

THE CRUELTY OF JIM CROW SEGREGATION



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

What was Jim Crow and what was life under it like for Black Americans?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define *stereotype* and explain the negative effects of stereotypes on individuals and society.
- Examine the origins of Jim Crow and associated anti-Black stereotypes.
- Analyze primary sources demonstrating ways in which Black people were segregated during the Jim Crow era.
- Discuss ways in which Black people resisted discrimination and worked to end Jim Crow segregation.
- Compose a written reflection on the impact of those who struggled to end segregation.



LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



TIME NEEDED

60 minutes



MATERIALS

- *Who Was Jim Crow?* handout (one copy to project)
- *Jim Crow Gallery* handout (one copy per small group)
- *Where Did Jim Crow Segregation Take Place?* handout (one copy to project)



VOCABULARY

activist

generalization

segregate/

sit-in

blackface

Jim Crow

segregation

stereotype

civil rights

minstrel show

“separate but
equal”

Procedures

NOTE

While Jim Crow was most prevalent and deeply rooted in the South, segregation was a national problem. Segregation actually existed earlier in the North than in the South, for example on the Massachusetts Eastern Railroad in the 1830s. In the 20th century, federal and local policies led to segregation in public housing and schools throughout the country, and “whites only” policies were enforced in many northern shops, theaters, hotels and restaurants. “Sundown towns” were common in both the North and South, excluding Black people through discriminatory laws, intimidation and signposts literally requiring “colored people” to leave by sundown. In addition to these practices, anti-Black riots and killings happened with regularity in many northern cities. Students should understand that while Jim Crow was most repressive and violent in the South, it wasn’t exclusively a regional problem.

PART 1

What is a Stereotype? (20–30 mins.)

- 1 Post the following sentence on the board: “All cities are dangerous.” Ask students if they agree that this is true. Explain that this statement is a *generalization*—it takes a fact that may be true about some cities and applies it to all cities. Ask students what the harm is in making generalizations.
- 2 Write the term *stereotype* on the board. Ask students if they have heard this term and what they think it means. Introduce and discuss the following definition:

Stereotype: a generalization about a person or group without regard for individual differences; the false idea that all members of a group are the same and think and behave in the same way
- 3 Provide an example of a stereotype that you have personally experienced or observed. Make sure students understand that stereotypes are specific to identity groups (e.g., race, religion, gender, etc.), and this term is not used to describe other sorts of generalizations.

NOTE

Help students understand that seemingly positive stereotypes (e.g., Black people are great athletes) also cause harm by making those who don’t fulfill them feel like failures; not recognizing the efforts of those who do fulfill them; suggesting that we can know things about people based on their group; and inferring that one’s group membership is connected to their intelligence, ability or character.

NOTE

Avoid creating a long list of negative stereotypes. Allow students to share a few illustrative examples, but try not to overwhelm them with ideas about prejudice that may be new, upsetting or used in ways that hurt others.

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Have students do reflective writing in response to the prompts below. Afterwards, invite a few volunteers to share their reflections. Discuss why it is so dangerous to believe and spread stereotypes.

- Has a stereotype ever been used to describe you or someone you know? If so, what was the stereotype and how did it make you feel?
- Why are stereotypes a problem? What effects do they have on individuals and communities?

PART 2

The Cruelty of Jim Crow Stereotypes and Segregation (90 mins.)

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Comment that Black people have been subject to harmful stereotypes throughout our nation's history. Project the image on the handout *Who Was Jim Crow?* (but hide the text below it). Explain that in the 1800s, a white actor named Thomas Rice created a Black character named Jim Crow. In pairs or small groups, have students identify some of the stereotypes they observe in the image. Then discuss the following questions:

- What stereotypes does the Jim Crow character communicate? *[Possible responses include that all Black people are foolish, clownish, stupid, lazy, clumsy, poor, raggedy, dirty and dangerous.]*
- How do you think the Jim Crow stereotypes affected the white audiences who watched Rice's shows?
- What actions do you think these stereotypes caused in communities across the nation at this time?

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Together, read the text at the bottom of the handout *Who Was Jim Crow?* Answer any questions students may have. Ask if they have heard about Jim Crow laws before, and allow them to share examples.

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Introduce students to John Lewis. Explain that he was a civil rights activist who fought for equal rights from the time he was a student in the 1950s, and was also a U.S. Congressman from Georgia until he died in 2020. Play the video "What was it like growing up in Alabama under Jim Crow?" [1:54]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p8t-Tij3EoY>. As students watch, ask them to list the different

ways Black people were segregated or separated during the Jim Crow era. After the video, discuss the following:

- What were some of the ways Lewis and other Black people were segregated during Jim Crow? (*List responses on the board.*)
- What was your reaction to Lewis’s parents telling him, “Don’t get in trouble, don’t get in the way”? Why didn’t his family encourage him to stand up for himself or fight back?
- How did it feel to hear that Lewis’s local library gave him a library card 40 years after he was denied one?

