

The Five Pillars of Jim Crow

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One Hundred Years of Jim Crow

“**Jim Crow**” refers to a system developed in the late 1800s and early 1900s to support white supremacy and oppress black citizens. Although there were laws that discriminated against African Americans throughout the country, the Jim Crow system existed only in the South.

We can see the system better if we look at its five parts.

1) Economic Oppression

The Jim Crow system was originally established by middle-class and upper-class whites who were afraid of poor blacks and poor whites working together. In order to keep the poor people from threatening the power of the ruling whites, new laws were made that separated the poor of both races.

Blacks were given the worst jobs for the lowest pay. Certain good jobs were set aside for whites only. Workers of both races were stopped if they tried to form labor unions. Many blacks, and a few whites, were arrested and forced to work as slaves in plantations and mines.

2) Political Oppression

After the Civil War, poor black and white farmers worked together to elected politicians who supported them. The politicians they elected gave them better government, better roads, and better working conditions.

In response, one major goal of Jim Crow was to ensure that poor whites and blacks would never unite again.

To stop the black political threat, blacks were “disenfranchised,” or not allowed to vote. Lack of voting power made blacks unable to remove elected officials they did not like. It also made them easy targets for politicians who wanted to distract the white voters’ attention from unfair taxes and corrupt governments.

3) Legal Oppression

Legal oppression went along with political oppression. Blacks had very difficult times in courts. All the judges and almost all juries were white.

In most areas, black witnesses were not allowed to testify against whites.

4) Social Oppression

Through racial segregation, blacks and whites were kept apart as much as possible.

Laws forced blacks and whites to be separate from each other in a variety of public accommodations.

- There were separate black and white rest rooms, drinking fountains, and waiting rooms.
- Blacks sat in the balcony of movie theaters or in separate theaters for blacks only.
- Blacks could not order food at the front of restaurants. Many restaurants simply refused to serve blacks at all.
- Blacks and whites went to county fairs on different days.
- Blacks were not allowed to use public libraries.

Segregation is the most famous part of Jim Crow. The Jim Crow system is often called “the segregation system.”

5) Personal Oppression

Black people were rarely shown common courtesy by white people. In fact, whites often picked out individual blacks for harassment.

White people could threaten, beat, rape, torture, and kill blacks with little fear of punishment.

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