

## **THE JIM CROW ERA: Exploring Discrimination in America**

*In a nation where "all men are created equal," why does discrimination exist?  
What is unique and what is universal about discrimination throughout modern American  
history?*

**Class:** US History II

**Grade Level:** 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade/College Prep

**Massachusetts Frameworks:**

USI.40 Explain the policies and consequences of Reconstruction.

F. the rise of Jim Crow laws

USII.9 Analyze the post-Civil War struggles of African Americans to gain basic civil rights.

**Rationale:**

This lesson fits in a sequence of lesson plans to help students understand the meaning of discrimination and social inequality in America.

**Lesson Plan: Who is Jim Crow?**

**Agenda:**

- 1) Journals
- 2) Whole group brainstorm
- 3) Analyze 'Jump Jim Crow' lyrics
- 4) Analyze Visual of Jim Crow
- 5) Lecture Burst
- 6) View Film

**Objectives:**

- 1) Explain the connection between the name 'Jim Crow' and the anti-Black laws of the Jim Crow era.
- 2) Analyze how stereotypes contribute to discrimination.

**Lesson Outline:**

- 1) Journals: What is a stereotype? Define and give examples.
- 2) Whole group brainstorm: Write 'stereotype' on chart paper.
  - a) Ask for examples.
  - b) Ask for definitions.
  - c) Ask for its function.
- 3) Analyze 'Jump Jim Crow' lyrics.
  - a) Explain that 'Jim Crow' = black stereotype of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.
  - b) Hand out song lyrics. Stereotype was based on a black minstrel character popularized by white actors in black face.

- c) Ask class to read to self.
  - d) Ask students to describe ‘what do you notice?’
  - e) Have students ask clarifying questions.
  - f) Next, have students make speculations to its meaning or historical importance.
  - g) Ask for an out loud rendition of song by a student volunteer.
  - h) Listen to the song on the radio. Ask, ‘does this change the way you think about it?’
- 4) Mini lecture: Who is Jim Crow? How did the name become associated with the anti-Black laws of the Jim Crow era?
- Jim Crow character - an exaggerated, highly stereotypical Black character.
  - Jim Crow character – portrayal of Blacks as singing, dancing, grinning fools.
  - Created by white actor – Thomas ‘Daddy’ Rice in 1828, modeled on an old Black slave who had difficulty walking.
  - Minstrel shows: theatre shows where white performers wear blackface makeup to darken their skin and portray African Americans.
  - Audience of minstrel shows – white audiences
  - Results: These stereotypes helped to popularize the belief that Blacks were lazy, stupid, inherently less human, and unworthy of integration.
  - Jim Crow = racial slur. The phrase became used to describe the laws and customs that segregated Blacks from white Americans after the Civil War.
- 7) Analyze Visual of Jim Crow:
- a) Hand out copies of popular visual image of the Jim Crow character.
  - b) Ask students to list adjectives they would use to describe the picture.
  - c) How does this picture help to popularize the stereotypical Black man?
- 8) Following the examination of the ‘Jump Jim Crow lyrics’ and the Visual image of Jim Crow, the class will watch the film *Ethnic Notions* by Marlon Riggs. Due to the graphic and grotesque representations of African Americans throughout American history that this film portrays, the film must be carefully introduced. Explain that the film shows highly offensive and exaggerated images of Blacks in America. As the class views the film, have them follow along with a handout that asks them to describe different Black stereotypes. Pause the film several times and go through the content question by question with the class.

**Assessment:**

- 1) Journal writing.
- 2) In class group participation.
- 3) Listening: Group discussions.
- 4) Film worksheet.

**Resources:**

“Who was Jim Crow?”. Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. 1999. Ferris State University. 11/21/2006 [www.ferris.edu/Jimcrow/who/.htm](http://www.ferris.edu/Jimcrow/who/.htm)

“Jim Crow (or Jump Jim Crow) lyrics”. Musicals 101.com. 2006. John Kenrick. 12/7/06.  
<http://www.musicals101.com/lycrow.htm>

“Jim Crow Visual”. Africans in America. 1998. PBS. 12/7/2006.  
[www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3b489b.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3b489b.html).

“Song: Jump Jim Crow”. Remembering Jim Crow. 2006. American RadioWorks.  
11/21/2006. <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/remembering/bitter.html>

Riggs, Marlon. Film: *Ethnic Notions*. San Francisco: California Newsreel. 1987.

**Materials:**

Student – Journals, writing utensil, notebook paper.

Teachers – “Jump Jim Crow” lyrics, Jim Crow Visual, sound file and computer to play it on, film and TV/DVD, handouts (examples below), chart paper, markers.

**"Jim Crow" (or "Jump Jim Crow")**  
**Published by Firth & Hall, NYC**

**Verse 1**

Come listen all you galls and boys I's jist from Tuckyhoe,  
I'm going to sing a little song, my name's Jim Crow,  
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,  
Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow.

**Verse 2**

Oh I'm a roarer on de fiddle, and down in old Virginny,  
They say I play de skyentific like Massa Pagannini.  
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,  
Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow.

**Verse 3**

I went down to de riber, I didn't mean to stay,  
But dere I see so many galls, I couldn't get away.  
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,  
Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow.

**Verse 4**

I git upon a flat boat, I cotch de uncle Sam,  
But I went to see de place where de kill'd Pakenham.  
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,  
Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow.

**Verse 5**

And den I do to Orleans and feel so full of fight,  
Dey put me in de Calaboose and keep me dare all night.  
Weel about and turn about and do jis so,  
Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow.



## **Ethnic Notions - “Black people in white minds”**

### **Focus questions:**

- 1. How did the name Jim Crow become associated with the anti-Black laws?**
- 2. How do stereotypes contribute to discrimination?**

The film, *Ethnic Notions*, depicts different images that have been used throughout America’s history to represent African Americans. The Black images and caricatures of African Americans were used by white Americans to justify the oppression of Blacks during the Jim Crow Era.

**Justify = to explain using an argument.**

### **America During Slavery**

- 1. Describe the ‘Sambo/Jim Crow’ stereotype.**
- 2. Describe the ‘Zip Coon’ stereotype.**
- 3. Describe the ‘Mammie’ stereotype.**
- 4. How did these three stereotypes help to justify and defend slavery in a land of freedom? How did they contribute to discrimination?**

### **America After Emancipation**

- 1. Describe the ‘Brute’ stereotype.**
- 2. Describe the ‘Uncle’ stereotype.**
- 3. Describe the ‘Pickaninnie’ stereotype.**

**4. How did these stereotypes help to justify racial violence and oppression in America after Emancipation? How did they contribute to discrimination?**

### **The Great Migration – African Americans Move North**

- 1. Describe the ‘Urban Coon’ stereotype.**
- 2. Did serving in WWI help Black Americans become accepted at home?**

### **Entertainment Industry**

- 1. Why was it a double-edge sword to be a Black entertainer in America?**
- 2. How did children’s cartoons in the 1930’s -60’s represent the African American?**
- 3. Describe how business used racial stereotypes to sell their profits.**

### **Civil Rights Movement & Beyond**

- 1. Did racial stereotypes end after the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s/60s?**
- 2. What is the film’s suggestion in how to end discrimination based on stereotypes?**