

A Partial Timeline of Educational Oppression in the U.S.

Adapted from the National Equity Project

1779 - Thomas Jefferson proposes a two-track educational system, with different tracks in his words for "the laboring and the learned." Scholarships would allow a very few of the laboring class to advance, Jefferson says, by "raking a few geniuses from the rubbish."

1805 - New York Public School Society formed by wealthy businessmen to provide education for poor children. Schools are run on the "Lancasterian" model, in which one "master" can teach hundreds of students in a single room. The master gives a rote lesson to the older students, who then pass it down to the younger students. These schools emphasize discipline and obedience, qualities that factory owners want in their workers.

1830s - By this time, most southern states have laws forbidding teaching enslaved people to read. Even so, around 5 percent become literate at great personal risk.

1840s - Over a million Irish immigrants arrive in the United States, driven out of their homes in Ireland by the potato famine. Irish Catholics in New York City struggle for local neighborhood control of schools as a way of preventing their children from being force-fed a Protestant curriculum.

1848 - Massachusetts Reform School at Westboro opens, where children who have refused to attend public schools are sent. This begins a long tradition of "reform schools," which combine the education and juvenile justice systems.

1864 - Congress makes it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native languages. Native children as young as four years old are taken from their parents and sent to Bureau of Indian Affairs off-reservation boarding schools, whose goal, as one BIA official put it, is to "kill the Indian to save the man."

1852 - Two years after California became a state; the legislature passed a bill barring African American children from schools. The First State Convention of Colored Citizens of the State of California met in 1854 and in a public pronouncement chafed against this discriminatory measure.

1865-1877 - African Americans mobilize to bring public education to the South for the first time. After the Civil War, and with the legal end of slavery, African Americans in the South make alliances with white Republicans to push for many political changes, including, for the first time, rewriting state constitutions to guarantee free public education. In practice, white children benefit more than Black children.

1896 - Plessy v. Ferguson decision. The U.S. Supreme Court rules that the state of Louisiana has the right to require "separate but equal" railroad cars for Blacks and whites. This decision means that the federal government officially recognizes segregation as legal. One result is that southern states pass laws requiring racial segregation in public schools.

1901-1904 – North Carolina Governor Charles Aycock enacts a "grandfather" clause requiring one's grandfather to have been an eligible voter in order to register to vote, thereby disqualifying almost all children and grandchildren of slaves. He further enacts Jim Crow segregation by spending three times as much on white schools as on black schools while becoming known as North Carolina's greatest "education governor."

1905 - The U.S. Supreme Court requires California to extend public education to the children of Chinese immigrants.

1921 - the California school law (Political Code 1662) was amended once again to read as follows:
The governing body of a school district shall have power to exclude children of filthy or vicious habits, or children suffering from contagious or infectious diseases, and also to establish separate schools for Indian children and for children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage. When such schools are established, Indian children or children of Chinese, Japanese, or Mongolian parentage must not be admitted into any other school.

July 23, 1930 – The “Lemon Grove Incident” The Lemon Grove school board decided to build a separate school for children of Mexican heritage without giving notice to their parents. On January 5, 1931, Lemon Grove Grammar School principal [Jerome Green](#), acting under instructions from school trustees, turned away Mexican children at the schoolhouse door, directing them to the new school, which came to be known within the local Mexican American community as *la caballeriza*, meaning "the stable". In *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove* this California Mexican American case was possibly the first successful court action in favor of school desegregation in the country.

1932 - A survey of 150 school districts reveals that three quarters of them are using so-called intelligence testing to place students in different academic tracks.

1930-1950 - The NAACP brings a series of suits over unequal teachers' pay for Blacks and whites in southern states. At the same time, southern states realize they are losing African American labor to the northern cities. These two sources of pressure resulted in some increase of spending on Black schools in the South.

1944 - The G.I. Bill officially known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 is signed by FDR on June 22. Some 7.8 million World War II veterans take advantage of the GI Bill during the seven years benefits are offered. More than two million attend colleges or universities, nearly doubling the college population. About 238,000 become teachers. Because the law provides the same opportunity to every veteran, regardless of background, the long-standing tradition that a college education was only for the wealthy is broken.

February 18, 1946 - Mendez v. Westminster School District, five Mexican-American fathers (Thomas Estrada, William Guzman, Gonzalo Mendez, Frank Palomino, and Lorenzo Ramirez) challenged the practice of school segregation in the U.S. District Court in Los Angeles. They claimed that their children, along with 5,000 other children of "Mexican" ancestry, were victims of unconstitutional discrimination by being forced to attend separate "schools for Mexicans" in four school districts in Orange County. One year later, Governor Earl Warren, who would later become Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court and preside over *Brown vs. Board of Education*, signed into law the repeal of remaining segregationist provisions in the California statutes.

