

Jim Crow Laws

Teacher Introduction:

Jim Crow laws were any state or local laws that enforced or legalized racial segregation. These laws lasted for almost 100 years, from the post-Civil War era until around 1968, and their main purpose was to legalize the marginalization of African Americans.

The laws get the name “Jim Crow” from a racist and insulting minstrel routine called *Jump, Jim Crow*. The routine was performed in the 1830’s by a white man named Thomas Dartmouth Rice. His most famous act was “Jump, Jim Crow,” in which Rice would paint his face black and do a song and dance that he claimed was inspired by a slave he once saw. He would also adorn a shabby dress that imitated how Rice, and many white individuals of the time, imagined the dress and demeanor of a southern enslaved black person.

Rice’s routine became a hit, and as his popularity grew, his stage name began to permeate the culture. “Jumping Jim Crow” or just simply “Jim Crow” became a well known derogatory term for African Americans. To call someone “Jim Crow” wasn’t just to point out his or her skin color: it was to reduce that person to the kind of caricature that Rice performed on stage.

The South started passing laws after the Civil War that discriminated against newly freed African Americans, and the Separate Car Act of 1890 began a long period of segregation that claimed the notion of “separate, but equal” with *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896. By the turn of the century, these “separate, but equal” segregation laws had gained the nickname made famous by Rice. The popularity of blackface minstrels faded (but never died) and T.D. Rice is barely remembered. In fact, most people today don’t know his name, but everybody knows “Jim Crow.”

The 20th century saw states across the South strongly enforce Jim Crow laws. These segregation practices affected every aspect of daily life, becoming enforced in professional offices, building entrances, schools, hospitals, asylums, jails, cemeteries, residential homes or neighborhoods, buses, rail cars, restrooms, water fountains, cashier windows, and phone booths. Not only were these institutions and objects separated, but it was also often the case that those for the African American community were not as nice or maintained as well as those for the white community. It is also important to note that while Jim Crow was mainly focused on separating African Americans from Whites, Jim Crow laws also segregated those of Asian, Hispanic, and Spanish descent as well. In fact, segregation became so intense in certain areas that it was not uncommon to see signs posted at city or town limits warning African Americans or other “colored” races that they were not welcome there. Though most prominent in the South, the North was not

immune to Jim Crow type laws. Some northern states required blacks to own property to vote; schools and neighborhoods were segregated; businesses displayed “whites only” signs.

As oppressive as the Jim Crow era was, it was also a time when black community members around the country stepped forward into leadership roles to vigorously oppose said laws. Ida B. Wells was an African American woman who refused to leave a train car designated for whites only. In 1889 she became co-owner of the Memphis *Free Speech and Headlight* and used her position to take on school segregation and sexual harassment. Though a mob destroyed her newspaper and threatened her with death, forcing her to live in the north, she continued her efforts against Jim Crow laws and lynching. Charlotte Hawkins Brown became the first black woman to create a black school in North Carolina and through her education work became a fierce and vocal opponent of Jim Crow laws. Joe Louis became the heavyweight boxing champion in 1937, and Jackie Robinson became the first African American to join major league baseball on April 15, 1947. In the segregated United States, having a black individual accomplish such astounding feats sent a message to white American about all that could be accomplished through equal opportunity.

Despite their accomplishments, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, Jackie Robinson, and other individuals and communities that attempted to defy Jim Crow laws were often met with extreme violence or even death. Lynchings, race riots, and other physical abuse were a constant threat to the African American community and any in the white community who attempted to resist Jim Crow as well. The poverty of the Great Depression only deepened resentment, with a rise in lynchings, and after World War II, even black veterans returning home were met with violence. However, the post WWII era also saw a rise in civil rights activism, which ushers in the decades-long civil rights movement effort that eventually resulted in the removal of Jim Crow. Individuals like Martin Luther King Jr. and decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968 tore down the racist infrastructure for good. Jim Crow is officially no longer enforced, but the United States is still striving toward full integration and adherence to anti-racism.

