

Jim Crow Laws



Lesson Plan

OBJECTIVE:

To understand the impact of Jim Crow laws on African Americans.

Social Studies Objectives: 7.02, 7.05

Social Studies Skill Goals: 1,2,3

NCSS Standards: I, II, IV

ELA Competency Objectives: 1.01, 1.03, 1.04, 2.01

Resources/Materials

- Background on the African American journey for equality (One online source is www.wikipedia.org/wiki/US_civil_rights_movement)
- Background on Jim Crow Laws
- Virtual Tour of the National Civil Rights Museum (www.mecca.org/~crights/cyber.html)
- Webquest assignment allows students to use the Internet to find out more about the fight for Civil Rights (www.rede-nonio.min-edu.pt/es/sebgama/webquest/#resources)

Procedure

Explain to students that you want them to try an experiment. It is imperative that you be specific that this activity is an experiment. Divide class into two groups based on any arbitrary point or reference that the students cannot control (height, eye color, first letter of last name, or other ideas). Allow one of the groups special privileges for the period. On the next day, switch privileges of the groups so that no one is left out. Use journal writing to have students extend the ideas of what it would be like to be favored or

“rejected” every day of their lives.

Debrief the class by eliciting ideas for reasons one group was treated differently. The discussion should include how both groups felt about the experience.

Have students read the background on Jim Crow laws.

Discuss the reading, centering the discussion on the reasons the Southern states thought the laws were needed and their effects on the lives of African Americans.

Bibliography

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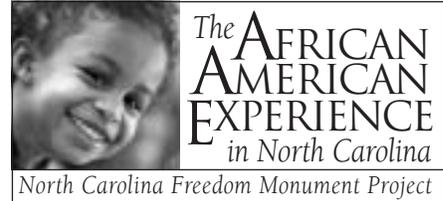
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Biographical Sketch



An outgrowth of the slave codes in the Antebellum South and the black codes passed just after the Civil War, Jim Crow laws legally denied rights to African Americans for more than eighty years. Following the ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, freedmen were able to enjoy many of the same rights and privileges once known to white America. Control of African Americans by whites was nearly impossible following legislation passed during Reconstruction.

Before the Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow laws were enacted to keep the status quo of white control. The infamous U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 recognized the issue of “separate but equal” as legitimate because it did not deprive blacks of equal rights if the accommodations were equal. Based on the ruling, African Americans once again came under the throes of white supremacy. By the early 1900s, every Southern state had statutes that created dual societies. The previous informal customs of the South had now become law. African Americans who broke Jim Crow laws often received harsh penalties—even death sentences.

The term Jim Crow goes back to 1843, when a group of white minstrels painted their faces black with charcoal and performed song and dance routines in New York City. The act, which imitated African Americans, met with great acceptance and glee in the South and rapidly grew in popularity. Thomas Dartmouth Rice, one of the more popular minstrels who imitated African Americans, sang a

song that spoke of turning around and jumping “Jim Crow.” The term thusly was applied to the laws that turned African Americans into second-class citizens again.

Jim Crow laws managed and dictated which privileges African Americans enjoyed. By law, African Americans could not use the same facilities, could not attend the same schools, or could not drink out of the same water fountains as whites. The list of “could nots” was extensive. The laws also governed where African Americans could sit on public transportation such as buses or trains.

For the most part, the Jim Crow laws reigned supreme in the South until 1915, when the Supreme Court ruled that an Oklahoma voting law was unconstitutional. Oklahoma had a law that prohibited voting by anyone whose father was not eligible to vote in the 1860 elections. The Fifteenth Amendment, which gave African Americans suffrage, passed in 1870; therefore, the Oklahoma law effectively prohibited most African Americans from voting. Although this ruling applied only to Oklahoma, it cut a chink in the Jim Crow armor. However, it was not until 1954, with the historic ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, that any significant changes were made in Jim Crow laws. The Supreme Court ruled in the Brown case that “separate but equal” schools were unconstitutional. It was not until Congress passed major civil rights legislation in the 1960s that the African Americans were afforded the rights that had been granted them in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

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Activities

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- After the reading, give students specific ways the laws affected African Americans from Reconstruction through the 1960s.
- Have students view the virtual tour of the National Civil Rights Movement and discuss how each exhibit was a way of chipping away at the Jim Crow Laws.
- Webquest assignment.
- Have students role-play examples of Jim Crow in action (for example, an African American who wants to be served at an all-white lunch counter or an African American who mistakenly drinks from the wrong water fountain).

- There are several excellent videos that give students a glimpse of Jim Crow laws:

The Road to Brown: The Man Who Killed Jim Crow

Out of Obscurity, Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman
(fiction)

4 Little Girls

The Tuskegee Airmen

Separate but Equal

Eyes on the Prize

We suggest showing parts of the videos to give an idea of the impact Jim Crow laws had on African Americans and U.S. society in general.

Creative Response

Now that your students have conducted your research on Jim Crow, ask them what visual examples stand out in their minds of Jim Crow practices in the South? Have them gather examples—either from downloaded images, copies of photos, or their own illustrations—and create a collage that captures the essence of Jim Crow. What single image do they find most striking?