

Jim Crow Museum Virtual Tour Accessibility

1. Timeline – The first section of the Jim Crow Museum Virtual Tour is the Timeline. This timeline consists of six sections; Africa Before America Slavery, Slavery in America, Reconstruction, Jim Crow Era, Civil Rights Era, and Post Civil Rights.

[Africa Before American Slavery - Didactic Panel](#)

The peoples of West Africa had rich and diverse histories and cultures centuries before Europeans arrived. Africans had kingdoms and city-states, each with its own language and culture. The empire of Songhai and the kingdoms of Mali, Benin, and Kongo were large and powerful with monarchs heading complex political structures governing hundreds of thousands of people. In other areas, political systems were smaller, relying on agreement between people at the village level.

Art, learning and technology flourished, and Africans were especially skilled with medicine, mathematics, and astronomy. In addition to domestic goods, they made fine luxury items in bronze, ivory, gold, and terracotta for both local use and trade.

West Africans had traded with Europeans through merchants in North Africa for centuries. The first traders to sail down the West African coast were the Portuguese in the 15th century. The Dutch, British, French and Scandinavians followed. They were interested in precious items such as gold, ivory and spices, particularly pepper.

From their first contacts, European traders kidnapped and bought Africans to be sold in Europe. However, it was not until the 17th century, when plantation owners wanted more slaves to satisfy the increasing demand for sugar in Europe, that transatlantic slaving became the dominant trade. This material was derived, in large part, from the writings of the International Museum of Slavery

[Slavery in America - Didactic Panel](#)

Within several decades of being brought to the American colonies, Africans were stripped of human rights and enslaved as chattel, an enslavement that lasted more than two centuries. Slavers whipped slaves who displeased them. Clergy preached that slavery was the will of God. Scientists "proved" that blacks were less evolved—a subspecies of the human race. The invention of the cotton gin in 1793 solidified the importance of slavery to the South's economy. By the mid-19th century, America's westward expansion, along with a growing anti-slavery movement in the North, provoked a national debate over slavery that helped precipitate the American Civil War (1861-65). Though the Union victory freed the nation's four million slaves, the legacy of slavery influenced American history, from the chaotic years of Reconstruction (1865-77) to the civil rights movement that emerged in the 1950s.

[Reconstruction - Didactic Panel](#)

In the tumultuous years following the United States Civil War, the federal government was faced with two conflicting challenges: to reincorporate the eleven states that had seceded from the

Union, and to define and implement a strategy for ensuring the economic, political, and social rights of newly-freed black Americans.

Radical Republicans, with support from the United States Army and the Freedmen's Bureau, led the effort to pass and implement laws that ensured first-class citizenship for blacks. The 14th Amendment to the Constitution (1868) affirmed that black Americans were citizens of the United States and entitled to due process and equal protection under the law. The 15th Amendment (1870) stated that the right of citizens to vote "shall not be denied...on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

Conservative white southerners, and their northern allies in the Democratic Party, opposed all efforts to extend human rights to blacks. By 1877, the white southerners who wanted blacks "re-enslaved" had won; the new "slavery" was Jim Crow segregation.

[Jim Crow Era - Didactic Panel](#)

Thomas Dartmouth Rice, a struggling white actor, became famous by performing in blackface makeup as "Jim Crow," an exaggerated, highly stereotypical black character. By 1838, the term "Jim Crow" was being used as a collective racial epithet for blacks, not as offensive as *nigger*, but as offensive as *coon* or *darkie*. The popularity of minstrel shows aided the spread of Jim Crow as a racial slur. By the end of the 19th century, Jim Crow was being used to describe laws and customs that oppressed blacks.

[Civil Rights Era - Didactic Panel](#)

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the resistance of African Americans to their oppression was expressed in three general approaches, as illustrated by prominent leaders. Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) stressed industrial schooling for African Americans and gradual social adjustment rather than political and civil rights. Marcus Garvey (1887-1940) called for racial separatism and a "Back-to-Africa" colonization program. W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) argued that African Americans were in the United States to stay and should fight for their freedom and political equality; it was this approach that laid the foundation for the American civil rights movement.

[Post-Civil Rights - Didactic Panel](#)

African Americans did not emerge from the civil rights movement fully integrated into American society; this is evident by the disproportionately large numbers of blacks who are in poverty, under-educated, and incarcerated. Nevertheless, the civil rights movement did force the end of legal segregation, and spur the creation of a sizeable black middle class. In the 21st century, race relations remain a contentious issue in many sections of society.