A Teacher’s Note on this Lesson:

This lesson hopes to encourage students to look at this time through the standards of the period and to understand the revolution in segregation practices that took place during the late 19th century into the 20th century.

Social Studies Georgia Standards of Excellence:

Grade 5: **SS5H1** Describe how life changed in America at the Turn of the Century.

Grade 5: **SS5H2** Describe U.S. involvement in World War I and post-World War I America.

Grade 5: **SS5H6** Describe the importance of key people, events, and developments between 1950-1975.

Grades 6-8: **L6-8RH1** Cite Specific Textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

Grades 6-8: **L6-8RH2** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

Grades 6-8: **L6-8RH8** Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g. loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts.)

Grades 6-8: **L6-8RH8** Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

Grade 8: **SS8H6** Analyze the impact of Reconstruction on Georgia.

Grade 8: **SS8H7** Evaluate key political, social, and economic changes that occurred in Georgia during the New South Era.

United States History: **SSUSH10** Identify legal, political, and social dimensions of Reconstruction.

United States History: **SSUSH13** Evaluate efforts to reform American society and politics in the Progressive Era.

Lesson Objectives:

- Analyze what life would be like for African Americans during the Jim Crow era.
- Understand the different stresses, sacrifices, and abuse endured by African Americans during this period.
- Interpret period photos from the late 19th-early 20th century.
- Analyze primary and secondary documents that portray American life during the late 19th-early 20th century.

Lesson Duration: One class period or one hour. *This can be modified to fit your class period length or lesson goals.*

Lesson:

This lesson includes the use of period terms that are not in good taste today. The terms “colored,” and “negro” were used by both races when referring to African Americans during this time period. Please let your students know that though the meanings of these terms have changed today and are not appropriate to use in a normal setting, they are left in this lesson for historical accuracy.

1. Ask your students if they have ever heard of the term “Jim Crow”?
2. Summarize the information of the first half of the Teacher Introduction above (stop at the dividing line between “but everyone remembers Jim Crow” and “The 20th century”).
3. How Media/Public Outreach Presented Jim Crow: Whether it be Minstrel Show Posters or Local Newspaper Articles, Jim Crow laws and institutions were often presented to the general public in a positive light, despite their racist and harmful nature. The separation of the races was displayed as not only accepted, but expected and to the benefit of society.
 - a. Show the students the images/articles listed below. Explain how they perpetuate Jim Crow in a positive light.
 - i. This image of “Jumping Jim Crow” shows the man smiling and dancing.
 - ii. These two newspaper articles articulate an agreeance and happy acceptance of Jim Crow for both white people and African Americans.
 - iii. However, this acceptance and praise of Jim Crow was not accepted or seen positively by all those in society. **In reality, Jim Crow was extremely harsh and violent, perpetuating a false narrative of equality in society.**
4. Activity: Separate your students into two groups based upon their eye color (Blue/Green on one side and Brown/Hazel on the other) or hair color (Blonde/Red Hair one on side and Brunette/Black hair on the other) or even shirt color (whatever combination you would prefer).
 - a. Pick one side of the students and explain to them their limitations in life based upon the color of their eyes/hair/shirt.

I will be using eye color as an example and choosing Blue/Green, but you can choose whichever variation that you wish.

 1. Explain to the students that those with Brown/Hazel eyes can use the bathroom they usually do, but those with Blue/Green either have to hold it in for the rest of the day or go to one on a different floor.
 2. Students with Brown/Hazel eyes can walk out the front door of the School to get to the buses, but those with Blue/Green have to walk

out the back and around, and when you get on the bus, you cannot share seats with anyone from the other side of the room.

3. Students with Brown/Hazel eyes can use computers/laptops/newer technology for their educational research, but those with Blue/Green eyes are only given access to books.
4. Both sides are able to sit in the same lunch room, but they are not allowed to sit at the same table as someone from the other side.

