

---

# Jim Crow Laws: How did Slavery Become Much More Than Economics

Slavery, or the brutal practice of human bondage, was practiced predominantly by white landowners in the Southern United States throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. People were kidnapped from Africa and forced to work as indentured servants at plantations for the production of crops like tobacco and cotton. It started in the United States of America in 1619, and lasted in about half the states until 1865, when it was prohibited nationally by the Thirteenth Amendment. The history of slavery spans many cultures, nationalities, religions, and societies, and unlike popular belief, slavery impacted much more than the American economy. Though the Union victory in the Civil War freed the nation's four million slaves, the legacy of slavery continued to influence American history. The 'peculiar institution', as it was often called, slavery impacted far more than just the American economy at the time, it defined the social and political landscape of the American South, best seen after the emancipation of slaves by the end of the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Slavery had a large impact on the social landscape of the United States, predominantly in the South, where it was most heavily practiced. One large element of the social impact of slavery was the persistence of racial attitudes, which focuses on events that took place in the decades after the Civil War. The sudden emancipation of blacks was politically threatening to whites, who for centuries had enjoyed exclusive political power in the government. This meant that they were responsible for writing the law and other important documents, like the Articles of Confederation, independent America's first governing document. This is when they also made specific race-based laws for black people, like the Jim Crow laws and Black Codes. (3)

The implementation of these policies also began the age of segregation or the separation of blacks and whites in public. While the Black Codes granted some freedoms to African Americans—including the right to buy and own property, marry, make contracts and testify in court (only in cases involving people of their own race)—their primary purpose was to restrict blacks' labor and activity. If a black person were to break any of these codes, they became subject to arrest, beating and forced labor, and the apprenticeship laws at the time forced many minors into unpaid labor for white planters. (4, 5)

The restrictive nature of the codes increased widespread black resistance to their enforcement, and also enraged many people in the North, who argued that the codes violated the fundamental principles of free labor ideas and the blacks' natural rights. By 1877, when the Reconstruction ended, the black population had seen little improvement in their social status, and the white supremacist groups (like the Ku Klux Klan) and powers throughout the region had prevented them from gaining any political power or improving their social status in America. The Ku Klux Klan was a secret society that started out as a private club for confederate soldiers, terrorizing black communities and spreading white southern culture, with members at the highest levels of government. During this time, many ex-Confederate soldiers were working as judges and police in the legal court system, which made it very difficult for African Americans to win Court Cases and appeal for their rights. Discrimination continued in the US with the implementation of Jim Crow laws, but would also inspire the Civil Rights Movement with prominent black personalities like Martin Luther King Jr., who fought for African American rights

---

and equality in the 1960s.(1)

The Jim Crow laws were another set of restrictive policies toward African Americans, which made segregation in public legal. Waiting rooms in professional offices were required to be segregated, along with other places like water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, cemeteries, even amusement-park cashier windows. These laws forbade African Americans from living in white neighborhoods. At the peak of these laws, segregation was enforced for public pools, phone booths, hospitals, asylums, jails and residential homes for the elderly and handicapped. Many schools even required the children to have different classrooms and textbooks for black and white students. In Atlanta, Georgia, African Americans in court were given a different Bible from whites to swear on. Intermarriage between whites and blacks was strictly forbidden in most southern states. It was also not uncommon to see signs posted at town and city limits warning African Americans that they were not welcome there.

The rise of the Jim Crow laws also resulted in the rise of its opposers. Ida B. Wells, a Memphis teacher, became a prominent activist against Jim Crow laws after refusing to leave a train car designated for whites only. When the conductor forcefully removed her, she bit him on the hand, and the judge in her case initially ruled in her favor. Another activist, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, became the first black woman to create a black school in North Carolina.(2)

The start of the Civil Rights era in the United States officially ended the Jim Crow laws, and made significant changes such as the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1964. They allowed federal prosecution of anyone who tried to prevent someone from voting, ensuring that black people would get to participate, and mandated equal employment of all.

In conclusion, these political and economic changes, when taken together, gave Southern white elites an incentive to promote anti-black sentiment in their local communities by encouraging violence towards blacks, racist attitudes, and the implementation of racist policies such as the Black Codes and Jim Crow laws, enforced after the emancipation of slaves. This intensified white racism in former slaveholding areas, and spurred on the start of the Civil Rights Era, with many black people demanding their rights. The post-slavery codes produced racially conservative political attitudes that were passed down locally, even in the modern world, from one generation to the next.

## Works Cited

1. History.com Editors. "Black Codes." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 1 June 2010, [www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-codes).
2. History.com Editors. "Jim Crow Laws." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 28 Feb. 2018, [www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws](http://www.history.com/topics/early-20th-century-us/jim-crow-laws).
3. History.com Editors. "Slavery in America." History.com, A&E Television Networks, 12 Nov. 2009, [www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery](http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/slavery).
4. "Political Experience." Ushistory.org, Independence Hall Association, [www.ushistory.org/us/12c.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/us/12c.asp).
5. "Slavery, the Economy, and Society." Cliffs Notes, [www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/history/us-history-i/slavery-and-the-south/slavery-the-economy-and-society](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study-guides/history/us-history-i/slavery-and-the-south/slavery-the-economy-and-society).