

THE STRUGGLE AGAINST JIM CROW SEGREGATION



ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How were the lives of Black Americans impacted by Jim Crow and how did they resist it?



OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Define Jim Crow and describe what life was like for Black Americans living under this system of segregation.
- Identify ways in which Black people resisted segregation and asserted their humanity during the Jim Crow era.
- Investigate sources on key events that reflect efforts by Black communities to end segregation.
- Create a timeline of important people and events related to the struggle against Jim Crow.



LEARNING STANDARDS

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



TIME NEEDED

105–135 minutes



MATERIALS

- AV equipment to show a video
- “*Jim Crow Train*” handout (one to project)
- *Growing up under Jim Crow* handout (one per student)
- *Resistance to Jim Crow: Key Events* handout (one for teacher reference or one per student)
- Laptops or tablets for student research
- Construction paper



VOCABULARY

blackface	Jim Crow	oppressive	stereotypes
<i>The Green Book</i>	minstrel shows	segregation	

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

Living Under Jim Crow (45 mins.)

- 1** Project the handout “*Jim Crow Train*” and introduce students to musician Joshua White. Play the song “Jim Crow Train” [3:01]: <https://bit.ly/37jqXbr>. While students are listening, have them write a response to one or more of the prompts below. Play the song a second time while students reflect and write.
 - What was Jim Crow? Why might White have written a blues song about it?
 - Why does White compare Jim Crow to a train? Why is he unable to ride the train?
 - What hope or demand is White communicating through this song?
 - What is the tone or feeling of the song?
- 2** Have students share their reflections with a partner or allow a few volunteers to share with the whole class. Make sure students understand the meaning of the term Jim Crow. Provide the following background as needed.

In 1828, the white comedian Thomas “Daddy” Rice first staged the song and dance “Jump Jim Crow,” which was performed in blackface and mocked Black men. This act and the many minstrel shows that followed were highly popular among white audiences and spread ugly prejudices about Black people across the U.S. Soon many white people began referring to all Black men as “Jim Crow” in a 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, numerous 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.

- 3** Ask students what their lives might have been like if they had grown up under Jim Crow. Have them think about the things that are important to them—school, athletics, hobbies, etc.—and imagine how those pursuits would have been impacted. Distribute the handout *Growing up under Jim Crow* and review the directions. Show one or more of the clips below from the PBS series by the same name. As they watch, have students take notes on the handout. Pause the video as needed to allow students time to record their observations.

- *Growing up under Jim Crow in Piedmont, WV and Chattanooga, TN*, featuring Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Samuel Jackson [4:31]: <http://bit.ly/3tTy1VW> (NOTE: This clip contains use of the N-word.)
- *Growing up under Jim Crow in Birmingham, AL*, featuring Condoleezza Rice [3:34]: <https://bit.ly/3jVL1pD>
- *Growing up under Jim Crow in Grapeland, TX*, featuring Ruth Simmons [5:02]: <http://bit.ly/379FZR0>

- 4** Discuss students’ reactions to the film clips and allow them to share some of the quotes they recorded. Post some of the quotes students captured and/or those below in different parts of the room. Have students form small groups around one quote that most resonates for them. Direct groups to interpret the quote and discuss how it makes them feel.

- “I had a very good idea of what our place was.”
—Samuel Jackson
- “I was aware that there were certain ways of behaving that were essential to surviving in that environment.”
—Ruth Simmons

- “In some ways, because it was so segregated, racism was everything and nothing at all.”
—Condoleezza Rice
- “Segregation could impose many limits, but it couldn’t completely crush all of our dreams.”
—Henry Louis Gates Jr.

PART 2

Resisting Jim Crow (60-90 mins.)

5 Comment that Jim Crow was violently oppressive and Black people continuously resisted this system in courageous and creative ways. To illustrate this idea, show the following two short videos one after the other.

- A woman who grew up in the Jim Crow South remembers one night on a rural road [3:05]:
<https://bit.ly/3ak0zjF>
- The real story of *The Green Book* [4:16]:
<https://bit.ly/2OBV47r>

6 After showing the videos, discuss some of the following questions:

- How was the road trip—a symbol of American freedom—affected by Jim Crow? What were the consequences for Black people who did not abide by the rules of the system?
- What were Black people forced to do to navigate and cope with segregation on the road?
- What did Francine mean when she said that her father “did what no man was supposed to do at that time”?
- When they were forced to stop for gas, how did Francine’s father alter his behavior and appearance? How did this make five-year-old Francine feel and what did it teach her? How did it make you feel?
- In Francine’s experience, how have white and Black people reacted differently to her story? Does this match your reaction? What does this tell you about the ways in which different people see racism?
- What reaction did you have to Victor Green’s solution to racism on the road? What networks of support did he use to make *The Green Book* a success?

- How do you interpret the phrase by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., “As long as our bodies are heavy with the fatigue of travel...”? What might he have meant both literally and figuratively?

7 Tell students that they will create a timeline of key events—like the publication of *The Green Book*—showing the ways in which Black Americans resisted oppression and asserted their humanity during the era of Jim Crow. Assign individuals or pairs a topic from the handout *Resistance to Jim Crow: Key Events*, or allow them to choose one they find interesting. Provide students with access to laptops or tablets for research.

8 Direct students to consult two or three sources and create a timeline record containing the following:

- The title and date(s) of the event
- A brief narrative summary of three to five sentences that names key people and explains why the event was significant
- An illustration or image that reflects an important aspect of the event

Have students create their record on a half-sheet of standard construction paper (6" x 9") or using a web-based application such as [Sutori](#) or [Timeline JS](#).