2. Inside the Museum - visitors encounter a wall graphic which depicts a life size Thomas Rice dressed as the character Jim Crow. The wall is accompanied with didactic panels that explain Jim Crow and Segregation, The Original Jim Crow, and the Father of Minstrelsy.

Jim Crow and Segregation - Didactic Panel

After the American Civil War (1861-1865), most southern states and, later, border states passed laws that denied blacks basic human rights. It is not clear how, but the minstrel character's name "Jim Crow" became a kind of shorthand for the laws, customs and etiquette that segregated and demeaned African Americans primarily from the 1870s to the 1960s.

The Original Jim Crow - Didactic Panel

Throughout the 1830s and '40s, the white entertainer Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1808-1860) performed a popular song-and-dance act supposedly modeled after a slave. He named the character Jim Crow. Rice darkened his face, acted like a buffoon, and spoke with an exaggerated and distorted imitation of African American Vernacular English. In his Jim Crow persona, he also sang "Negro ditties" such as "Jump Jim Crow."

Rice was not the first white comic to perform in blackface, but he was the most popular of his time, touring both the United States and England. As a result of Rice's success, "Jim Crow" became a common stage persona for white comedians' blackface portrayals of African Americans.

Father of Minstrelsy - Didactic Panel

Minstrel shows were popular musical stage shows from the 1830s to the early 1900s. The performers, their faces artificially blackened, played the roles of ignorant, lazy, joyous blacks. Audiences roared with laughter. Thomas Dartmouth Rice is known as the Father of Minstrelsy

3. Blackface Minstrelsy - The next section of the virtual tour deals with blackface minstrelsy from the large stage to the small stage. A show case offers artifacts related to minstrel shows such as scripts, burnt cork makeup, wigs, minstrel joke books, minstrel show advertisings, and pictures from minstrel shows.

Blackening Up - Didactic Panel

When performing as minstrels, white performers used burnt cork and greasepaint or shoe polish to darken their skin and red or white makeup to exaggerate their lips. They also wore woolly wigs and ragged clothes to imitate and ridicule African Americans. Ironically, by the 1840s, even some black entertainers were darkening their already dark skin and performing in blackface as minstrels.

Popularity of Minstrel Shows - Didactic Panel

With the popularization of radio and motion pictures in the 1920s, professional minstrel shows lost much of their national following. However, amateur minstrel shows continued in local theaters, community centers, high schools, and churches as late as the 1960s.

4. Minstrelsy fed into a caste system – The beliefs and attitudes perpetuated on the minstrel stage led to the shaping of beliefs and attitudes of the general public toward

African Americans. The next stop on the virtual tour shows a display case with didactic panels addressing An American Caste System, Everyday Segregation, and Segregated Water Fountains.

[An American Caste System - Didactic Panel](#)

Jim Crow refers to the racial hierarchy that defined American life through a set of laws and practices which operated primarily, but not exclusively, in southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. This hierarchy, with whites at the top and blacks at the bottom, was supported by millions of everyday objects and images.

[Everyday Segregation - Didactic Panel](#)

During the Jim Crow period, a black person might begin a bus or train ride near the front, but each time a white passenger boarded the African American passenger had to move back a row. An added indignity was that black passengers were often the ones forced to carry and re-position the segregation sign.

[Segregated Water Fountains - Didactic Panel](#)

Segregated water fountains were common during the Jim Crow period. The supporters of racial segregation argued that if blacks and whites shared public facilities-in this case water fountains-it would promote social equality, which would, in turn, lead to the destruction of American culture.

5. Jim Crow Laws – Three large walls with Jim Crow Laws printed on them as well as other Jim Crow signs move visitors from the Minstrelsy and Segregation section of the museum to the Violence area of the museum.

[Segregation Was Pervasive - Didactic Panel](#)

During the Jim Crow period there were separate hospitals for blacks and whites, separate prisons, separate public and private schools, separate churches, separate cemeteries, separate public restrooms, and separate public accommodations. In most instances, the black facilities were grossly inferior-older, smaller, less-well-kept, and less conveniently located. In other cases, there were no black facilities-no Colored public restroom, no public beach, and no place to sit or eat.

