

# Jim Crow Laws

In his Inaugural Address, President Barack Obama said that less than 60 years ago, segregation in Washington, D.C., would have prevented his African father from being served in a restaurant. Obama was calling attention to a shameful chapter in American history. From the 1880s to the 1960s, many Southern states

enacted unfair laws that limited the legal rights of black Americans. These acts were known as Jim Crow laws, named after a minstrel-show character (musical performer who portrayed blacks negatively). Read the samples of Jim Crow laws below, then answer the questions on a separate sheet of paper.

- “No person of color shall migrate into and reside in this state, unless, within twenty days after his arrival . . . he shall enter into an [agreement] with two [property owners] as [sponsors].”
- “[No person of color] shall pursue the practice, art, trade, or business of an artisan, mechanic, or shopkeeper, or any other trade or employment . . . until he shall have obtained a license from the judge of the district court, which license shall be good for one year only.” (A license could cost \$100 or more.)
- “No person of color shall be permitted to preach . . . to congregations of colored people without special permission from the mayor or president of the board of police.”
- “It shall be unlawful for a Negro [black] and white person to play together or in company with each other at any game of pool or billiards.”
- “Separate free schools shall be established for the education of children of African descent; and it shall be unlawful for any colored child to attend any white school, or any white child to attend a colored school.”
- “Books shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue to be used by the race first using them.”
- “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.”
- “It shall be unlawful for any amateur white baseball team to play baseball on any vacant lot or baseball field within two blocks of a playground devoted to the Negro race.”
- “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.”

## QUESTIONS

1. How did these rules become known as Jim Crow laws?
2. How were blacks restricted from traveling freely?
3. How did these laws limit employment opportunities for ex-slaves?
4. How did Jim Crow laws limit religious freedoms guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution?
5. Why do you suppose it was illegal for white and black Americans to compete at pool?
6. If a white school was getting rid of old books, could a black school adopt them for its students' use?
7. Could black and white amateur baseball teams play separate games on neighboring diamonds?
8. What do you think the total effect of Jim Crow laws was meant to be?
9. Describe ways in which establishing separate black and white schools was unfair.
10. What effects might Jim Crow laws have had after they were abolished? How do you suppose many African-Americans overcame such obstacles?