8 Tell students they will observe some photos and add to the list they started of the ways Black people were segregated during Jim Crow. Divide students into small groups and give each a copy of the *Jim Crow Gallery* handouts. Direct groups to examine the images and complete the accompanying graphic organizer.


9 Gather the class and discuss students’ observations. Add to the list (started in step 7) of ways that segregation took place during the Jim Crow era. Project the handout *Where did Jim Crow Segregation Take Place?* Allow students to react to the list and remark on which places surprise them the most. Emphasize how widespread and dominant Jim Crow segregation was during the nearly 100 years that it lasted.

10 Tell students that Jim Crow segregation ended after many decades of struggle and resistance by Black activists and their allies. Play the following StoryCorps audio interview, which provides a first-person account of someone who resisted Jim Crow: “Dion Diamond remembers the risks he took as a young civil rights activist” [2:22]: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySx3xNdmg0A>. Afterwards, discuss the following questions:

- What is a sit-in? Why did Diamond start his “own private sit-ins”?
- Why did Diamond keep his activities from his parents? How did his family react when they found out?
- Diamond describes his actions as the “chances you take when you’re young.” Do you think it was just his youth that caused him to act as he did? What other reasons or personal qualities may have motivated him?
- How did Diamond react to the boy who pointed a finger in his face? Were you surprised by his reaction? Explain.

NOTE

When reviewing the “Think it Through” question on the handout, make sure students understand that “separate but equal” is never acceptable. Such policies signal that some groups are different and even inferior, and often result in exclusion and unequal treatment. The doctrine of “separate but equal” comes from the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which said that racially separate facilities, if equal, did not violate the Constitution. In 1954, the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* set a new precedent by ruling that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” and that segregation is a form of discrimination.



11 Highlight Diamond’s words at the end of the clip: “Today, when people read my name, they may not know who I am... But anytime I pick up a historical publication, I feel as if a period or a comma in that book is my contribution.” Assign students to create a piece of writing reacting to Diamond and reflecting on why he is more than a “period or comma” in our history books. Students may do this in the form of a letter to him or an original poem.

12 As time allows, have students share their writing in pairs or small groups. Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the following page.

Discussion Questions

- 1 How do stereotypes (even ones that sound like compliments) harm people and society?
- 2 What is the connection between stereotypes and the way Jim Crow arose in our country?
- 3 What surprised you about the ways Black people have been segregated in our country? How did it make you feel to learn about this history?
- 4 Have you ever been afraid to speak up when you heard a stereotype or saw unfair treatment? Explain.
- 5 What did you learn from the civil rights leaders you met during this lesson that you can apply to your own life?
- 6 What can we do to make sure our classroom and community is a safe and stereotype-free place?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + BrainPOP. "Jim Crow." <https://www.brainpop.com/socials-studies/ushistory/jimcrow>.
- + Ferris University. Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow>.
- + Osborne, Linda Barrett. *Miles to Go for Freedom: Segregation and Civil Rights in the Jim Crow Years*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2012.
- + State Bar of Georgia. "Brown v. Board of Education (1954): Separate Is NOT Equal." May 22, 2016. YouTube video, 8:03. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aX9Dmo24_cc&t=2s.

Lesson Extensions

- Have students read stories about children who fought for civil rights and discuss the personal qualities and actions that they can apply to their own lives. Recommended picture books include *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles and George Ford; *The Youngest Marcher: The Story of Audrey Faye Hendricks, a Young Civil Rights Activist* by Cynthia Levinson and Vanessa Brantley-Newton; *Let the Children March* by Monica Clark-Robinson; and *Separate Is Never Equal: Sylvia Mendez and Her Family's Fight for Desegregation* by Duncan Tonatiuh.
- Investigate the history of the Civil Rights Movement in your town or local community. Have students create a timeline of notable people and events. Invite a community member who participated in the movement to visit your school and speak about their experiences.
- Show the video *Brown v. Board of Education (1954): Separate Is NOT Equal* (see Additional Resources) and introduce students to the court case that ended legal segregation in the United States.
- Assign students to research current civil rights issues and leaders. Have them choose one, consult at least three online sources of information and create a brief report or multimedia presentation to share with the class.



Who Was Jim Crow?



