

Slavery is over, now what?

In the years right after the Civil War, freedmen (former slaves) were able to vote and participate in government, thanks to the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and the Civil Rights Acts. Sadly, some people did not understand that freedmen deserved equal rights and opportunities. The federal government had been protecting these rights, but in 1877, Rutherford B. Hayes became president and ended Reconstruction. All of a sudden, there was no one to enforce the new laws and amendments and no authority to punish those who treated blacks unfairly. From then on, people worked to **undermine** efforts at equality, and states passed laws that greatly restricted the rights and freedoms of blacks living in the South (and the North!).



Group of freedmen in Richmond, VA 1865

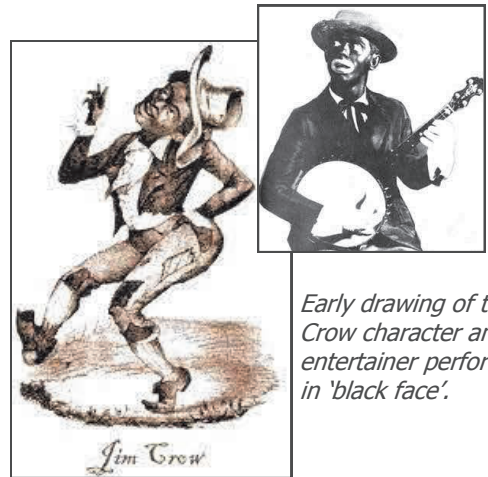
Making Adjustments

The end of slavery meant major social changes for all because slavery had kept black and white societies apart for so long. Once freed, former slaves acted quickly to create their own communities with new churches and schools. Some stayed in the South, while others migrated to the North hoping to find better living conditions and work.

By the 1870s, most southern states adopted laws known as **Black Codes**, creating a legal form of segregation. **Segregation** is when people are separated by race. These codes limited the rights and freedoms of black people. Northern states varied in the way they accepted the new arrivals, but segregation was common all over the nation.

So, who is Jim Crow?

Before the iPod, before television, movies and radio, people went to the theater for entertainment. Daddy Rice, a white actor, would cover his face with charcoal and then sing and dance in a silly way. This character's name was Jim Crow. Just like we compare people to characters on TV, people began to use Jim Crow as a way to describe black people. (It wasn't a compliment.) For example, there were 'Jim Crow' cars on trains where all blacks were forced to sit, even if they bought a first-class ticket! As time went on, the term was also used to describe any racist law that restricted the rights and opportunities of black people.



Early drawing of the Jim Crow character and an entertainer performing in 'black face'.

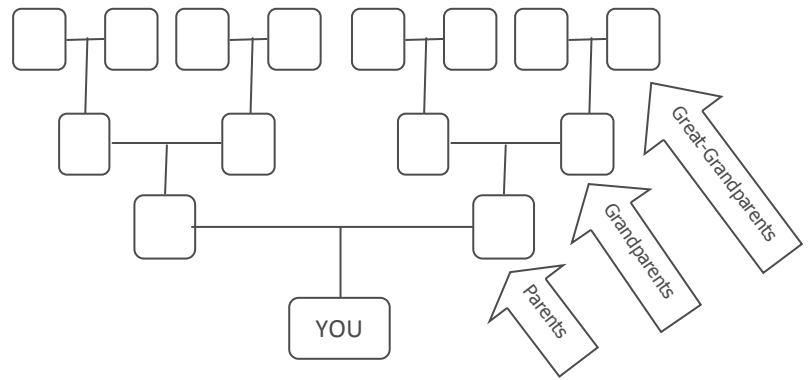


You Say I Can't Do What?!

Jim Crow laws were found all over the South and even in many Northern states. It would have been very difficult to walk around any large town or city and *not* see a sign dividing whites and blacks. The segregation of public accommodations was only one way that Jim Crow laws controlled people's behavior. There were limits on whom people could marry, adopt, or where they could attend school. There was even one law limiting who could cut your hair! The laws don't make any sense today, but it was a fact of life for the millions of people living in America between the 1860s and the 1960s.

Who is Black?

All of the Jim Crow laws were based on the difference between whites and blacks. But what does that mean? Most states decided that you were considered black if you had only one great grandparent who was black (1/8 African heritage). If there was doubt, a person would have to prove that they could go back three generations without any African heritage.



Jim Crow Laws

Education: Public schools were provided for black children, but they were not as nice as the schools provided for white children. Most lacked books, supplies and other resources. One law said that blacks and whites could not use the same textbooks, and another required bus drivers to be the same race as the children they drove around!

Marriage and Family: **Miscegenation** is a word that means the mixing of races. Both Northern and Southern states had a variety of laws that banned marriages and relationships between blacks and whites. There were also laws that either banned **interracial** (more than one race) adoptions or required the race of the baby and adopting parents to be written on the legal documents.

Public Accommodation:

Accommodation means a place where people spend time. This can mean anything from a restaurant to a prison to a hotel. Many of the Jim Crow laws were written to keep the races separate, and public spaces were the most visible area for interaction. Restaurants could not serve blacks and whites in the same dining room. Circuses and theaters had to provide two separate ticket booths, entrances, and seating areas. Missouri, Texas, and other states called for separate libraries for blacks and whites. 'White Only' signs were seen on bathroom doors, drinking fountains, public pools, waiting rooms and businesses all over the South and in some areas of the North.



Voting Rights: We already know that freedmen were given the right to vote under the 15th Amendment in 1870. Between 1871 and 1889, almost all Southern states passed laws that restricted African Americans' right to vote. In Georgia and South Carolina black voting was cut in half between 1880 and 1888! Even when blacks did vote, many of their ballots were stolen or not even counted. These restrictive laws continued into the 1960s until President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965.



Transportation: Blacks were required to sit in the back of public buses and train cars, or in a separate car altogether. The famous Supreme Court case *Plessy v. Ferguson* established that it was okay to create 'separate but equal' public settings. This 1896 case set the stage for numerous state and local laws requiring blacks and whites to stay segregated in society.