

Name \_\_\_\_\_



## Jim Crow Laws

By Jane Runyon

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Many people believed that the end of the Civil War would bring great changes to the lives of slaves in the South. They were given freedom from slavery by the President of the United States. They were declared to be citizens of the United States.

As citizens, they were guaranteed certain rights by the Constitution. All should have been well. But it wasn't.



To be honest, it wasn't just the southern states that had problems with equality. Many northern states also had a tradition of segregation. Blacks and whites lived separately, worked separately, and ate separately. It was just their habit and no one thought much about it.

The southern states believed in segregation and slavery. Blacks often worked closely with whites, but they were the property of the whites. They could be bought and sold. They had no say in who governed them.

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 offered on June

13, 1866. It stated that "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. Whites still held the majority of seats in the state legislatures, so it was easy to pass laws to their benefit. Several states made marriage or even dating between races a crime. You could be put in prison for such a crime. Some vigilantes took the law into their own hands and hanged anyone they thought might be breaking this law. Vigilantes are people who try to enforce a law without the help of regular law enforcement. The hangings by these vigilantes were called lynchings. The Ku Klux Klan became infamous as a vigilante group.

There were several types of Jim Crow laws enforced during this time. Louisiana had a law that made black passengers ride in separate railroad cars. A black man named Homer Plessey took the railroad to court saying this law was unconstitutional. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that as long as the railroad cars used by the blacks were "separate but equal" to the cars used by whites, the law could be used.

The United States Congress passed a Fifteenth Amendment giving black males the right to vote. White politicians came up with a variety of Jim Crow laws to keep blacks from taking over local governments. In some places a poll tax was charged. Knowing that blacks had very little money to spare, they required voters to pay a special tax for voting when they reached the polls.

Literacy tests were routinely given to black voters. If they could not read and/or explain certain complicated written passages, they could not vote. Former slaves who were denied education had no chance to pass these literacy tests.

Grandfather clauses were put into voting rules. If a person's grandfather had not voted, then that person was not allowed to vote. Since blacks had just been given the right to vote, none of their grandfathers had ever voted.

The Emancipation Proclamation gave freedom to slaves. But white people all over the nation did their best to keep that freedom from giving blacks any kind of power. White legislators used the law to keep their hold on local governments. It took decades to knock down those laws.



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### Questions

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Jim Crow laws were designed to keep black people from having the same rights as white people.
- A. false
  - B. true
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Who was Jim Crow?
- A. a plantation owner
  - B. a state legislator
  - C. a clown in a show
  - D. a former slave
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. How could you pass a literacy test?
- A. write your name
  - B. read and explain written passages
  - C. go to a library
  - D. write an application
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What were white people afraid of?
- A. They would lose money.
  - B. They would lose the power to control the vote.
  - C. They would lose the right to vote.
  - D. They would lose their homes.
5. What was a poll tax?

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6. What was a grandfather clause?

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What document gave freedom to slaves?
- A. The Emancipation Proclamation
  - B. The Civil War
  - C. The Declaration of Independence
  - D. The Constitution
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Segregation means that races are separated.
- A. true
  - B. false