6. Jim Crow and Violence – Laws and customs would not have been able to be sustained without violence and the threat of violence for violators. This section of the virtual tour explores the many forms of violence toward African Americans during the Jim Crow era. The displays include the Brute caricature case, the Ku Klux Klan case, Blacks as Targets case, a life-size replica of a lynching tree, a blow-up postcard of a public whipping in Delaware, and an actual pillory.

[The Brute Caricature - Didactic Panel](#)

During the postwar period of Radical Reconstruction (1867-1877), many white writers argued that without slavery—which supposedly contained their animalistic tendencies—blacks were reverting to criminal savagery. The brute caricature portrayed black men as threatening menaces, fiends, and sociopaths, and as hideous, terrifying predators who targeted helpless victims, especially white women.

Lynching as Social Control - Didactic Panel

At the beginning of the 20th Century, much of the anti-black propaganda found in scientific journals, newspapers, and novels focused on the stereotype of the black brute. The fear of black men raping white women became a public rationalization for the lynching of blacks. Lynching is the illegal, often public, killing of an accused person by a mob.

Most of the victims were hanged or shot, but some were burned at the stake, castrated, beaten with clubs, or dismembered. In the mid-1800s, whites constituted the majority of victims (and perpetrators). However, after the Civil War, blacks were the most frequent victims. The great majority of lynchings occurred in southern and border states, where the resentment against blacks ran deepest.

The KKK as Terrorists - Didactic Panel

Ku Klux Klan (also called the Invisible Empire) is the name of a secret society that has terrorized blacks from the end of the Civil War to the present. Claiming to be a Christian organization, Klan members have harassed, beaten, lynched, and bombed black Americans, as well as Catholics, Jews, immigrants and others. Klan membership exceeded two million in the mid-1920s; by 2010, the number was less than 20,000.

Today, there are many small independent Klan organizations, in addition to dozens of other white supremacist groups still active in the United States and beyond. The new Klans have "mainstreamed" their recruitment by publicly deemphasizing violence. They also stress opposition to affirmative action, busing, and liberal immigration policies.

Blacks as Targets - Didactic Panel

"Hit the Coon" and "African Dodger" were popular games at resorts, fairs, and festivals before the 1920s. Prizes were awarded for direct hits. Some operators gave the human targets protective wooden helmets covered with woolly hair.

Hostility Against Blacks - Didactic Panel

Carnival games in the 19th and early 20th centuries revealed white hostility toward blacks. This enmity was legitimated, even celebrated, by making it appear that African Americans were deserving and willing victims of white aggression.

7. Caricaturing Black People – leaving the violence area into the caricaturing black people area, the doorway is in the shape of the Coon Chicken Inn Porter.

Coon Chicken Inn - Didactic Panel

Coon Chicken Inn was a small restaurant chain in the American West from the late 1920s through the 1950s. The restaurants were known for their entrances, which featured the head of a winking, grinning, grotesquely caricatured black man wearing a porter's cap. The words "Coon Chicken Inn" were written on teeth framed by oversized red lips. Visitors entered through a doorway in the middle of the black man's mouth. The menu included southern fried "Coon Chicken" sandwiches and chicken pie, as well as hamburgers, seafood, chili, and assorted sandwiches. Blacks (especially ones with very dark skin) were employed as waiters, waitresses, and cooks.

8. Kitchen case – the first area in the caricaturing black people is a kitchen case. This kitchen motif shows the many ways in which caricatured African Americans were used for advertising and marketing of everyday kitchen products. Aunt Jemima is one of the featured product lines.

Racism In The Kitchen - Didactic Panel

During the Jim Crow period a typical American kitchen had many products with images that portrayed blacks in negative ways; these included packaging for cereal, syrup, pancake mix, and detergent; salt and pepper shakers; string holders; cookbooks; hand towels; placemats; grocery list reminders; and, wall hangings. Any object found in a kitchen could be-and often was-transformed into anti-black propaganda.

Aunt Jemima - Didactic Panel

In the 1880s, Chris Rutt, who had recently developed the idea of a self-rising pancake batter, attended a minstrel show that included a skit with a southern mammy character named Aunt Jemima. Rutt and his partner, Charles Underwood, decided that the mammy, dressed in an apron and bandanna, would help distinguish and sell their pancake mix. When the R.T. Davis Mill Company purchased Rutt and Underwood's company, they employed a real person to portray Aunt Jemima in their marketing scheme. Nancy Green, born a slave in Kentucky in 1834, became the first "real" Aunt Jemima. She impersonated Aunt Jemima until her death in 1923.

