"JIM CROW" CARS

For Virginia Afro-Americans, as Well as Those of Kentucky, Tennessee and Several Other Southern States.

An Attempt to Extend the Provisions of the Outrageous Law to Street Cars.

The Constitutionality of the Law to be Attacked in the Courts by an Electric Street Car Company and Prominent Virginia Afro-Americans.

Richmond, Va.—Since Sunday week, July 1, the "Jim Crow" car law passed by the Virginia legislature last January, and signed by Gov. Tyler in spite of the remonstrance of nearly every influential colored man in Virginia, has been in force. It requires every railroad and, some attorneys say, every street car company in the state to provide separate cars for the exclusive use of colored people. Negroes are not allowed to ride on the cars intended for the use of the whites, and vice versa; but any Negro forcing himself upon a car for whites, and refusing to leave when requested to do so, may be forcibly ejected without such act furnishing the basis of a damage suit against the company. Furthermore, railroad companies are not only to provide such cars, but they are required to enforce the provisions of the law. Failure to do so becomes a misdemeanor. While the average southern Negro is a trifle more docile than the Negro who has emigrated to the north, there are enough Negroes of an independent and aggressive nature here in Richmond and elsewhere in Virginia to insist upon their rights. Hence from every hamlet and village in the "Old Dominion" comes reports of Negroes being thrown off the "white" cars. The law was originally aimed at the steam railroads, and was drawn up in order to prevent Negroes from occupying sleeping car berths in the same car with white people. It appears now that while the law was so worked that it apparently included only "railroads propelled by steam," and was so passed, in reality it was intended all along to apply the law to the electric cars. Eminent jurists have asserted that electric cars are plainly "railroads propelled by steam," inasmuch as steam power drives the dynamos at the power houses, and electricity is simply a "method" of transmitting the steam power to convenient points. It is pointed out that if the steam engines at the power houses shut down the electric cars would be stalled. Hence the electric cars are propelled by steam, and come within the law, called in derision the "Jim Crow" car law. This, however is about as thin reasoning as steam. This is an ingenious theory, though its legality remains to be proved. The legislature did not emphasize this view of the measure, because it would have aroused even more opposition on the part of Negroes than the law apparently aimed at the railroads did. Few Virginia Negroes ever ride on the railroads—at least the masses of the colored population do not—and so they did not become wildly excited over the "Jim Crow" car law as a bill. A few professional Negroes and some ministers raised their voices, but the law was passed almost unanimously. The several railroad companies rather favored the bill than otherwise. But now that

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/aaeo:@field(DOCID+@lit(o19335))
Library of Congress http://www.loc.gov

it has been held that electric railroads must also run separate cars for the colored people, the street car companies protest on the ground that the innovation will be a costly one for them, necessitating the use of nearly 50 per cent. more cars without any corresponding increase in receipts. In Richmond the leading traction company has adopted the policy of every other car for Negroes, but this will shortly be succeeded by a new scheme. Each car will carry a small trailer and Negroes will be compelled to ride in the trailer or walk. In Norfolk and Newport News the street cars are enforcing the every-other-car-for-Negroes rule, but in Roanoke the company has issued no rule. The result is that most of the passengers are white, because whenever a Negro boards a car his reception is such that he either departs peacefully or else is assisted to make an exit by half a dozen white passengers. The conductors, meanwhile, neither assist in the ejection nor retard it. From some of the smaller cities come rumors of Negroes intimidated by the whites and forced to wa . The average Virginia Negro knows better than to fight with white men, because even if temporarily victorious, a dozen white men would speedily turn the tables on him within 24 hours. One of the biggest of the electric railroads has announced its intention of contesting the law, in case an effort is made to force it to run "Jim Crow" cars. This road is the Washington, Alexandria & Mount Vernon railroad, running from Washington to the tomb of the Father of His Country, a distance of 20 miles. It is probably the only electric railroad in Virginia which now permits Negroes to freely ride on its cars with white passengers, but some of the white citizens of Alexandria, seven miles below Washington, have submitted to the condition with ill-concealed impatience during the past two weeks. Alexandria is an old-fashioned southern city, and its close proximity to the national capital leads one to think that it would not go to extreme measures. On the contrary, a mob of Alexandria citizens, without masks, took a Negro from the Alexandria lockup a year ago and hanged him to a lamppost, in the main street of the town. The feeling against Negroes throughout the south is very strong, and it is especially evident in Virginia. One reason is unquestionably due to the way in which Negroes are treated in Washington, which exerts much the same influence upon Virginia as New York does upon Connecticut and New York state. In Washington one-third of the population is of Negro blood. Negroes are treated as equals in most instances; hundreds of them are employed in the government departments; thousands of them attend the public schools; two members out of seven members of the board of education are Negroes and vote on matters pertaining to the conduct of the white as well as colored schools. On the steam railroads there has been no hitch whatever. Through trains passing through Virginia from New York to Florida do not carry the "Jim Crow" cars, being especially exempted in the bill. Through trains which stop at various points in Virginia must obey the law while in the state, though passengers from, say, Philadelphia, bound for Atlanta, whether colored or white, pass through the state undisturbed. There are not many through trains, however, as the northern terminal of the Southern railway, the Chesapeake & Ohio railroad, and the Norfolk & Western railroad are in Washington.

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/aaeo:@field(DOCID+@lit(o19335))
Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov

These three railroads have attached special coaches for Negroes to each regular train, and the color line is closely drawn. A Negro may board a train of the Southern railway in Washington and ride through that city and over the long bridge at the Potomac to the Virginia shore without molestation; but as soon as the river is crossed, he must move forward to the "Jim Crow" coach, usually the first car ahead of the smoker, which, as everyone who has ever traveled knows, is the most uncomfortable coach in a train, owing to the mass of cinders from the engine. Although it doesn't require a large part of the night to cross Virginia, it is impossible for a Negro in Richmond or any other Virginia city to purchase a sleeping car ticket for any point bound south, except in the sleeping car set aside for the use of Negroes. Even then it is very difficult for a Negro to get a sleeping car berth, because the railroads will not attach the extra sleepers for Negroes unless there are sufficient berths sold. Hence the usual mode of procedure is to refuse to sell sleeping car berths except a few moments before train time, in case sufficient applications have been filed from Negroes to warrant the extra car. If there are not enough applications the few Negroes who wish to ride are told that they must ride in the "Jim Crow" car until after leaving Virginia, when they might possibly be able to purchase a berth from the Pullman conductor. For passengers bound north the invariable answer is to refer them to the Pullman conductor, who requires them to ride in the "Jim Crow" car until the Potomac river has been crossed. Negroes travelling from, say, Richmond to New York on a through night train are therefore compelled to spend three hours in a day coach before they can occupy a berth. Under the circumstances few Negroes use the steam cars at night when travelling any considerable distance. There has been some talk among Negro business men and lawyers of making a test case to find out if the law is unconstitutional. It is asserted by them that the state law violates the sixteenth amendment, in that it discriminates against Negroes on account of their color. And the Afro-American soldier fights for this country! He would better come home and assist in the fight for his rights. Hurrah! for McKinley and Roosevelt? Scat!

http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/aaeo:@field(DOCID+@lit(o19335))
Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov