

# JIM CROW AND THE FIGHT FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

**NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES CORE CURRICULUM, GRADES 7/8:****UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK STATE HISTORY****UNIT SIX** *Division and Reunion**Chapter III: Results of the Civil War*

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore1.pdf> (page 64).

**UNIT SEVEN** *An Industrial Society**Chapter I: The Maturing of an Industrial Society in the Second Half of the 19th Century*

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore1.pdf> (page 66).

**UNIT ELEVEN** *The Changing Nature of the American People From World War II to the Present**Chapter I: Postwar Society Characterized by Prosperity and Optimism*

<http://www.emsc.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/sscore1.pdf> (page 86).

These questions and documents can be used in conjunction with the New York State Education Department core curriculum for grades 7/8 Social Studies: United States and New York State History. Students will learn about the Populist Era, 1880–1900, as a response to the overwhelming power of Big Business. Students will be able to see the connection between the results of the Civil War and how that led to Constitutional Amendments 14 and 15 and eventually the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

**FOCUS QUESTION**

What were “Jim Crow” laws and how did they affect African Americans?

**MATERIALS**

Political cartoons, Watson reading (“The Negro Question in the South”), Alabama State Literacy Test, Dr. Seuss cartoon.

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY**

Give students the Alabama State Literacy Test telling them that it is a “pop quiz.” Give students about 5 minutes before you tell them what it really is.

Explain that the documents came from workbooks used by Citizenship Schools in the early 1960’s, which taught African American applicants how to pass the exams. Each applicant had to answer four questions to successfully register to vote, but this was only one part of the application process. An applicant had to give, under oath, information about his or her address, employment, family members and a host of information that would be given to the applicant’s employer, the Ku Klux Klan and other organizations. For the audacity of attempting to register to vote, applicants could lose their jobs, be thrown off their land, and be subjected to violence or even death. White voters received much simpler exams and were encouraged to vote. Voter registration for whites often exceeded 100% because dead people were not removed from the lists.

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## QUESTIONS TO THE GROUP FOLLOWING THE ACTIVITY

1. Do you think this test was fair? Why or why not?
2. Do you think that people should have to be tested before voting?
3. Do you think that voters should be informed about their government?
4. Why do you think that African Americans were willing to risk so much in order to gain the right to vote?
5. Do you think that voting is a right worth struggling for?

## PROCEDURE

In the 1890's and early 1900's Southern states imposed a series of laws to prevent African Americans from voting, such as poll taxes, literacy tests and the "grandfather clause." Local governments and white supremacist mobs used violence, including lynching, to terrorize African Americans and prevent them from voting.

Show the students the political cartoon entitled: "How the colored voter is allowed to cast his ballot in a state where Democrats control the election."

Ask students to describe what is happening in the cartoon.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. What do you think the cartoonist's point of view was?
2. Who would benefit from African Americans voting or not voting? Why?
3. Do you think this cartoon is violent? Why or why not? Why would violence be necessary at a voting station?

## Dr. Seuss's Campaign for Democracy

Dr. Seuss is best known for his children's books, but during World War II he turned his pen to politics in a New York City newspaper called *PM*. He drew this cartoon in October 1942, using the democratic themes of wartime propaganda to support the expansion of democracy at home.

Have the students analyze the cartoon by Dr. Seuss on their own and discuss as a class.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. What did Dr. Seuss mean when he entitled the cartoon "Democracy's turnstile"?
2. What does the phrase "10 Million Americans Who Haven't Got the Price" mean?
3. The people in the cartoon appear to be entirely white. Why do you think Dr. Seuss chose not to have people of other races in the cartoon?
4. Why do you think that white supremacists in the South used the poll tax to exclude African American voters? Why do you think they weren't concerned about poor white voters?

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After the Compromise of 1877, African American men retained voting rights, but held little political power in their states. Beginning in the 1890's, a full-scale attack on African American civil rights began in the South that led to the legal segregation of all aspects of everyday life, including public transportation, education and the workplace. African American voting rights also came under attack through legislation and organized violence, including the horrible act of lynching, which was used to enforce white supremacy.