Please explain to the students at the end of the lesson that these are not real rules. We obviously don't want to limit bathroom or educational access to the students, these are just examples of what life was like, and they can go on with their regular school schedule/personal business once the lesson is over.

ii. Then ask the students these questions:

1. Those on the Brown/Hazel side, are you okay with this arrangement?
 2. What about those on the Blue/Green side?
 3. Do you think this is fair?
 4. Would you like these to be actual rules that your followed in school or in life? This was the reality of life for many African Americans during the Jim Crow era.
5. Summarize the information of the second half of the Teacher Introduction above.
 6. Realities of Jim Crow: Show the students the remaining images/articles and explain how they differ from those shown before.
 - a. These images and articles demonstrate the harsh experience of African American lives, and those of other people of color, during the Jim Crow era.
 7. Explain how the break down of Jim Crow and these social, political, and legal structures change the course of history for the better.
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5-1. Jim Crow.



This minstrel poster depicts an enslaved, or generalized “black man” as one who is happy and content in his shabby clothes and physical/livelihood separation from the well dressed individuals in the background. This racist, blackface image became one of the images that gave Jim Crow Laws their name.

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NOT FEEL THAT I WILL OVERWEIGH HIM WITH
orders. W. E. ALLEN.
Washington, February 19.

**Wants "Jim Crow" Law All Over
the United States.**

To the Editor of THE TIMES:
I read with interest the article written
by "J. F. N." to The Times Mail Bag,
in which he wishes to isolate the col-
ored population from the white in
Washington, and then does not advoc-
ate the passing of the "jim crow" law
in the District of Columbia.
I agree with him entirely on the segre-
gation law, but disagree as regards the
"jim crow" law.
The colored race is no longer "looked
down" on, and by passing this "jim
crow" law and giving them as good
cars and service as is given the white
people, it will then give that race the
opportunity to develop more racial pride
and distinction.
Some people think it is a disgrace to
be colored, and think the passing of
this "jim crow" law would mean a
downward trend of this race. This is
no longer the thought of an educated
person, and if the colored people would
not think so much of trying to be equal
with the white people and would try to
develop their race to such an extent as
to make them recognized by their pride
and habits; then the colored people
should pull for this law, and, after
passing it, try to be rivals and not
equals of the white race.
I have talked with several well-edu-
cated colored men on this question, and
was surprised to find that they agreed
entirely with me, and a few of them
went to such an extent as wanting a
separate part of the United States as
their home, as was given the Indians.
I and every other person, whether
white or black, provided they have
enough pride, should pull for this "jim
crow" law, not only in the District of
Columbia, but all over the United
States. W. W. J.
Glen Ferris, W. Va., February 20.

Image 6

"To the Editor of THE TIMES:

I read with interest the article written by
"J.F.N." to The Times Mail Bag, in which
he wishes to isolate the colored population
from the white in Washington, and then
does not advocated the passing of "jim
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I agree with him entirely on the
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The colored race is no longer "looked
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service as is given the white people, it will
then give that race the opportunity to
develop more racial pride and distinction.