9 If students have created paper records, direct them to display their timelines in chronological order on the walls of the classroom. Once the timelines are ready to examine, have students conduct a gallery walk/view and read about the events their classmates researched. Answer any questions students have and discuss which events most surprised or inspired them. Conclude the lesson by discussing some of the questions on the following page.

NOTE

Direct students toward reliable sites as they research Black history. Suggestions include [Blackpast](#), [History.com](#), [Google Cultural Institute: Black History and Culture](#), [The Biography Channel: Black History](#), [The Culture Kidz: African American History](#) and [Ducksters: Black History Month](#).

Discussion Questions

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- + BrainPOP. "Jim Crow." <https://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/ushistory/jim-crow>.
- + Thirteen/Educational Broadcasting Corporation. "The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow." <https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/jimcrow/index.html>.
- + Ferris University. Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. <https://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow>.
- + WNYC. "Kids Talk About Segregation." May 19, 2016. YouTube video, 3:44. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sff2N8rez_8.

1

What is the origin of Jim Crow? Why is this term used to describe the era of legal segregation in the U.S.?

2

What features of life under Jim Crow most surprised or troubled you? Why?

3

How did these forms of segregation harm and limit opportunities for Black people?

4

How did many Black people show and maintain their humanity in the face of Jim Crow? What examples of resistance to Jim Crow stood out to you? Why?

5

Is segregation a problem in our community or nation today? If so, what forms does it take?

6

What can we do to resist segregation where it exists in our school or community?

Lesson Extensions

- Assign students to analyze the "Examples of Jim Crow Laws" by state at <http://bit.ly/2Nsidst> to determine the areas of day-to-day life that were most impacted by Jim Crow (e.g., education, transportation, etc.). Have them develop a report or presentation on the ways in which these laws harmed Black communities.
- Show students the video *Kids Talk About Segregation* (see Additional Resources), in which fifth graders from the Bronx comment on what segregation looks like today from their vantage points. Have students create their own video in which they interview community members and share their own views on segregation. Use the video to stimulate a dialogue about segregation in your community and what students can do to address it.



“Jim Crow Train” by Joshua White

Can't you hear that train whistle blow?
Can't you hear that train whistle blow?
Can't you hear that train whistle blow?
Lord, I wish that train wasn't Jim Crow

Stop the train so I can ride this train
Stop Jim Crow so I can ride this train
Stop Jim Crow so I can ride this train
Black and White folks ridin' side by side

Now hear that train whistle blow
Can't you hear that train whistle blow?
Can't you hear that train whistle blow?
Oh Lord, this train is Jim Crow



Joshua White (1914–1969) was an American musician, actor and civil rights activist who grew up in segregated South Carolina. He wrote and performed blues, gospel, jazz and folk music, and was also known for his social protest songs. “Jim Crow Train” is from the 1941 album “Southern Exposure,” which included six anti-segregationist songs and was subtitled “An Album of Jim Crow Blues.” White had a close personal relationship with Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and influenced the president’s views on desegregation. His anti-segregationist and pro-civil rights views were later used to label him as a Communist and disrupt his career during the period of McCarthyism.



Growing up under Jim Crow

As you watch the video clip, take notes in each square below. On the back of this handout, record one quote from the video that really stood out to you.

VIDEO TITLE: _____

What specific forms did Jim Crow segregation take?

How was Jim Crow enforced?

How were Black people affected by Jim Crow?

How did Black people cope with or resist Jim Crow?



Resistance to Jim Crow: Key Events

This is a partial list of important events related to the struggle against Jim Crow.

1875	The Civil Rights Act of 1875 is passed
1881	Spelman College, the first college for Black women in the U.S., is founded
1892	Ida B. Wells launches her anti-lynching crusade
1898	Booker T. Washington speaks on race relations at the Cotton States and International Exposition
1903	<i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> by W.E.B. Du Bois is published
1903	<i>The Chicago Defender</i> , Chicago's first African American newspaper, is launched
1905	The Niagara Movement is formed
1909	The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) is formed
1910	<i>The Crisis</i> , the first Black civil rights magazine, is established
1911	The National Urban League is founded
1914	Marcus Garvey establishes the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)
1920	The Harlem Renaissance begins
1925	A. Philip Randolph organizes the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters
1936	Jesse Owens wins four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics
1936	Victor Hugo Green publishes <i>The Green Book</i>
1939	Marian Anderson performs at the Lincoln Memorial
1942	The Congress of Racial Equality is organized
1943	The Tuskegee Airmen are the first Black flying squadron to deploy overseas
1947	Jackie Robinson breaks the color line in baseball
1948	Executive Order 9981 desegregates the U.S. Armed Forces
1952	Malcolm X becomes a minister of the Nation of Islam
1954	The court case <i>Brown v. Board of Education</i> makes segregation in schools illegal
1955	The Montgomery Bus Boycott begins
1957	The Little Rock Nine desegregate Central High School in Arkansas
1957	The Civil Rights Act of 1957 is passed
1960	The Greensboro sit-ins take place in North Carolina
1960	The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is founded
1961	Freedom Riders challenge segregation in the South
1963	The March on Washington, D.C. takes place
1964	The Civil Rights Act of 1964 is passed
1965	The march from Selma to Montgomery for voting rights and Bloody Sunday take place
1965	The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is passed