Part of the reason for this violence was the political threat posed by the African American vote. The Southern states had been under one party rule since the end of Reconstruction in 1877, but that control came under threat in the late 1880's and early 1890's, when farmers who faced low prices for their cotton crop and high levels of debt formed a third party called the People's or Populist Party. They attacked the power of bankers, railroads, landlords and others they felt oppressed them. Some white members of the Populists proposed an alliance with African American farmers who faced similar problems, including Tom Watson, a Populist member of Congress from Georgia.

Give the students the article by Tom Watson, written in October 1892, and have them read in pairs.

Assign half the class the reading from the point of view of a white farmer and have them take notes on what the farmer's reactions would be.

Assign the other half of the class the reading from the point of view of a black farmer and have them take notes on what the farmer's reactions would be.

## SUGGESTED QUESTIONS

1. Why does Watson believe that blacks and whites should both support the People's Party?
2. Why does he believe that they are separated?
3. To what extent does he believe that whites and blacks are equal?
4. The People's Party faded away in the early 1900's; when this occurred Tom Watson became an outspoken racist. Why do you think he changed his views?

## FOLLOW-UP/HOMEWORK

Ask students to conduct research concerning who votes in the United States today. Gather data and discuss results.

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## ANSWERS TO ALABAMA STATE LITERACY TEST

**(40) B**

1. Yes
2. person chosen to act for others
3. Federal Bureau of Investigation
4. True

**(40) C**

1. search warrant
2. Legislature
3. Confederation
4. courts

**(41) B**

1. Yes
2. agreement between nations
3. Hoover
4. Vice President

**(41) C**

1. No
2. The appointment of officers
3. promoting progress
4. U.S. currency

### DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY'S NEW YORK TIMES

Descriptions of historic events in textbooks are often based on the original newspaper accounts. These questions help you compare the past with current reports in The New York Times.

1. Find an article about a voting problem anywhere in the world as reported in The New York Times. What was the problem and who was affected? Compare and contrast this situation with the Alabama State Literacy Test.
2. In many countries, some groups are not permitted to vote. Check The Times for examples. Create a large poster for the classroom, using these columns to record what you find in The Times: name of country, group not permitted to vote, reason given for denying suffrage to the group, how people were stopped from voting. Illustrate your poster with Times headlines about voting rights abuses.
3. Voting conflicts often end up in the courts. Follow Times coverage of a voting rights case in any American court. How was the case judged? Who won and why?

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## QUESTIONS FROM THE ALABAMA STATE LITERACY TEST

SAMPLE

SAMPLE

(40)

"B"

1. Can the president of the United States be impeached? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. Check the applicable definition for "representative":  
\_\_\_\_\_ agreement between states  
\_\_\_\_\_ person chosen to act for others  
\_\_\_\_\_ good character
  3. FBI stands for the \_\_\_\_\_
  4. Each county in Alabama may decide by vote whether or not it will have legalized sale of alcoholic beverages. \_\_\_\_\_
- 

"C"

1. If a person seeks to search your home, what kind of paper must he have before you are compelled to allow him to do it? \_\_\_\_\_
2. If the United States wishes to purchase land for an arsenal and have exclusive legislative authority over it, consent is required from \_\_\_\_\_
3. Prior to the adoption of the United States Constitution, the organization of states was known as the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Tribunals are \_\_\_\_\_.

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SAMPLE

SAMPLE

(41)  
"B"

1. Can the president of the United States be removed from office for conviction of bribery? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Check the applicable definition for "treaty":  
\_\_\_\_\_ agreement between nations  
\_\_\_\_\_ a tax  
\_\_\_\_\_ a written oration
3. Name the man who is nationally known for heading the Federal Bureau of Investigation for many years. \_\_\_\_\_
4. What officer is designated by the Constitution to be president of the Senate of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_

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"C"

1. Can the state coin money with the consent of Congress? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Name one area of authority over state militia reserved exclusively to the states. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The power of granting patents, that is, of securing to inventors the exclusive right to their discoveries, is given to the Congress for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The only legal tender which may be authorized by states for payment of debts is \_\_\_\_\_.