Some people think it is a disgrace to be
colored, and think the passing of this "jim
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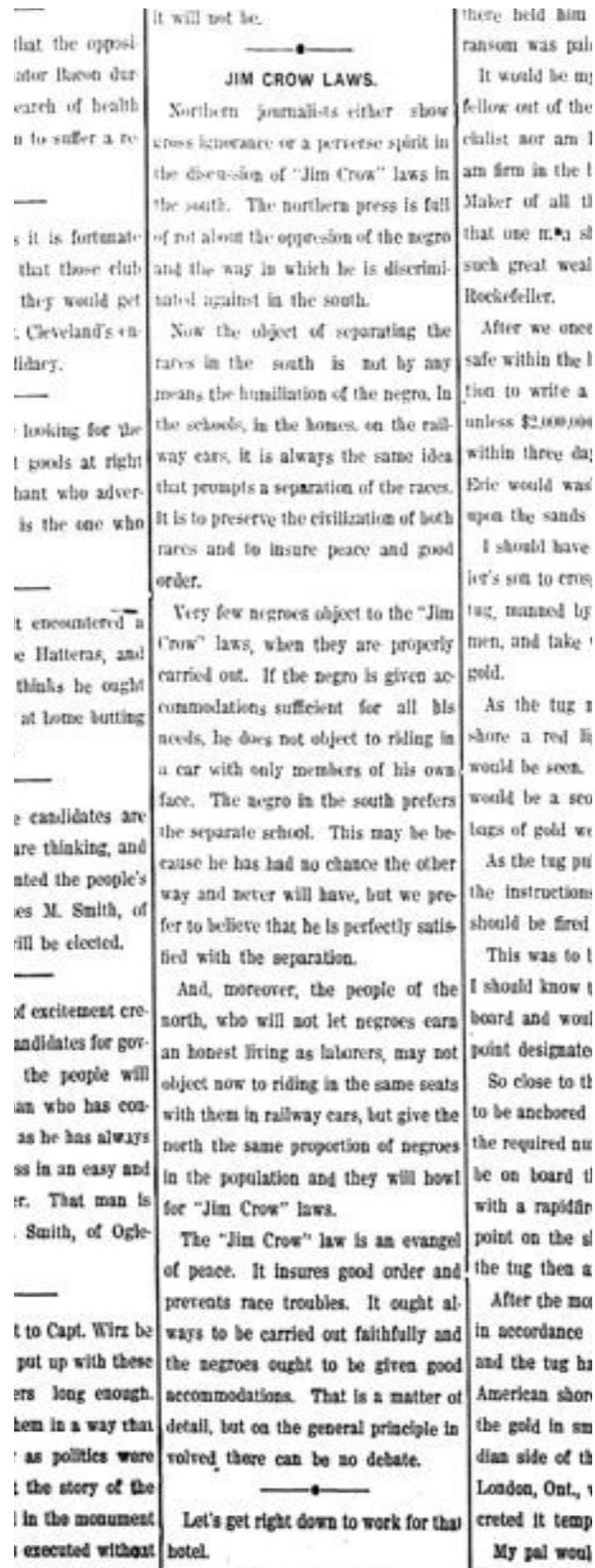
extent as to make them recognized by their pride and habits; then the colored people should pull
for this law, and, after passing it, try to be rivals and not equals of the white race.

I have talked with several well-educated colored men on this question, and was surprised to
find that they agreed entirely with me, and a few of them went to such an extent as wanting a
separate part of the United States as their home, as was given the Indians.

I and every other person, whether whire or black, provided they have enough pride, should pull
for this "jim crow" law, not only in the District of Columbia, but all over the United States.

This article portrays the institution of Jim Crow as the best decision for African Americans. According to the author, any “educated person” would be able to see this, but the article neglects to mention how the “cars” and “service given to African Americans were not the same as what was given to the White community. The mistreatment African Americans received as a result of Jim Crow was not cause for pride, but instead sadness and a greater desire to be “equals” and not “rivals”.

5-3: The Athens banner. (Athens, Ga.) 1902-1923, November 03, 1905, Image 2



"Northern Journalist either show gross ignorance or a perverse spirit in the discussion of "Jim Crow" laws in the south. The northern press is full of rot about the oppression of the negro and the way in which he is discriminated against in the south.

Now the object of separating the races in the south is not by any means the humiliation of the negro. In the schools, in the homes, on the railway cars, it is always the same idea that prompts the separation of the races. It is to preserve the civilization of both races and to insure peace and good order.

