

## What were the Jim Crow Laws?

With the end of the Civil War, blacks found themselves not only free from slavery but declared citizens of the United States by President Abraham Lincoln.

However, after the Civil War, many whites intended to retain their hold on blacks through the use of laws that became known as Black Codes. These were special rules that blacks were held to. White people didn't have to follow these same rules. Eventually, these Black Codes became known as Jim Crow laws.

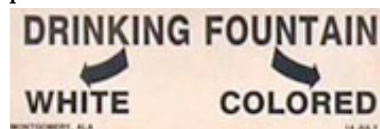


Jim Crow was the name of a clown character found in minstrel shows. A white actor would blacken his face and perform like a fool. He would sing a song with the words "Wheel about, turn about, dance jest so- Every time I wheel about I shout Jim Crow." Jim Crow came to represent the African-Americans who laughed on the outside, accepting their lot in life. Yet, these same people were hurting on the inside because of the treatment they received.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution was enacted on June 13, 1866. It stated, "No state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws." Many states got around this amendment by creating their own laws called Jim Crow Laws. Whites still held the majority of seats in the state legislatures, so it was easy to pass laws to their benefit.

The Jim Crow Laws formed a racial caste system primarily in southern states that encouraged segregation (to separate people according to their race Oxford American Dictionary, p.822) and discrimination. Jim Crow was more than a series of rigid anti-Black laws. It was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens. Jim Crow represented the legitimization (legal support) of anti-Black racism. The Jim Crow system was justified by the following beliefs or rationalizations: Whites were superior to Blacks in all important ways, including but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior; treating Blacks as equals would encourage interracial relationships; any activity which suggested social equality encouraged interracial relations, if necessary, violence must be used to keep Blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy.

Jim Crow signs were placed above water fountains, door entrances and exits, and in front of public facilities. There were separate hospitals for Blacks and Whites, separate prisons, separate public and private schools, separate churches, separate cemeteries, separate public restrooms, and separate public accommodations. In most instances, the Black facilities were grossly inferior -- generally, older, less-well-kept. In other cases, there were no Black facilities -- no Colored public restroom, no public beach, no place to sit or eat.





Here are some of the typical Jim Crow laws, as compiled by the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site Interpretive Staff:

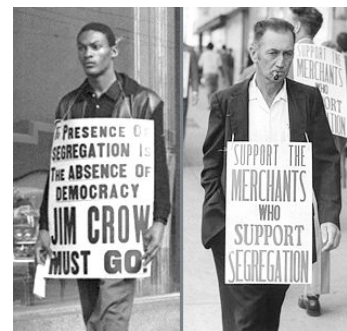
- Barbers. No colored barber shall serve as a barber (to) white girls or women (Georgia).
- Blind Wards. The board of trustees shall...maintain a separate building...on separate ground for the admission, care, instruction, and support of all blind persons of the colored or black race (Louisiana).
- Burial. The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons (Georgia).
- Buses. All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races (Alabama).
- Child Custody. It shall be unlawful for any parent, relative, or other white person in this State, having the control or custody of any white child, by right of guardianship, natural or acquired, or otherwise, to dispose of, give or surrender such white child permanently into the custody, control, maintenance, or support, of a negro (South Carolina).
- Education. The schools for white children and the schools for Negro children shall be conducted separately (Florida).
- Libraries. The state librarian is directed to fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of the colored people who may come to the library for the purpose of reading books or periodicals (North Carolina).
- Mental Hospitals. The Board of Control shall see that proper and distinct apartments are arranged for said patients, so that in no case shall Negroes and white persons be together (Georgia).
- Militia. The white and colored militia shall be separately enrolled, and shall never be compelled to serve in the same organization. No organization of colored troops shall be permitted where white troops are available and where whites are permitted to be organized, colored troops shall be under the command of white officers (North Carolina).
- Nurses. No person or corporation shall require any White female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed (Alabama).

- Prisons. The warden shall see that the white convicts shall have separate apartments for both eating and sleeping from the Negro convicts (Mississippi).
- Reform Schools. The children of white and colored races committed to the houses of reform shall be kept entirely separate from each other (Kentucky).
- Teaching. Any instructor who shall teach in any school, college or institution where members of the white and colored race are received and enrolled as pupils for instruction shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction thereof, shall be fined... (Oklahoma).
- Wine and Beer. All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine...shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room at anytime (Georgia).

The violation of any of these laws could result in imprisonment. Furthermore, the Jim Crow laws were undergirded by violence, real and threatened. Blacks who violated Jim Crow laws, for example, drinking from the White water fountain or trying to vote, risked their homes, their jobs, even their lives. Whites could physically beat Blacks with impunity (liberty). Blacks had little legal recourse (options) against these assaults because the Jim Crow criminal justice system was all White: police, prosecutors, judges, juries, and prison officials. Violence was instrumental for Jim Crow. It was a method of social control. The most extreme forms of Jim Crow violence were lynchings.

Lynchings were public, often sadistic (brutal), murders carried out by mobs. Between 1882, when the first reliable data were collected, and 1968, when lynchings had become rare, there were 4,730 known lynchings, including 3,440 Black men and women. Most of the victims of Lynch-Law were hanged or shot, but some were burned at the stake, castrated, beaten with clubs, or dismembered.

In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 into law. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlaws discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and gender in public accommodations, employment, and federally funded programs, essentially ending Jim Crow Laws. It also established a framework within the federal government for combating discrimination by giving the U.S. Attorney General the power to file discrimination suits, expanding the mandate of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.



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**Select the letter that best answers the question.**

1. Jim Crow laws were designed to keep black people from what amount of rights as white people?
  - a. The same
  - b. Less than
  - c. More than
  - d. None
2. Who was Jim Crow?
  - a. A plantation owner
  - b. A clown in a show
  - c. A state legislator
  - d. A former slave
3. Segregation means that races are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. The same
  - b. Separated
  - c. United
  - d. Combined
4. What area did the Jim Crow laws greatly impact?
  - a. North states
  - b. Southern states
  - c. Western states
  - d. Both A and C
5. Where were Jim Crow signs not placed?
  - a. Above water fountains
  - b. Door entrances and exits
  - c. In front of public facilities
  - d. Sidewalks
6. What kind of punishment would a black person receive for violating the Jim Crow laws?
  - a. Imprisonment
  - b. Lose their home, job, and even their life.
  - c. Lynching
  - d. Forced to wear a sign around their neck
7. The Jim Crow law regarding education required black and white students to go to school \_\_\_\_\_?
  - a. Separately
  - b. Together
  - c. Sometimes
  - d. On holidays
8. In 1866, what Amendment to the Constitution was enacted that stated, "No state shall deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law"?
  - a. Amendment 15
  - b. Amendment 12
  - c. Amendment 13
  - d. Amendment 14
9. In 1964 what Act was passed that outlawed discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, and gender?
  - a. Individuals with Disabilities Act
  - b. No Child Left Behind Act
  - c. Civil Rights Act of 1991
  - d. Civil Rights Act of 1964
10. Between 1882 and 1968, how many known lynchings occurred of Black men and women?
  - a. 4,730
  - b. 6,268
  - c. 3,440
  - d. 2,098