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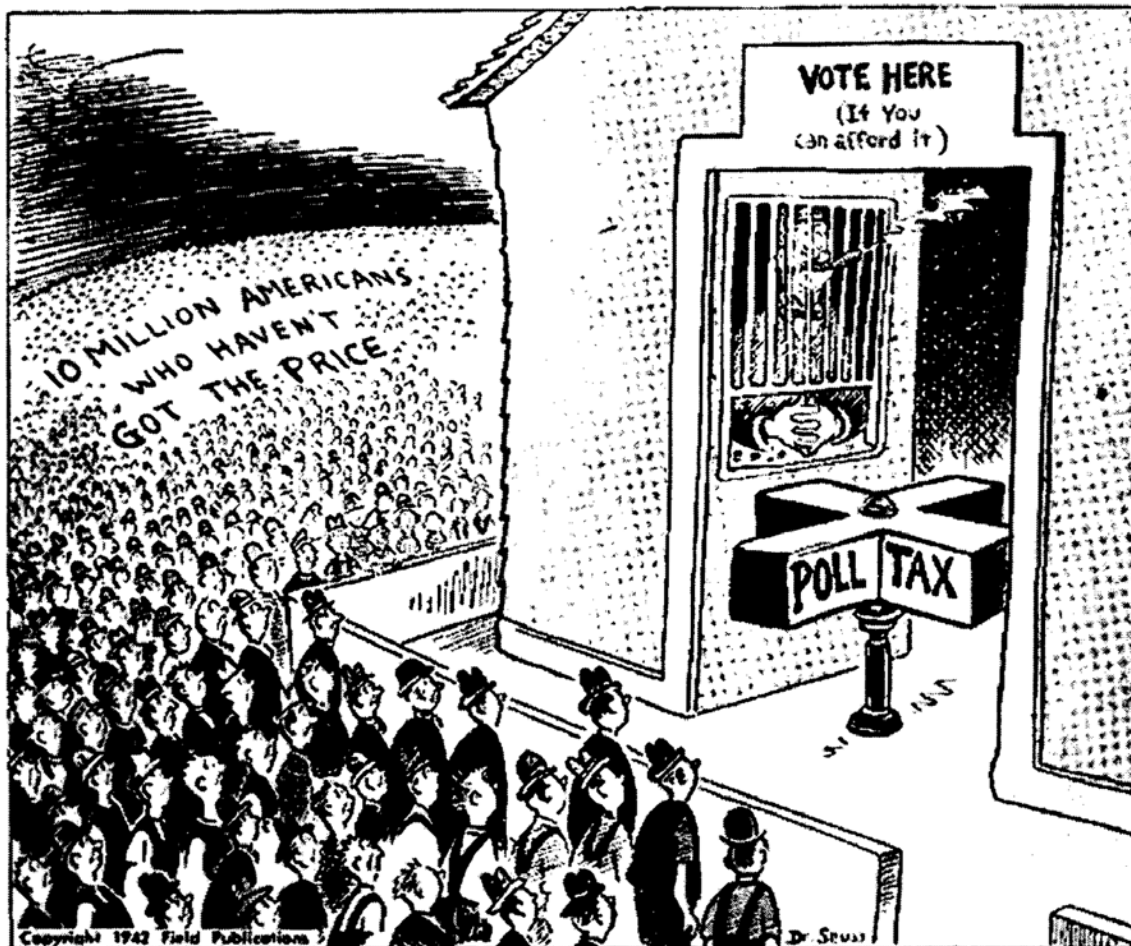


HOW THE COLORED VOTER IS ALLOWED TO CAST HIS BALLOT IN  
A STATE WHERE DEMOCRATS CONTROL THE ELECTION.