Very few negroes object to the "Jim Crow" laws, when they are properly carried out. If the negro is given accomodation sufficient for all his needs, he does not object to riding in a car with only members of his own race. The negro in the south prefers the separate school. This may be because he has had no chance the other way and never will have, but *we prefer to believe that he is perfectly satisfied with the separation.*

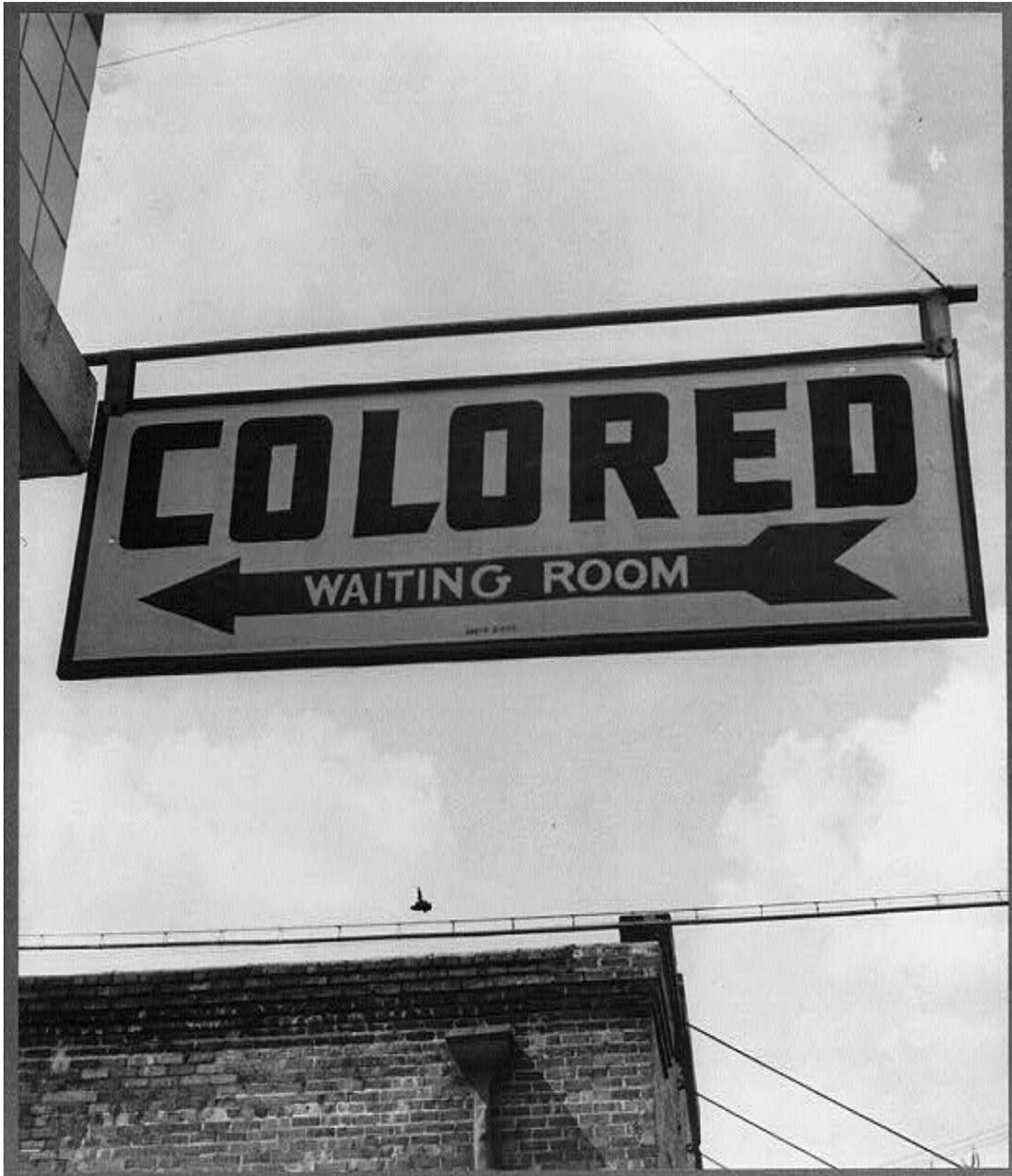
And, moreover, the people of the north, who will not let negroes earn an honest living as laborers, may not object now to riding in the same seats with them in railway cars, but give the north the same proportion of negroes in the population and they will howl for "Jim Crow" laws.

The "Jim Crow" law is an evangel of peace. It insures good order and prevents race troubles. It ought to be given good accomodations. That is

a matter of detail, but on the general principle involved there can be no debate.”

