

STUDENT MATERIALS

Navigating Jim Crow:

The “Chitlin” Circuit, the “5” Royales and the Birmingham Children’s March

Vocabulary Words (Optional)

Directions: Study these words:

Chitlin' Circuit (n.): A collection of performance venues throughout the eastern, southern, and upper Midwest areas of the United States that were safe and acceptable for African American musicians, comedians, and other entertainers to perform in during the era of racial segregation in the United States. (Source: *alchetron.com*)

Civil Rights Movement (n.): An organized movement by African Americans and their supporters in the mid-1950s to late 1960s to eliminate segregation and achieve civil rights equal to those of whites including equal opportunity in employment, housing, and education, as well as the right to vote and the right of equal access to public facilities. (Source: *legaldictionary.thefreedictionary.com*)

Desegregation (n.): The elimination of laws, customs, or practices under which people from different religions, ancestries, ethnic groups, etc. are restricted to specific or separate public facilities, neighborhoods, schools, organizations, etc. (Source: *dictionary.com*)

Jim Crow (n.): A practice or policy of segregating or discriminating against black people, as in public places, public vehicles, or employment. (Source: *dictionary.com*)

Expanded Definition: Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system which operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states, between 1877 and the mid-1960s. More than a series of rigid anti-black laws, it was a way of life.

(Source: ferris.edu/jimcrow/what.htm Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia)

Navigate (v. transitive): To deal effectively with a complicated situation. (Source: *macmillandictionary.com*)

Oppression (n.): A situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom. (Source: *dictionary.cambridge.org*)

Segregation (n.): The institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority. (Source: *dictionary.com*)

The Green Book: *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was a guidebook for African American travelers published by Victor H. Green annually from 1936 to 1966 that provided a list of hotels, boarding houses, taverns, restaurants, service stations and other establishments throughout the country that served African Americans patrons. (Source: *The Smithsonian Digital Volunteers*)

White Supremacy (n.): The belief, theory, or doctrine that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial groups, especially black people, and are therefore rightfully the dominant group in any society. (Source: *dictionary.com*)

Vocabulary Check (Optional)

Directions: In the sentences below, fill in the blanks with the correct word from this list.

Jim Crow	Oppression	Segregation	Desegregation
Chitlin' Circuit	Navigate	<i>The Green Book</i>	White Supremacy

_____ is the institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority.

_____ is a situation in which people are governed in an unjust way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom.

_____ is the belief, theory or doctrine that white people are inherently superior to people from all other racial groups, especially black people, and are therefore rightfully the dominant group in any society.

_____ refers to the practice in the United States from 1877 until the mid-1960s of segregating or discriminating against African Americans, as in public places, public vehicles, or employment.

The _____ is a collection of performance venues throughout the eastern, southern, and upper Midwest areas of the United States that were safe and acceptable for African American musicians, comedians, and other entertainers to perform in during the era of racial segregation in the United States.

To _____ means to deal effectively with a complicated situation.

_____ is the elimination of laws, customs, or practices under which people from different religions, ancestries, ethnic groups, etc. are restricted to specific or separate public facilities, neighborhoods, schools, organizations, etc.

_____ was a guidebook for African American travelers published annually from 1936 to 1966 that provided a list of hotels, boarding houses, taverns, restaurants, service stations and other establishments throughout the country that served African Americans patrons.

Jim Crow Laws Discussion Questions

(This is a whole class discussion with no writing required.)

Jim Crow Laws: “Jim Crow” (so called after a black character in minstrel shows) was the name of a series of segregation laws which operated mainly, but not only, in southern and border states, between 1877 and the mid-1960s. These laws called for separate facilities for whites and blacks. Usually, facilities for blacks were inferior. The most common types of Jim Crow laws prohibited intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep their black and white customers separated. Many states, and even cities, punished citizens legally for violating the Jim Crow laws. African Americans also had to worry about the possibility of being the victims of violence if they did not obey the Jim Crow laws, or were perceived not to obey them.

Sampling of Laws: Below is a sampling of Jim Crow laws from Alabama and Georgia. There were Jim Crow Laws similar to these in other states. (These laws were from earlier than 1964, when Jim Crow laws became outlawed everywhere.)

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. (*Alabama*)

Discussion Question: Imagine you were an African American living under this Jim Crow law. How would this law impact your making plans to go out to eat at a restaurant?

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. (*Georgia*)

Discussion Question: Imagine you were an African American living under this Jim Crow law. How would this law impact your making plans as to which park you would visit?

Restrooms

Every employer of white or negro males shall provide for such white or negro males reasonably accessible and separate toilet facilities. (*Alabama*)

Discussion Question: How would this law impact your life away from home?

Chitlin' Circuit Video Analysis

1. Rip Daniels, Founder of the American Blues Network (video clip 2:26 – 2:34):

“They had to carry in some cases their own petrol, and in all cases, they had to have dependable transportation. You did not want to break down.”

Why did musicians on the Chitlin' Circuit need to bring their own petrol (gasoline); what were the dangers facing these musicians if they ran out of gas or their car broke down?