*From "The Colored American Republican text book: a book of facts and figures,  
showing what the Republican Party has done for the Afro-American," c. 1899*

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<http://orpheus.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dspolitic/Frame.htm>



*From the newspaper PM by Dr. Seuss, 1942.*

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FROM THE ARENA, VI (OCTOBER 1892), PAGES 540-550

## THE NEGRO QUESTION IN THE SOUTH.

BY THOMAS E. WATSON, M.C.

THE Negro Question in the South has been for nearly thirty years a source of danger, discord, and bloodshed. It is an ever-present irritant and menace.

In brief, the end of the war brought changed relations and changed feelings. Heated antagonisms produced mutual distrust and dislike—ready, at any accident of unusual provocation on either side, to break out into passionate and bloody conflict.

. . .

Now consider: here were two distinct races dwelling together, with political equality established between them by law. They lived in the same section; won their livelihood by the same pursuits; cultivated adjoining fields on the same terms; enjoyed together the bounties of a generous climate; suffered together the rigors of cruelly unjust laws; spoke the same language; bought and sold in the same markets; classified themselves into churches under the same denominational teachings; neither race antagonizing the other in any branch of industry; each absolutely dependent on the other in all the avenues of labor and employment; and yet, instead of being allies, as every dictate of reason and prudence and self-interest and justice said they should be, they were kept apart, in dangerous hostility, that the sordid aims of partisan politics might be served!

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The white tenant lives adjoining the colored tenant. Their houses are almost equally destitute of comforts. Their living is confined to bare necessities. They are equally burdened with heavy taxes. They pay the same high rent for gullied and impoverished land.

They pay the same enormous prices for farm supplies. Christmas finds them both without any satisfactory return for a year's toil. Dull and heavy and unhappy, they both start the plows again when "New Year's" passes.

Now the People's Party says to these two men, "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the keystone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both."

This is so obviously true it is no wonder both these unhappy laborers stop to listen. No wonder they begin to realize that no change of law can benefit the white tenant which does not benefit the black one likewise; that no system which now does injustice to one of them can fail to injure both. Their every material interest is identical. The moment this becomes a conviction, mere selfishness, the mere desire to better their conditions, escape onerous taxes, avoid usurious charges, lighten their rents, or change their precarious tenements into smiling, happy homes, will drive these two men together, just as their mutually inflamed prejudices now drive them apart.

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To the emasculated individual who cries "Negro supremacy!" there is little to be said. His cowardice shows him to be a degeneration from the race which has never yet feared any other race. Existing under such conditions as they now do in this country, there is no earthly chance for Negro domination, unless we are ready to admit that the colored man is our superior in will power, courage, and intellect.

Not being prepared to make any such admission in favor of any race the sun ever shone on, I have no words which can portray my contempt for the white men, Anglo-Saxons, who can knock their knees together, and through their chattering teeth and pale lips admit that they are afraid the Negroes will "dominate us."

The question of social equality does not enter into the calculation at all. That is a thing each citizen decides for himself. No statute ever yet drew the latch of the humblest home—or ever will. Each citizen regulates his own visiting list—and always will.

The conclusion, then, seems to me to be this: the crushing burdens which now oppress both races in the South will cause each to make an effort to cast them off. They will see a similarity of cause and a similarity of remedy. They will recognize that each should help the other in the work of repealing bad laws and enacting good ones. They will become political allies, and neither can injure the other without weakening both. It will be to the interest of both that each should have justice. And on these broad lines of mutual interest, mutual forbearance, and mutual support the present will be made the stepping-stone to future peace and prosperity.

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## The Negro Question in the South *by Tom Watson*

### GLOSSARY

**antagonism** rivalry; opposition to a conflicting force (noun).

**cultivated** to be sophisticated; prepared and used for growing crops (adjective).

**despotism** tyranny; system of government where the leader has unlimited power (noun).

**discord** disagreement; active quarreling or a conflict (noun).

**emasculated** weak; powerless (adjective).

**fleece** to cheat someone; to charge excessively for goods and services (verb).

**onerous** difficult to handle; troublesome; to have a burden (adjective).

**sordid** disgusting and/or dirty; low; base level (adjective).

**usurious** to lend out money for exorbitant interest in return (noun).