Again, this article mentions how African Americans actually like Jim Crow if the laws “are properly carried out.” However, the laws were not properly carried out, nor were they accepted. The author states how they [the white community] prefer to “believe” that he [the African American] is perfectly satisfied with the separation and segregation. In reality, the author has neglected to research the harsh factual realities of Jim Crow instead of beliefs.

8-1: A Greyhound bus trip from Louisville, Kentucky, to Memphis, Tennessee, and the terminals. Sign at bus station. Rome, Georgia



This is an example image of the separation that was enforced at bus stations and other aspects of life. Similar to the sign in the exhibit, these segregation practices were very invasive into the everyday aspects of life for African Americans.

8-2: Negro drinking at "Colored" water cooler in streetcar terminal, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



In this image, one can see the bathroom signs, which indicate the direction men and women of both races should go to find their designated restrooms. Additionally, the central focus of the image depicts an African American individual taking a drink from the water cooler designated specifically for “colored” people. Most likely, there would have been a legitimate water fountain designated for “whites” either on the other side of a partition or in a more preferable location away from the restrooms.

8-3: A cafe near the tobacco market, Durham, North Carolina



These separate entrances for “white” and “colored” people had to be observed and strictly followed during the Jim Crow era. Behind those segregated entrances, one of two scenarios would be presented: separate seating sections for whites and colored people or a simple counter for African Americans to order at and then a seating area for white individuals to dine in for their meal.

8-4: 29 Disturbing Pictures Of American Life Under Jim Crow



This sign demonstrates the desire of certain communities to not have just separate entrances or waiting rooms, but a completely racially segregated neighborhood. This was not uncommon in the United States during the Jim Crow era. Some towns called “sundown towns” would not allow African Americans in the town after dark. These white communities also feel that their desires and beliefs are patriotic or true American beliefs, as can be represented by the flags.

8-5: Russell Lee / Dolph Briscoe Center for American History



This sign addresses how Jim Crow affected and limited not just African Americans, but hispanic, asian, and other “colored” races as well. Signs like the one in this undated image were displayed at various restaurants and other public accommodations under a system known as "Juan Crow" laws, addressing those of spanish descent who were subjected to Jim Crow laws.

8-6: Booker T. Washington's Letter to the Editor of the Montgomery Advertiser

Tuskegee, AL

April 24, 1885

"I wish to say a few words from a purely business standpoint. It is not a subject with which to mix social equality or anything bordering on it. To the Negro it is a matter of dollars and cents. I claim that the railroads in Alabama do not provide as good accommodations for the colored passengers as those furnished white passengers for the same money and that the fare is not first class as claimed on the face of the ticket.

My reasons for the above assertions are (a) that in most cases the smoking car and that in which colored people are put are the same; (b) when not put directly into the smoking car they are crammed into one end of a smoking car with a door between that is as much open as closed, making little difference between this and the smoking car; (c) on some of the roads the colored passengers are carried in one end of the baggage car, there being a partition between this and the baggage or express; (d) only a half coach is given to the colored people and this is almost invariably an old one with a low ceiling and it soon becomes crowded almost to suffocation and is misery to one knowing the effects of impure air. The seats in the coach given to colored people are always greatly inferior to those given the whites. The car is usually very filthy. There is no carpet as in the first class coach. ..When a white man gets drunk or wants to lounge around in an indecent position he finds his way into the colored department...

If railroad officials do not want to let us enter the first-class car occupied by white passengers let them give us a separate one just as good in every particular and just as exclusive, and there will be no complaint. We have no desire to mix... There is no disposition on the part of the colored to obtrude themselves on the whites when they can receive equal, separate accommodations... We can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand for maintaining the right."

This letter is also included in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* lesson plan. It addresses forthright the unequal accommodations that were provided to African Americans, even as early as 1885, compared to those offered to the white community. All those separation practices enforced in the images shown above can be given a new perspective with the knowledge provided by Booker T. Washington in regards to the inequality shown under Jim Crow.