2. Author Preston Lauterbach (video clip 2:35 – 2:44):

“A driver on the Chitlin' Circuit had to know how to navigate this world. He had to know what towns and what parts of town were safe for him to stop in.”

What were some thoughts that might have gone through a musician’s mind when mapping out his journey?

3. Scrap Iron, Little Milton's Road Manager (video clip 2:54 – 3:07)

"I mean when we used to eat, we used to go around to the back of the restaurant. You couldn't go in there and sit down and eat like we do now. You would go to the back door, and 'What you want, boy?'"

What did Scrap Iron's memory reveal about the effects that Jim Crow laws had on him and other African Americans?

“The Slummer the Slum”

Now don't try to figure out

Where I come from

Now don't try to figure out

Where I come from

I could be the smart guy from Wall Street

I could be the Purple People Eater's son

Now there's only one difference

between me and you

Now there's only one difference

between me and you

You've got money in your pocket, oh no

And I've got a hole in my shoe

“The Slummer the Slum” Text Analysis

1. What may the “5” Royals be saying in the first stanza? Give evidences. Put that message in a bumper sticker. (See the first stanza, lines 1 – 6.)

2. What may the “5” Royals be saying in the last stanza? Give evidences. Put that message in a bumper sticker. (See the last stanza, lines 7 - 12.)

The Birmingham Children’s March Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Bull Connor, Birmingham Commissioner of Public Safety** (video clip 4:40 – 4:47)
“I always worked under this philosophy: You can never whip these birds if you don’t keep you and them separate.”

What does this quote suggest about how Bull Connor and other segregationists viewed African Americans? Give evidence.

2. **Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, Movement Leader** (video clip 6:05 – 6:17)
“We thought you could just shame the white man into ‘look how bad you’re treating your negroes,’ you know. But I found out that they were determined not to give one inch.

Why would shaming not work and what did work? _____

3. **In the short-term, how did the Birmingham Children’s March hurt the “5” Royales? In the long-term, how did the march help improve the lives of the “5” Royales? Provide evidence.**

Culminating Questions

1. In what ways does the song “The Slummer the Slum” by the “5” Royales reflect the history of the times?

2. How and why did the subtle protest of the “5” Royales’ song “The Slummer the Slum” differ from the more overt protest of the Birmingham Children’s March?

3. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed the Jim Crow laws. What were some of the intended consequences for African Americans, in general, and specifically for the “5” Royales and other Chitlin' circuit musicians? What were some of the unintended consequences? Give evidence for your arguments.

Homework

Choose two of the following questions. Each answer should include at least three pieces of evidence.

1. Compare these two photos:

Photo A: “Chitlin” Circuit Club people enjoying themselves in “Chitlin” Circuit venue:
https://www.flickr.com/photos/library_of_congress/3549665322

Photo B: Photo of dog attacking local high school student Walter Gadsden, 1963
Birmingham Children’s March. (Scroll down to see photo.)
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-children-who-marched-into-civil-rights-history/>

2. During Jim Crow, African Americans were an oppressed group acting out of self-preservation. Describe the tension that existed for many African Americans between wanting changes in society and working within the system of the times.
3. Consider what it takes to be heroic in the face of oppression. What is the best characterization of a hero?
4. Living under Jim Crow, John Tanner and other members of the “5” Royals endured restrictions. What kind of restrictions, if any, do you feel on you today?
5. Consider what it takes for any movement against oppression to succeed. Please give an example from history and one from current events.

Extra Credit (Optional)

Option 1: Watch this video of a hip-hop song two teenagers wrote and performed about the Birmingham Children’s March.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yk_n-C5S8g4

Directions: Create your own song or poem protesting a topic of your choice. Your topic can relate to current events or your topic can be about an issue in your school or community.

Option 2. Read and listen to this excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” Dr. King wrote this letter three weeks before the Birmingham Children’s March. In this letter, he defends the strategy of nonviolent protest against racism.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VKq7wUoIIK8>

Directions: Write an essay, poem, or song (or create a visual essay with video, photos, and/or other images) about what impressed you about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and why you think it became one of the most important documents of the Civil Rights Movement.

Option 3. Listen to this excerpt from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Where Do We Go from Here?” speech (1967):

<https://vimeo.com/11154217>

In this speech he delivered in 1967, a year before his assassination, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. discussed economic equality. Consider the line in the “5” Royales’ “The Slummer the Slum,” (written nearly ten years earlier): “Now there’s only one difference between me and you/ You’ve got money in your pocket, oh no, and I’ve got a hole in my shoe.”

Directions: Write an essay, poem, or song (or create a visual essay) about what impressed you about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Where Do We Go from Here?” speech. Comment on its similarities to the economic message of “The Slummer the Slum.” Was the song ten years ahead of its time?

Option 4: Short Essay

Directions: Research and write a 2–3-page (double space) essay on the “Chitlin” Circuit that explores how it was an agent of both freedom and oppression for African Americans. Use at least 3 sources, and cite them.