Thomas Rice playing Jim Crow in blackface, Bowery Theatre, New York City, 1833

In 1828, a white comedian from New York named Thomas Dartmouth “Daddy” Rice first performed the song and dance *Jump Jim Crow*. He darkened his face with burnt cork and paraded around the stage in an exaggerated way that made fun of Black men. Some say he got the idea from watching an elderly enslaved man who had trouble walking. Others say it was a ragged Black stable boy. However it began, the mocking performance became a huge hit with white audiences across the country.

Jump Jim Crow contributed to the rise of a new form of musical theater called the minstrel show. These shows included comedy and variety acts, songs and dances performed by white people in blackface. From the 1830s to the 1920s, these shows were highly popular and spread ugly stereotypes about Black people across the U.S.

“Daddy” Rice’s character and the popularity of minstrel shows led many white people to start referring to all Black men as “Jim Crow” in an insulting and demeaning way. Stereotypes of Black people as stupid, lazy and less than human caused many white people to believe that Black and white people should live separately. From the 1870s to the 1960s, a great number of laws were passed that separated Black people in almost every part of society, including schools, transportation, hospitals, theaters, parks and more. This cruel system of segregation is known as Jim Crow.

IMAGE SOURCE: BlackPast.org, “Thomas Rice as Jim Crow,” <http://www.blackpast.org/aah/jim-crow>.



Jim Crow Gallery

View the photos in the Jim Crow Gallery. Choose three to examine closely. Record your observations on the chart below. Then answer the question at the bottom of this page.

Photo number	Where is the segregation taking place?	What do you notice? What details in the scene stand out?	What might have been the effect of the segregation?

Think it Through: During Jim Crow, some argued that segregation was acceptable as long as it was equal. For example, it was okay if the law required Black and white children to attend separate schools as long as one school was as good as the other. What do you think? Is “separate but equal” ever acceptable? Why or why not?

Jim Crow Gallery



Jim Crow Gallery



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7

Jim Crow Gallery





Jim Crow Gallery Photo Credits

- 1 Buble, Esther. *1943 Colored Waiting Room Sign*. September 1943. United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1943_Colored_Waiting_Room_Sign.jpg.
- 2 Delano, Jack. *At the bus station in Durham, North Carolina*. May 1940. United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Accessed February 4, 2021. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:JimCrowInDurhamNC.jpg>.
- 3 *Discrimination in a restaurant in Juneau*. January 1, 1908. Accessed February 4, 2021. <http://historicalaska.blogspot.com/2011/06/racism-and-jim-crow-in-alaska.html>.
- 4 *New Orleans—Whites Only—Maids in Uniform Accepted*. 1969 “Jambalaya” Tulane University yearbook. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:New_Orleans_-_Whites_Only_-_Maids_in_Uniform_Accepted.jpg.
- 5 Tampone, Victor. *African Americans WWII*. April 13, 1942. NARA—Pictures of World War II. Accessed February 4, 2021. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:African-americans-wwii-002.jpg>.
- 6 Alexisrael. *A Jim Crow Law sign for bus segregation in North Carolina*. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:North_Carolina_Jim_Crow_Laws.JPG.
- 7 Colored Sailor’s Room. 1917–1919. War Department photograph via NARA website. Accessed February 4, 2021. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ColoredSailersRoomWWINOLA.jpg>.
- 8 Lange, Dorothea. *Rex Theatre for Colored People, Leland, Mississippi*. June 1937. United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Rex_theatre.jpg.
- 9 Wolcott, Marion Post. *Segregated cinema entrance*. October 1939. United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Accessed February 4, 2021. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Segregated_cinema_entrance3.jpg.
- 10 *View of street showing segregated taxi cab sign*. 1935–1965. New York Public Library Digital Collections. Accessed February 4, 2021. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/9e8d39a4-cf9b-7f26-e040-e00a18066977>.
- 11 Lee, Russell. *“Colored” drinking fountain from mid-20th century with african-american drinking*. July 1939. United States Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Accessed February 4, 2021. <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/fsa1997026728/PP>.



Where did Jim Crow Segregation Take Place?

- Barber shops/ salons
- Housing
- Trains
- Facilities for people with disabilities
- Telephone booths
- Childcare
- Schools
- Boating
- Parks
- Bars
- Libraries
- Waiting rooms (e.g., train stations)
- Fishing
- Textbooks
- Circus tents
- Sports
- Buses
- Prisons
- Bathrooms
- Marriage
- Water fountains
- Hospitals
- Theaters
- Concerts
- Swimming pools/areas
- Cemeteries/funeral homes
- Restaurants/ lunch counters
- Billiard halls
- Military
- **and many more places**