



A Guide for Discussing the Jim Crow Era & *The Negro Motorist Green Book* with Youth

From the late 1800s through the Civil Rights Movement, a series of state and local laws were instated across the United States to define segregated public spaces and promote social opportunities for white supremacy while deliberately stifling progress for African Americans. Legally, African Americans received "separate but equal" treatment under the law — in actuality, public facilities for African Americans were nearly always inferior if they existed at all. In addition, African Americans were systematically denied the right to vote in most of the rural South through the selective application of literacy tests and other racially motivated criteria. These laws were known as “Jim Crow” laws. Jim Crow was the name of a minstrel routine that first appeared in the 1820s. Over time, the name became a derogatory nickname for African Americans and a designation for their segregated life.

The Jim Crow era can be difficult to discuss, but it is a very important chapter of our history that needs to be taught. It not only explains an important time in North Carolina history, but also connects to the bigger picture of what was going on in American history. It is the result of everything that happened since the first Africans were brought to America, and what leads to many of the current events that now face our state and nation.

When teaching about the Jim Crow era, it is important to help youth understand not only the injustice of segregation and oppression of racism, but also to help them recognize the courageous and everyday experiences of African Americans and Civil Right advocates that worked to create safe communities and bring about equal rights. *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, later known as *The Negro Traveler’s Green Book* in 1952, and finally the *Travelers’ Green Book* in 1960, is a great depiction of this. It shows how African Americans helped each other grow and thrive. Overcoming Jim Crow was done in solidarity, with one generation helping the next.

One difficult task with examining this part of our history is the terminology used in primary sources from the time. Many of these primary sources will contain the word “Negro” or other historical terms. Before introducing youth to these materials, it is important to explain to them the use of these words, and while they may have been the common terminology in the past, today they are outdated and inappropriate unless one is reading aloud directly from a historical document or work of literature.

When examining this time, also be aware that you and others may have close personal connections to this era and its impact. The subject is, and should be, and emotional one, so creating a space where everyone is comfortable and supported is essential to learning about this part of our history. To start the process, you should take time to do a self-review – to seek out

any biases you may have yourself and to acknowledge and diminish them before working with others on this topic. A visit to this [website](#) may help you better understand your own biases.

Do's and Don'ts for Educators Teaching the Jim Crow Era

The Southern Poverty Law Center's "Teaching Tolerance" project has issued the following list to help guide educators when teaching about slavery. They have been adapted in this document to apply to discussing the Jim Crow era.

Don'ts:

- Do not use role-plays. They can induce trauma and minimization, and for youth, are almost certain to provoke parental concerns.
- Do not focus only on brutality. Horrific things happened to African Americans during this era, but there are also stories of hope, survival, and resistance.
- Do not Separate people by race.
- Do not treat people as modern-day proxies for historical people of the past.
- Do not make race-based assumptions about someone's relationship to segregation, the Jim Crow era, and the Civil Rights Movement.

Do:

- Use primary sources and oral histories.
- Underscore African American's contributions to American History.
- Use photographs that reflect activism, family life, and other daily activities.
- Choose texts that illustrate the people from this era as whole individuals.
- Organize field trips or visits to historic sites and museums that reflect the lives of African Americans during this time.
- Introduce stories about African American, Native American, and White civil right activists that fought for equal rights and change.

References

Facing History and Ourselves. "Addressing Dehumanizing Language from History." Facinghistory.org. <https://www.facinghistory.org/reconstruction-era/addressing-dehumanizing-language-history> (accessed December 2, 2019).

Teaching Tolerance. "Test Yourself for Hidden Bias." Tolerance.org. <https://www.tolerance.org/professional-development/test-yourself-for-hidden-bias> (accessed October 14, 2019).

Teaching Tolerance. "Tongue-Tied." Tolerance.org. <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2014/tonguetied> (accessed October 14, 2019).