Segregated America

After the Civil War, millions of formerly enslaved African Americans hoped to join the larger society as full and equal citizens. Freedom meant an end to the whip, to the sale of family members, and to white masters. The promise of freedom held the hope of self-determination, educational opportunities, and full rights of citizenship. Between 1865 and 1875, Congress passed a series of civil rights acts, and the nation adopted three constitutional amendments intended to ensure freedom and full citizenship for all black Americans. The 13th Amendment (1865) abolished slavery. The 14th Amendment (1868) extended “equal protection of the laws” to all citizens. The 15th Amendment (1870) guaranteed that the right to vote could not be denied “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” Not until the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920 were women guaranteed the right to vote.

When Reconstruction ended in the 1870s, however, most white politicians abandoned the cause of protecting the rights of African Americans in the name of healing the wounds between the North and the South. In the former Confederacy and neighboring states,
local governments constructed a legal system aimed at re-establishing a society based on white supremacy. African American men were largely barred from voting. By the 1890s the expression “Jim Crow,” based on a stage-show character who portrayed African Americans negatively, was being used to describe laws and customs aimed at segregating African Americans and others. These laws were intended to restrict social and sexual contacts between whites and other groups and to limit the freedom and opportunity of people of color. For example, these laws separated people of color from whites in schools, housing, jobs, and public gathering places. This legislation was given final constitutional sanction by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1896, in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. 

Store Window, Sisseton, South Dakota, 1939

Courtesy of Library of Congress
Lesson Plan One: Segregated America

To the Teacher: This activity complements the teaching of Reconstruction and its aftermath, including the rise of legislated segregation both prior to and following the landmark Supreme Court decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. Noted below within the main lesson are additional suggestions for teachers of both younger and older students.

Grade Level: 4th through 6th grade; 7th through 12th grade

Objectives: At the end of this lesson, students will be able to discuss the rise of segregated (Jim Crow) America in the years following the Civil War and its impact into the twentieth century. Specifically, they will be able to:

- Identify and discuss the condition and aspirations of freed African Americans in the years following the Civil War
- Identify the social factors such as racism and sexism that led to the rise of Jim Crow segregation
- Evaluate the effect of such segregation on people of color and whites

Time: 1 to 2 class periods

Materials: On the CD: Teacher Briefing Sheet: Lesson Plan One, Teacher Briefing Sheet: 15th Amendment Print; Student Handout: Jim Crow Laws; 15th Amendment Print; four student handouts with photographs and looking questions; 13th, 14th, 15th Amendment text

National History Standards: Era 5 3A/B/C; Era 6 2B; Era 7 3A

Teacher Introduction: Explain to students that the end of the Civil War brought massive changes for both blacks and whites in the South. Discuss that the newly freed blacks had hopes of achieving the equality and success that had been denied to them, while many whites felt that their culture and way of life had been irrevocably destroyed. With older students, also discuss that many whites feared that social contact on equal terms with blacks could lead to sexual relations between the races. Explain that the country adopted three new amendments to the Constitution to assist African Americans in achieving equality.

Primary Source Analysis: Print Commemorating the 15th Amendment
Introduce or review the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and record the purpose of each on the board for student reference. Show the print and ask students to answer the following through class discussion:
What are your first impressions?

What is the print about? When was it created? Why was it created? How do you know?

What’s happening in the center of the print? Why is the event taking place?

Look closely at the framed images around the edges of the print. Who are some of the people? Why do you think they are pictured here?

Ask a student to read the quotations in the upper corners of the print. Where do these words come from? Why might the person who created the document include them here?

What stories are told by the images and captions in the framed pictures to the left and to the right of the center image?

What stories are told along the bottom of the document? What types of freedom do they represent?

What is the tone or feeling of the print? How do the American flag and the colors contribute to the message of the print?

Additional Questions for Teachers of Middle/High School Students:

Why did the artist choose to include pictures of Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant, Schuyler Colfax, and John Brown? Why do you suppose Grant and Colfax are positioned together at the top of the print while Lincoln and Brown are positioned together further down? How do they relate to the issue of slavery?

Near the top of the print are two images of African Americans. What do they symbolize?

How does the print reflect the goals of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments?

What hopes, dreams, and aspirations do you think the people pictured in the parade had?

What do the images on the print tell you about how people felt about the interaction between blacks and whites at the time the print was made?

What is the overall purpose of the print?

Discuss with students the following quotation from a freed slave:

“No! we are free. What do we want? We want education; we want protection; we want plenty of work; we want good pay for it, but not any more or less than any one else... and then you will see the down-trodden race rise up.” – John Adams, a former slave

Ask students to discuss factors that would affect the possibility of achieving these goals or mitigating these concerns. Discuss the responses as a class. Be sure to discuss how and why such topics of education, voting, and equal pay are significant. Also ask students to imagine how white Southerners might have felt about the changes brought on by the Civil War. How might they have responded to these amendments? Why?
**Student Activity—Analysis of Jim Crow Laws and Photographs of Segregated America:** Divide students into five groups. Give the political cartoon to one group, a copy of Jim Crow laws to one group, and one photograph to each of the remaining groups. Refer to the Teacher Briefing Sheet on the CD for background information on these images. (Note: Teachers of younger students may want to do this activity using the photographs only.)

Have the groups examine their assigned photograph or cartoon, taking time to think about and discuss the questions at the bottom of each handout. Have the group with the Jim Crow laws read through and discuss the laws, and then make a list of the laws in their own words to share with the class.

Explain to students that during the last quarter of the 1800s and through the early decades of the 1900s, many whites redoubled their efforts to deprive African Americans of their civil and political rights. Under a legislated system of segregation and discrimination called Jim Crow laws, many states sought to restrict blacks from voting and sharing public facilities with whites. Use the questions below to generate discussion, based on the list of laws, and the selected cartoons and photographs. Help students place the cartoon, photographs, and Jim Crow laws in time and in relation to the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments and *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

**Background on *Plessy v. Ferguson***: In 1890, a new Louisiana law required railroads to provide “equal but separate accommodations for the white, and colored, races.” Outraged, the black community in New Orleans decided to test the rule. On June 7, 1892, Homer Plessy agreed to be arrested for refusing to move from a seat reserved for whites. Judge John H. Ferguson upheld the law, and the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson* slowly moved up to the U.S. Supreme Court. On May 18, 1896, the Court, with only one dissenting vote, ruled that segregation in America was constitutional.

- What do you think might have led to the establishment of these laws in the South following the Civil War?
- What would it be like to live in a society where such laws were enforced?
- If you were a white person, how would these laws affect you?
- If you were an African American person, how would these laws affect you?
- How do these laws compare to the rights guaranteed in the amendments that we have studied?
- What does the establishment of these laws reveal about the culture of the South at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries? What words would you use to describe it?