At the 1893 World's Exposition in Chicago, Green, as Aunt Jemima, sang songs, cooked pancakes, and told romanticized stories about the Old South as a happy place for blacks and whites.

Afterwards, her image was plastered on billboards nationwide, with the caption, "I'se in town, honey." In her role as Aunt Jemima, Green made appearances at countless country fairs, flea markets, food shows, and local grocery stores. By the turn of the century, Aunt Jemima, along with the Armour meat chef, were the two commercial symbols most trusted by American housewives.

9. Racism on the Lawn – across from the kitchen case are a number of racist lawn ornaments that would have been placed on people's lawns or in front of their homes.

Racism On The Lawn - Didactic Panel

The lawn jockey is a decorative yard ornament that caricatures black people and promotes the idea of their servitude. Typically a cast replica about half-scale, it depicts a black man dressed in jockey's clothing carrying a lantern or a metal ring suitable for hitching a horse. The black lawn jockeys often have exaggerated features, such as bulging eyes, large red lips, a flat nose and curly hair. The flesh of the figure is usually a glossy black color.

Traditionally, two styles of lawn jockey have been produced: the stocky, hunched "Jocko" and the taller, thinner "Cavalier Spirit." Both styles were still manufactured in 2012. Many Americans, especially African Americans, feel that lawn jockeys are racially offensive. It is common for homeowners to repaint the figure's skin with pink or white paint to avoid charges of being racially insensitive.

10. Caricature row – the next section of the virtual tour is a large showcase which displays a number of racial caricatures of African Americans. The case includes items depicting the Picaninny caricature, the Tom caricature, the Coon caricature, the Tragic Mulatto, the Jezebel caricature, the Savage caricature, the Golliwog, the Mammy caricature and cases featuring racism as a commodity and the N-Word.

[Caricaturing Black People - Didactic Panel](#)

In the United States, all racial groups have been caricatured, but none as often or in as many ways as black Americans. Blacks have been portrayed in popular culture as pitiable exotics, cannibalistic savages, hypersexual deviants, childlike buffoons, obedient servants, self-loathing victims, and menaces to society.

These anti-black depictions routinely took form in material objects, such as ashtrays, drinking glasses, banks, games, fishing lures, detergent boxes, and other everyday items. This case holds objects that illustrate some of the major anti-black caricatures.

[Racism As Commodity - Didactic Panel](#)

All of the objects in the Jim Crow Museum have market values. In 2011, there were more than 50,000 collectors of "Black Americana," a category that includes racist artifacts. Generally, the more racist an object is, the higher the price it commands.

[The N-Word - Didactic Panel](#)

The word nigger is a shorthand way of saying that blacks possessed the moral, intellectual, social, and physical characteristics of the Coon, Brute, Tom, Mammy, and other racial caricatures.

Although considered by many people to be a hateful slur, the word is used in different ways and contexts to connote different meanings.

11. Games, Toys, and Dolls – adjacent to the caricature row is a display case featuring games, toys, and dolls that feature racist characteristics.

[Games And Toys – Didactic Panel](#)

Games are effective vehicles for spreading racial stereotypes and prejudice. All of the common caricatures of blacks were represented in games. Players, often children, received messages through a game's graphics and text that blacks were, for example, lazy or deviant and deserved to be mocked or hurt.

12. Battling Jim Crow Imagery – the end of caricature row leads to a display with art pieces that use art to fight against negative imagery of African Americans. Four art pieces are on display; "Beware," by Michael Ray Charles, "Serving This," by Lester White, "No More," by Jon Onye Lockard, and "Styling," by David Pilgrim.

[Using Art To Fight Racism - Didactic Panel](#)

Black artists have been at the forefront of the battle against anti-black imagery. They have used their art to "deconstruct" racist imagery. This painting was created by Michael Ray Charles. He suggests that there are similarities between the Sambo, Mammy, and minstrel images of the Jim Crow period and contemporary mass-media portrayals of black youths, celebrities, and athletes. While Charles notes that "stereotypes have evolved," he sees certain constants in the American subconscious. "I'm trying to deal with present and past stereotypes in the context of today's society."

13. Achieving despite resistance – African Americans did not just accept Jim Crow laws, policies, customs, and caricatures, they fought back and accomplished great things despite barriers. This section of the virtual tour focuses on Politicians, Military Heroes, Thinkers, Athletes, and Musicians.

