Unit Title: The Jim Crow Era

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Grade Level: High School

School: Fauquier High School  
Fauquier County Public Schools  
Time Estimate: 10 class periods (90-minute periods)

Overview: The students will use a variety of websites to explore the Jim Crow Era from 1877 – 1920 to learn its significance in our American history. They will first investigate the origin of the word Jim Crow and how and why it was applied to the segregated society it represented. It is assumed that the students will come to this unit with a firm understanding of the Reconstruction period and how it impacted the lives of the African Americans.

Using secondary information available on line, the students will examine the laws and practices surrounding segregation in the south, as well as unwritten customs that defined it. The students will explore different organizations that either supported or opposed segregation and will end the unit by comparing and contrasting key figures and their reactions to this specific era in American history. Throughout the course of this unit students will be expected to examine a variety of primary resources such as legal documents, photographs, speeches, letters, and political cartoons. They will be asked to discuss, compare, respond through writing, and evaluate these sources, as well as produce a documentary as a class.

Historical Background: After the Civil War, during Reconstruction, former slaves enjoyed a period when they were able to vote, actively participate in the political process, acquire land from their former owners, seek their own employment, and use public accommodations. They were able to enjoy these freedoms because they felt protected by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Many white southerners resisted this progress, however, and soon rallied against the former slaves' and their newly earned freedoms. Many began to find means for eroding the gains for which many African Americans had shed their blood to earn.

With the Compromise of 1877 and the withdrawal of federal troops in the South, political power had been restored to the white Democrats. Under the control of a white ruling class known as the "Redeemers," white southerners who used terrorist tactics to win back control of the states from Republicans, Democrats took control of southern state legislatures and stepped up their attempt to strip African Americans of the rights they had gained under the Radical Republican controlled congress. Already limited by black codes, which kept many African Americans bound to the plantations, white supremacists were determined to strip the African Americans from their right to vote. In order to disfranchise the African Americans, southern state legislatures instituted poll taxes and literacy tests, depriving poor uneducated African Americans the right to vote.

To further deprive African American of their rights, state legislatures initiated laws designed to enforce segregation, or separation of races. These laws were known as the Jim Crow Laws, so called for a minstrel song containing the refrain "jump-jump-jump
Jim Crow.” By the 1890’s all southern states had segregated all public transportation, schools and other public places. Although several African Americans attempted to sue for their rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and the Fourteenth Amendment, the Supreme Court refused to overturn Jim Crow laws, stating the Fourteenth Amendment prohibited states from discrimination, not individuals and businesses.

The Plessy V. Ferguson lawsuit in 1896 set the precedent for separate facilities when the court ruled that "separate but equal" facilities did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. With the backing of the Supreme Court, the first years of the twentieth century saw segregation reaching into almost every area of southern life. Much of the legal structure did no more than confirm what had already been a widespread social practice since well before the end of Reconstruction. The Jim Crow laws had stripped African Americans of any of the modest social, economic, and political gains they had made. What had been maintained by custom in the rural areas soon became law in the newly growing cities and towns of the South.

Many organizations formed to either oppose or support the Jim Crow south. One such group that supported the Jim Crow laws was the Ku Klux Klan, a white terrorist group determined to destroy the Republican Party by murdering and attacking Republican leaders and legislators. They also employed intimidation and/or murder to keep the African Americans from voting. Civil rights organizations such as the ‘National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’ and the ‘National Urban league’ were founded by both blacks and whites to help fight for equality. Despite segregation, a growing African American middle class began to emerge. They formed mutual aid societies, started and supported businesses, and built schools. The Methodist Episcopal and Baptist Churches grew rapidly which also fostered a sense of community and activism.

However, many of the gains made by this community were fleeting; African Americans suffered widespread discrimination for many years. In response to the segregation and the discrimination, many key leaders represented different approaches to how African Americans should respond. Booker T. Washington called for cooperation with southern whites, whereas Ida B. Wells argued that African Americans should protest unfair treatment. W.E.B. Du Bois advocated political action and a civil rights agenda whereas Benjamin "Pap" Singleton urged African Americans to move west and develop their own independent communities in the west. Although each method for achieving equality was different, the combination of these ideals and practices through the early part of the 20th century, laid the foundation for the future of the African American civil rights movement.

Major Understanding:
Despite the impact of how “Jim Crow” shaped state laws and customs, African Americans made a variety of choices in response to segregation and other forms of discrimination. Led by key leaders such as Ida B Wells, Booker T. Washington, D.E.B. Du Bois, and Benjamin Singleton, African Americans responded to the oppression by whites in very different ways, but always with justice in sight. At the same time white southerners continued to ensure segregation and preserve white dominance, refusing to believe equality to exist for a race that at one time, existed strictly for their own profit.

Objectives:
1. Students will work individually or cooperatively in pairs to explore websites to analyze primary and secondary information and answer a series of questions.
2. Students will explore a variety of primary documents and evaluate each using specific guided questions.
3. Students will work collaboratively to explore personal narratives interpreting views of people during the Jim Crow Era and independently write a paper defining the results.
4. Students will compare and contrast the views of key leaders cooperatively as a group and then independently write a position paper supporting one view.
5. Students will work in pairs or independently to research two prominent groups that emerged as a result of the Jim Crow Era, one for and one against the rights of African Americans.
6. The students will work both independently and cooperatively to create a “60-Minute” video of the Jim Crow Era.

**Standards of Learning:**

**Skills:**

VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to

a) Identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;

b) Formulate historical questions and defend findings based on inquiry and interpretation

c) Develop perspectives of time and place including periods and personalities in American history

d) Communicate findings orally and in analytical essays and/or comprehensive papers

e) Develop skills in persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled

f) Apply reference sources to understand how relationships between humans and their environments have changed over time

g) Interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

**Content:**

VUS.7c The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era and its importance as a major turning point in American history by:

c) Examining the political, economic, and social impact of Reconstruction

VUS.8a The student will demonstrate knowledge of how the nation grew and changed from the end of Reconstruction through the early twentieth century by

a) Explaining the westward movement of the population