

John Tillman

John Newton Tillman was born on December 13, 1859, in Springfield, Missouri, and moved as a young boy to Washington County, Arkansas. He graduated from the University of Arkansas in 1880. While pursuing a teaching career, Tillman also studied law and was admitted to the Arkansas bar in 1883. He was elected circuit clerk of Washington County, serving from 1884 to 1888; he also served one term in the state senate, from 1889 to 1891. During his state senate term, Tillman introduced the Separate Coach Bill which required that people of African-American descent be required to ride in separate train cars. The bill passed easily in both houses. Sen. George W. Bell, along with one white senator, voted against the bill, while only 13 dissenting votes were cast in the House, two from white representatives and the remainder cast by the 11 African American state representatives.

From 1892 to 1898, Tillman served as prosecuting attorney for the Fourth Circuit and then as judge from 1900 to 1905, when he was elected President of the University of Arkansas. He held this position until 1912. In 1915, he was elected to the U.S. Congress and served until March 3, 1929. Tillman died six days later in Fayetteville, Arkansas.