[Achieving Despite Resistance - Didactic Panel](#)

During the Jim Crow period, African Americans were confronted by institutional discrimination and acts of individual discrimination, and generally treated as second-class citizens. Nevertheless, blacks made significant contributions that enriched the United States. The achievements of African Americans were realized in all areas; however, the Jim Crow Museum's collection highlights the achievement of African Americans as politicians, military heroes, thinkers, athletes, and musicians.

[Politicians - Didactic Panel](#)

Much of the fight against Jim Crow segregation occurred in the political arena, so it is not surprising that many talented African Americans went on to become important political leaders.

[Military Heroes - Didactic Panel](#)

There has been no war fought by or within the United States in which African Americans did not participate, including the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, the Spanish American War, the World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as other minor conflicts.

Thinkers - Didactic Panel

During slavery it was illegal for blacks to learn to read and write; nevertheless, many blacks found clandestine ways to gain literacy. Given the reality of slavery's "compulsory ignorance laws" and segregated, substandard schools during the Jim Crow period, it is remarkable that so many blacks excelled as educators, writers, scientists, philosophers, and theologians.

Athletes - Didactic Panel

During the Jim Crow period, blacks were barred from competing in professional and amateur sports against whites. In international arenas, such as the Olympics, where such racially discriminatory rules were not applied, African Americans excelled, often winning medals and setting world records.

Musicians - Didactic Panel

Much of the rich tapestry that is American music owes its origins to black musical creation and innovation. Imagine an America without so-called Negro Spirituals, gospel, ragtime, jazz, blues, funk, rhythm and blues, and hip hop.

14. Push Back Becomes Social Activism – The Civil Rights movement was inspired by the thousands of average everyday people who had had enough of the injustice, racism, and denied opportunities. This case shows items related to the National Civil rights movement.

Civil Rights Movement - Didactic Panel

The Civil Rights Movement began as a grassroots effort and became a national movement to remove Jim Crow laws "and by extension, Jim Crow etiquette, norms, and imagery" from the United States. Although the movement is often linked to its leaders, for example, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X, it was really a movement of "regular" black people who were tired of being denied basic human rights.

Civil Rights Success - Didactic Panel

The Civil Rights Movement was at its peak from 1955-1965. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, guaranteeing basic civil rights for all Americans, regardless of race. These victories came after nearly a decade of nonviolent protests and marches including the 1955-1956 Montgomery Bus Boycott, the student-led sit-ins of the 1960s, the massive March on Washington in 1963, and many other initiatives both large and small.

15. The Battle Continues – Despite the amazing success of the civil rights movement, some thoughts and ideas die hard. In this last case there are new items that harken back to the Jim Crow era negative propaganda imagery. Some items are created to be fake antiques while others are created after a race-based event has happened.

The Battle Continues - Didactic Panel

Although America is a more democratic society than it was during the Jim Crow period, imagery that depicts African Americans and other groups in derogatory ways is still pervasive. Indeed, many new caricatured images of African Americans have been produced in the 21st Century.

16. Cloud of Witnesses – The final room on the virtual tour is the Cloud of Witnesses discussion room. The concave wall is covered with a wallpaper mural of Jon McDonald's Cloud of Witnesses painting commissioned for the Jim Crow Museum. Those featured on the mural are: Johnnie Mae Chappell, Michael Henry Schwerner, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, Rev. James Reeb, Delano Herman Middleton, Samuel Ephesians Hammond Jr., Henry Ezekial Smith, Viola Gregg Liuzzo, Medgar Evers, Ben Chester White, Denise McNair, Adie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, Malcolm X, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Cloud of Witnesses - Didactic Panel

The "Cloud of Witnesses" mural was painted in 2012 by Jon McDonald, an artist at Kendall College of Art and Design of Ferris State University. The "witnesses" featured in the clouds comprise a small but diverse collection of individuals who sacrificed their lives during the Civil Rights Era. In their own, unique ways, these individuals paid the ultimate price on the long, difficult path to making the United States a more democratic and egalitarian society. As we delve into the stories behind each of the individuals and their untimely deaths, we uncover the realities of how the brutal nature of Jim Crow America touched all of society: from innocent children to active civil rights leaders and demonstrators; from the victims and their families to the perpetrators of these horrific crimes and the society that produced, encouraged, and protected the killers; from those who experienced the realities of Jim Crow firsthand to our society that continues to grapple with the effects and influence of Jim Crow today.