

# BLACK CITIZENSHIP

IN THE AGE OF **JIM CROW**

## FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

This guide is for families with kids age 8 and up to use while navigating the online exhibition—*blackcitizenship.nyhistory.org*. It includes discussion questions and prompts to look closer at objects and displays. Families will explore themes including community, freedom, and military service, and will consider the ways Black citizens resisted oppression and the ways their rights were suppressed.

A glossary is included.



### **What is citizenship?**

Start with the portrait of Dred Scott, and read about him on the label.

Talk as a family about this statement:

American citizenship confers legal rights, protections, and responsibilities. But its meaning goes deeper. To be a citizen is to be accepted, to be ‘one of us.’

How does being a citizen mean being accepted?

As you explore *Black Citizenship in the Age of Jim Crow* you will learn how Black Americans gained citizenship after the Civil War during Reconstruction and what that meant for their daily lives. You will learn about a racially oppressive system of laws and social customs called “Jim Crow,” which prevented Black citizens from exercising their rights. And you will learn about the people and coalitions that resisted and organized against these laws and customs.

# RECONSTRUCTION

Black soldiers, civilians, and communities gained and lost freedoms during Reconstruction. In this section, explore the many ways they created family and home life after slavery. Discover examples of how Black people fought to maintain their rights in large and small, successful and unsuccessful ways after the Civil War.



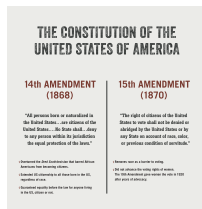
Black people have served in all wars fought by the United States. What are some reasons people join the military?

Find this trio of paintings. With your family, what does each of the three images represent? How and why does the figure change from image to image?



What makes a home? A family? Enslaved people did not have a choice about keeping their families together or about where to make their home.

Read the label for this object and discuss with your family: What did building a house like this mean to freed people like William and Lucy Fractious?



List out different kinds of freedoms you think everyone deserves.

Find and explore the display and text related to the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments with your family. What did each of these amendments do? Why were each of them needed to create and preserve freedom for Black Americans after the Civil War?



Discuss with your families: How is a community stronger than an individual? In the unstable years after the end of slavery, Black people sought unity around safety, common beliefs, and goals.

Explore the stories and objects on the Pursuit of Happiness panel and the sculpture *Uncle Ned's School*. Why did education matter so much to Black Americans during Reconstruction? How did they show how much they valued education?



Have each person in your family name someone they admire who stood up for their beliefs.

Explore the “Democracy” panel to learn about how Black men and women participated in democracy after the Civil War. What issues did they fight for? What organizations and people did they connect with for this work?

# AGE OF JIM CROW

“Jim Crow” was a racially oppressive system of laws and social customs which prevented Black citizens from exercising their rights. In this section, explore the ways Black Americans sought equality and how they were suppressed during Reconstruction. You’ll also explore ways people participated in white supremacy—the belief that white people are superior to others—during the Jim Crow era and beyond.

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Discuss as a family: How do people *and* systems engage in oppression, in both obvious and subtle ways?

Look at this garment and read its label. What messages might this robe send to a person who is being threatened by its wearer?

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Find a mailbag nearby and look for the accompanying photo showing what is on the inside. Why might the mailman who owned this bag have labeled one side “colored” and one side “white” even though no one else would see it? What does this bag show you about how segregation affected daily life under Jim Crow?

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*The photographs on this panel depict crowds about to lynch Black men.* Journalist Ida B. Wells reported on lynching as a method of terrorizing Black communities in the South. Wells’ writing brought threats against her, her friends, and family and her newspaper’s office was burned. In her series of articles *Southern Horrors*, Wells focused on the victims’ lives and the accusations against them, rather than the horrific details of their deaths. Why do you think she found this an effective method of telling the story of lynching to a Northern and national audience?

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Read about the different methods used to suppress Black voting. Why do you think this was the central goal of the Southern Jim Crow system?

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Find this scale and read its label. How did sharecropping affect Black farmers? What was at stake if a sharecropper wanted to fight back against his or her employer?

# RESPONDING TO AND RESISTING JIM CROW

Black Americans resisted oppression through actions large and small. Investigate the ways they sought equality, fought oppression, and strengthened their communities during and after Reconstruction. You'll also explore how white supremacy continued and continues to be a destructive force. And you'll learn how like-minded groups and individuals helped push back against these violent systems.

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What was T. Thomas Fortune's response when he was refused service in a New York City hotel? What was the outcome of his action?

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Find a photo of a quilt. Two "Exodusters" made the quilt. What is an Exoduster? Why might the family who made this have decided to make a place like Nicodemus, Kansas, their home?

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What nickname was given to Black soldiers who used canteens like this in the American West? What are the theories behind how this nickname came to be?

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Find the panel devoted to the Lost Cause. What was the Lost Cause? How did the Lost Cause influence the building of the statues on Monument Avenue in Richmond and other Confederate monuments? What should be done with these statues today?

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Explore some of the ways W. E. B. Du Bois fought for rights for Black Americans. What were some different methods Du Bois used to confront Jim Crow? Who were some of the different groups and people he worked with?

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# RESPONDING TO AND RESISTING JIM CROW (CTD.)

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Who wore Pullman Porter hats? How did Pullman Porters see and experience freedom, or lack thereof, through their work? How did they contribute to the Great Migration?

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What does this diorama portray? Explore other objects and text related to Black WWI soldiers nearby. How does Private Henry Johnson's story stand out and how is it similar to the experiences of other soldiers like him?

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## BLACK CITIZENSHIP



Some Black neighborhoods in cities such as New York, Chicago, and Atlanta evolved into hubs of vibrant communities. Why were they such important places for Black Americans in the Jim Crow era? In what ways are they still contributing to thriving Black communities?

# GLOSSARY

**agitation:** actively fighting for social or political change

**colored, negro:** Most commonly used terms to refer to Black people during the Jim Crow era; today seen as outdated and offensive

**constitutional amendment:** a legal article, or change, made to the Constitution

**contraband:** an enslaved person who freed themselves by escaping to the Union Army; they were legally defined as “contraband of war” or confiscated property from the Confederate enemy

**emancipate:** to free from slavery

**franchise/disenfranchise:** the right to vote/to take away someone’s right to vote

**Great Migration:** mass movement of approximately six million African Americans out of the rural South to the urban Northeast, Midwest, and West in the first half of the 20th century

**Jim Crow:** a racially oppressive system of laws and social customs which prevented Black citizens from exercising their rights

**lynching:** public murder committed by a mob without a legal trial for the victim, and meant to strike fear into a community of people

**oppress:** to use an imbalance of power to keep people in a lower standing

**race riot:** outbreak of public violence against people from one racial group, or between people of different racial groups

**Reconstruction:** period of rebuilding and reunifying the United States after the Civil War, between 1865 and 1877

**segregation:** separating Black and white people by law and by custom; common in the Jim Crow era

**suppress:** to forcibly limit or prevent

**white supremacy:** the belief that white people are superior to others