

or inhabited by people of color throughout the country. In North Alabama, an example of these would be Beulahland and Small Farms, communities led by the Bridgeforth family in Limestone County. Some more organically formed settlements include Nebo in Morgan County or the “Negro Settlement” near Tanner in Limestone County. These communities are technically segregated, but not with the intention of discriminating against people of color or denying them landownership and independence. Similar instances include Wilder Place in Morgan County, land set aside by Mrs. Lelia Seton Edmondson for poor tenant farmers of all races, as well as a housing development for African Americans in Muscle Shoals – although it never came to fruition. These planned communities seem to bridge a gap between full integration and total segregation.

Jim Crow and strict segregation was fully entrenched across the South by 1910, prompting thousands of African Americans to leave the region between 1916 and 1970 for the industrial cities of the North in what is known as the Great Migration. Many found that the North was not exempt from *de facto* segregation; neither were many federal programs. Despite segregation not being a federal decree, New Deal programs such as the Works Administration Program (WPA), Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) segregated their programs and crews in southern states. Jim Crow was so ingrained that even the most liberal politicians outspoken against segregation did not push for change. Instead, most thought it was up to the states to better their own race relations.

The mid-20th century saw two landmark federal decisions involving the rights of African Americans – *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the Civil Rights Act (1964). The Supreme Court decision outlawed the segregation of public schools and other educational facilities on the basis that separate was not equal and thus unconstitutional. This had a great impact on American society beyond education facilitating the mass closing of African American schools and integration of the students into formerly white-only schools. While not all of the schools were closed, the majority were because the white schools were nearly always better built, better equipped, and better staffed. With children

of color attending the same schools as white children, most teachers of color were put out of work on the discriminatory basis that they were less qualified than white teachers. Although the Supreme Court ruling officially made segregated schools unconstitutional, there still persists issues of predominately all-white or all-black schools throughout the country, of which the nearly all-black schools are chronically underfunded. Similarly, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the last large civil rights legislation that made it unconstitutional for states and local municipalities to allow for segregation or discrimination based on race. Like with *Brown v. Board*, compliance and enforcement of desegregation and civil rights were slow at best. While these laws barred discrimination and segregation *de jure* – officially and lawfully – the practice of these in reality, or *de facto*, persists to some degree today.

Naturally, the decades of segregation and discrimination did not go unopposed by people of color. There were several ways in which communities and individuals sought to protest laws or social norms, eventually culminating in the Civil Rights Movement. Arguably, one of the most interesting artifacts of resistance from the early 20th century is *The Negro Motorist's Green Book*. Established in 1936 by New York mailman Victor Hugo Green, the *Green Book* was a catalog of refuge from discrimination while traveling in the South. Driven by discriminatory laws dictating people of color on public transportation, middle class African Americans who could afford a private automobile took enthusiastically to the road and the freedom it provided. The *Green Book* was published every year until 1966. Within it would be a catalog of services, places, and people who were known to serve people of color, even individuals who would open up their homes to travelers for the night. African Americans learned to use the *Green Book* to navigate around or away from particularly hostile areas. Interestingly, there are few entries in the *Green Books* for North Alabama. This may be for either of two reasons: people did not frequently travel through North Alabama – there are few major highways even today and it is easy to get to most of the South without going through North Alabama; or North Alabama was not as hostile towards people of color who might find food and lodging easily enough and therefore, there was little need to provide travelers with information.



(Above) The Cover of the Green Book from 1948 (New York Public Library Research Libraries, Digital Collection)

Segregation & Discrimination as Historical Researching Tools

Learning to understand segregation and discrimination, particularly in the South in the 20th century, is actually a valuable tool for researching. One of the first tasks in historical research of communities of color, is simply identifying where people lived. An understanding about the