Fourteenth Amendment** prohibited discrimination by the government but did not prohibit discrimination by individuals.

In 1896, the Supreme Court case of **Plessy v. Ferguson** set a precedent that justified segregation in all public facilities, schools, hospitals, public transportation and passenger terminals, parks, and public buildings.

Poll Taxes	Southern states imposed a tax on every voter. Those who were too poor to pay poll taxes, including many African Americans, could NOT vote.
Literacy Tests	Some states required that people had to be able to read and write before they could vote. African Americans had a very low literacy rate; therefore they were not eligible. The Freemen's Bureau created by Congress in 1865 had established schools for young African Americans but they were separate, poorly equipped and under-funded.
Grandfather Clauses	Poll taxes and literacy tests would have kept poor and uneducated whites from voting. To prevent this, Southern states added the grandfather clauses to their constitutions. The rule was that you were allowed to vote if you were the son or grandson of a man eligible to vote in 1866 and 1867 even if you could not pay the Poll Tax or pass the literacy test. Since few African Americans could vote in 1867, the clause benefitted whites exclusively.

Secret societies such as the **Ku Klux Klan** tried to frighten African Americans from taking part in any Reconstruction programs or governments. Many times federal troops were sent to break up Klan actions against African Americans. Organizations such as the Klan played an important part towards white supremacy in the South.

