

## Lecture Two

### Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation in the United States

From 1881 to 1964, Jim Crow laws separated Americans by race in 26 states. **The laws created segregation or the legal separation by race of Americans.** During that period, and especially after **Plessy vs. Ferguson**, the Supreme Court decision of 1896, in most American cities, towns, and states, North and South, people lived in segregated neighborhoods.

For much of its history Jim Crow segregation had the protection of the U.S. Constitution and U.S. Supreme Court.

**The Supreme Court provided constitutional backing they needed to construct a completely segregated society.** The “Jim Crow laws” remained constitutionally protected until the Supreme Court rule **Brown vs. the Board of Education in 1956**, and later, President Lyndon Johnson signed the **Civil Rights Act of 1964**.

During the segregation era, Jim Crow laws imposed penalties and punishments on people who broke those statutes and ordinances mandating segregation. The most common Jim Crow laws made it illegal for anyone to marry someone of another race and asked that business owners separate their customers by skin color. Those laws also protected business owners' right to legally refuse service to people because of their race.

Jim Crow America included the eleven states that seceded from the Union in 1861 and established the Confederate States of America. The Confederate states (Southern and slave states) had one goal in mind when they broke away from the Union: the preservation of slavery and white supremacy. **The Thirteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution after the Civil War ended in 1865 and it abolished slavery in the United States.**

#### Racism as a driving force behind Segregation

The abolition of slavery had little impact on the attitudes and ideas of southerners. Jim Crow laws were aimed at denying freedom and equality to the same group that had been enslaved, African Americans.

To justify segregation and the Jim Crow laws, one idea topped all others: **the supremacy of the white race.** That racist mindset justified the abuse and inhuman treatment suffered for generations by Africans in the United States.

The goal of Jim Crow laws created a legal state system similar to the one established by slave codes during the era of slavery. Instead of chains, whips, and deadly fear, laws, jails, powerlessness, and the constant fear of death started to govern the relationship between

whites and blacks. Cruel state legislations separating blacks from whites, always backed up by fear of a lynch mob or a beating, would keep blacks from seeking or achieving equality.

### **Implementation of the Jim Crow Laws**

Jim Crow laws covered almost every possible area of human contact. For example, a Georgia law made it a crime for the official in charge of a cemetery to allow “any colored person” to be buried on ground used for the burial of white people. A Louisiana law required separate buildings for black and white “blind persons” in state institutions for the disabled. That same state required all “circuses, shows, and tent exhibitions” to provide two ticket offices, two individual ticket sellers, and “not less than two entrances” to their performances. If the ticket offices were outside they had to be “not less than twenty- five feet apart.” In Mississippi, every hospital needed a separate entrance for white and “colored patients and visitors.”

Florida (as did 37 other states) prohibited “all marriages between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive.” North Carolina directed librarians to “fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of colored people.” Alabama said “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.” Blacks and whites in Alabama could be arrested for playing “together or in company with each other” at any game of pool or billiards.

White supremacists felt that segregation gave Southerners of all colors exactly what they wanted, peace and security. To them, “the Negro had not been segregated merely for political or race advantage, but . . . for his good and the country’s good. and speaking broadly, for our own salvation,” a white North Carolina U.S. senator explained in 1906.

To prevent them from voting or participating in civic and political life, many states imposed poll tax and literacy tests to African Americans. The latter lost their right to vote and political participation was restricted to the white. White advocates of taking away the right to vote from African Americans argued that because of their ignorance and laziness, African American were not fit for electoral participation.

The fight against Jim Crow segregation and for full constitutional rights for all Americans began in the courts and moved to the streets, and then into Congress. It ended successfully, but the struggle took more than 80 years and was filled with bloody lynchings, massacres, murders, humiliations, discriminations, unequal treatment, protests, demonstrations, boycotts, congressional debates, racist court opinions, racist police brutality, and the total loss of all constitutional rights and privileges. Jim Crow created a totalitarian, racist society in eleven states. The African Americans living in those states suffered great injustice, stress, and trauma during those times.

### **References**

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