

## THE ORIGIN OF "JIM CROW"

Jim Crow laws were named for an ante-bellum minstrel show character. The minstrel show is one of the first forms of American entertainment. The tradition began in February 1843 when a group of four white men from Virginia, who called themselves, the "Virginia Minstrels," smeared black cork on their faces and then put on a song-and-dance act in a small hall in New York City. Their performance was such a hit that the group was invited to tour to other cities. Before long, many other entertainers were imitating that style. They all gained success around the country imitating how African-Americans sang and danced.

One performer, who became the most famous, was called Daddy Rice. He was a white actor, who was inspired by an elderly African American man from Louisville, Kentucky, who sang and danced to a song that ended with the same chorus:

"Wheel about and turn about and do just so,  
Ev'ry time I wheel about I jump Jim Crow."

Rice's imitation of the African-American song and dance routine took him from Louisville to Cincinnati to Pittsburgh to Philadelphia and finally to New York City in 1832.

Jim Crow laws, named for the minstrel show character, were passed in the late 1800s by the legislatures of the Southern states that discriminated against African Americans in the south. After the Civil War, many former slaves left the rural areas to live in towns and cities. During Reconstruction, blacks and whites often rode together in the same railway cars, ate in the same restaurants, and used the same public facilities but didn't hang out with each other socially. However, some white southerners thought that the large urban black communities, which provided labor for factories, created a threat. The white southerners couldn't control these new communities the same way they had been able to control the blacks in a more rural setting, where they were dependent on the whites for work. In the city, blacks and whites competed for jobs, and some felt there was a danger of social mixing. The whites felt a need to gain more control over the blacks in the city. New laws, called Jim Crow, were passed restricting the freedoms of African Americans.

In 1883, the U.S. Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional. The Court also ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment kept state governments from discriminating against people because of race but did not keep private organizations or individuals from doing so. This allowed railroads, hotels, theaters, and other businesses to legally practice segregation. By 1914 every southern state had passed laws that created two separate societies: one black, the other white. Blacks and whites could not ride together in the same railroad cars, sit in the same waiting rooms, use the same washrooms, eat in the same restaurants, or sit in the same theaters. Blacks were denied access to parks, beaches, and picnic areas; they were barred from many hospitals.

Beginning in 1915, the Supreme Court began to intervene and Jim Crow laws were challenged. One of the most important court decisions occurred in 1954 when the Supreme Court ruled in a case called *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated public schools were unconstitutional. This began what is known as the "Civil Rights Movement" in the 1960s, which finally ended the Jim Crow laws.

## JIM CROW LAWS: WHAT WERE THEY?

Jim Crow was a set of laws and social customs requiring racial segregation. From 1881 to 1964, Jim Crow laws separated Americans by race in 26 states. From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for consorting with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white clientele separated. However, Jim Crow laws covered almost every possible area of human contact. The following is a sampling of Jim Crow laws from various states:

ALABAMA-Nurses: No person or corporation shall require any white female nurse to nurse in wards or rooms in hospitals, either public or private, in which negro men are placed. Buses: All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket

windows for the white and colored races. Railroads: The conductor of each passenger train is authorized and required to assign each passenger to the car or the division of the car, when it is divided by a partition, designated for the race to which such passenger belongs. Restaurants: It shall be unlawful to conduct a restaurant or other place for the serving of food in the city, at which white and colored people are served in the same room, unless such white and colored persons are effectually separated by a solid partition extending from the floor upward to a distance of seven feet or higher, and unless a separate entrance from the street is provided for each compartment. Pool and Billiard Rooms: It shall be unlawful for a negro and white person to play together or in company with each other at any game of pool or billiards. Toilet Facilities, Male: Every employer of white or negro males shall provide for such white or negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities.

FLORIDA: Intermarriage: All marriages between a white person and a negro, or between a white person and a person of negro descent to the fourth generation inclusive, are hereby forever prohibited. Cohabitation: Any negro man and white woman, or any white man and negro woman, who are not married to each other, who shall habitually live in and occupy in the nighttime the same room shall each be punished by imprisonment not exceeding twelve (12) months, or by fine not exceeding five hundred (\$500.00) dollars. Education: The schools for white children and the schools for negro children shall be conducted separately. Juvenile Delinquents: There shall be separate buildings, not nearer than one fourth mile to each other, one for white boys and one for negro boys. White boys and negro boys shall not, in any manner, be associated together or worked together.

GEORGIA: Barbers: No colored barber shall serve as a barber [to] white women or girls. Burial: The officer in charge shall not bury, or allow to be buried, any colored persons upon ground set apart or used for the burial of white persons. Restaurants: All persons licensed to conduct a restaurant, shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room or serve the two races anywhere under the same license. Amateur Baseball: It shall be unlawful for any amateur white baseball team to play baseball on any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of a playground devoted to the Negro race, and it shall be unlawful for any amateur colored baseball team to play baseball in any vacant lot or baseball diamond within two blocks of any playground devoted to the white race. Parks: It shall be unlawful for colored people to frequent any park owned or maintained by the city for the benefit, use and enjoyment of white persons...and unlawful for any white person to frequent any park owned or maintained by the city for the use and benefit of colored persons. Wine and Beer: All persons licensed to conduct the business of selling beer or wine...shall serve either white people exclusively or colored people exclusively and shall not sell to the two races within the same room at any time.

LOUISIANA: Circus Tickets: All circuses, shows, and tent exhibitions, to which the attendance of...more than one race is invited or expected to attend shall provide for the convenience of its patrons not less than two ticket offices with individual ticket sellers, and not less than two entrances to the said performance, with individual ticket takers and receivers, and in the case of outside or tent performances, the said ticket offices shall not be less than twenty-five (25) feet apart. Housing: Any person...who shall rent any part of any such building to a negro person or a negro family when such building is already in whole or in part in occupancy by a white person or white family, or vice versa when the building is in occupancy by a negro person or negro family, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor and on conviction thereof shall be punished by a fine of not less than twenty-five (\$25.00) nor more than one hundred (\$ 100.00) dollars or be imprisoned not less than 10, or more than 60 days, or both such fine and imprisonment in the discretion of the court. The Blind: The board of trustees shall...maintain a separate building...on separate ground for the admission, care, instruction, and support of all blind persons of the colored or black race.