1948 - Educational Testing Service is formed, merging the College Entrance Examination Board, the Cooperative Test Service, the Graduate Records Office, the National Committee on Teachers Examinations and others, with huge grants from the Rockefeller and Carnegie foundations. These testing services continued the work of eugenicists like Carl Brigham (originator of the SAT) who did research "proving" that immigrants were feeble-minded.

1954 - On May 17th, the U.S. Supreme Court announces its decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, ruling that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal," thus overturning its previous ruling in the 1896 case of *Plessey v. Ferguson*. *Brown v. Board of Education* is actually a combination of five cases from different parts of the country.

1956 – Virginia enacts the Stanley Plan, a set of laws that eliminate state funding for any school that integrates, gives the Governor power to close any school that integrates, and sets up a tuition grant structure to allow families to enroll their children in segregated private schools instead. Many school districts close. White parents strip public schools of everything from desks to football goal posts and take the items to their new, segregated private schools.

1957 - Little Rock, Arkansas, a federal court orders public school integration and Governor Orval Faubus sends his National Guard to physically prevent nine African American students from enrolling at all-white Central High School. Reluctantly, President Eisenhower sends federal troops to enforce the court order, not because he supports desegregation, but because he can't let a state governor use military power to defy the U.S. federal government.

1960 - First grader Ruby Bridges is the first African American to attend William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans. She becomes a class of one as parents remove all Caucasian students from the school.

1964 - The Civil Rights Act becomes law. It prohibits discrimination based on race, color, sex, religion or national origin.

1966 - The Equality of Educational Opportunity Study, often called the Coleman Report because of its primary author James S. Coleman, is conducted in response to provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its conclusion that African American children benefit from attending integrated schools sets the stage for school "busing" to achieve desegregation

1968 - African American parents and White teachers clash in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville area of New York City, over the issue of community control of the schools. Teachers go on strike, and the community organizes freedom schools while the public schools are closed.

1971 - Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education The Supreme Court holds that busing is an appropriate remedy for the problem of racial imbalance in schools, even when the imbalance resulted from the selection of students based on geographic proximity to the school rather than from deliberate assignment based on race. This was done to ensure the schools would be "properly" integrated and that all students would receive equal educational opportunities regardless of their race.

1972 - Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 becomes law. Though many people associate this law only with girls and women's participation in sports, Title IX prohibits discrimination based on gender in all aspects of education.

1974 - Milliken v. Bradley. A Supreme Court made up of Richard Nixon's appointees rules that schools may not be desegregated across school districts. This effectively legally segregates students of color in inner-city districts from white students in wealthier white suburban districts.

1974 – Lau v. Nichols, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court ruling that established the judicial mandate for bilingual education for Chinese-speaking students. The case became a significant milestone within the legacy of Asian American activism and a remedy to inequality in education.

1983 - The report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education, A Nation at Risk, calls for sweeping reforms in public education and teacher training.

1994 - Proposition 187 passes in California, making it illegal for children of undocumented immigrants to attend public school.

1996 - The Oakland, California School District sparks controversy as it proposes that Ebonics be recognized as the native language of African American children. African American parents advocate for using the California bilingual education statute as leverage for increasing funding for segregated Black schools.

1996 - California passes Proposition 209, which outlaws affirmative action in public employment, public contracting and public education. Other states put forth their own initiatives with conversations about similar legislation on a federal level to follow.

1997 – Proposition 187 is overturned in California. Federal courts find Proposition 187 to be unconstitutional.

June 1998 - California passes Proposition 227, a ballot measure, backed by Ron Unz, making it illegal for teachers to speak Spanish in California public schools and by default, outlawing bilingual education in California.

2000 – As a result of parent lawsuits in Charlotte, courts overturn the 1971 Swann decisions and lift the court order for busing. Many school systems begin to switch to “School Choice Plan” approaches for student assignment.

2001 - No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is approved by Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002. The law, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, holds schools accountable for student achievement levels and provides penalties for schools that do not make adequate yearly progress toward meeting the goals of NCLB.

2007 - In the cases of Parents involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No 1 and Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that race cannot be a factor in assigning students to high schools, thus rejecting integration plans in Seattle and Louisville, and possibly affecting similar plans in school districts around the nation.

Reflection Question: What should be on this timeline from your local context? If you don't know, how could you find out?