

Lecture 2.5: Gilded Age Segregation

Focusing on what's happening for black people during reconstruction

Limiting Black Voting rights:

- After the compromise of 1877, “redeemers” gain so much power in the south that they come up with legal strategies, don’t need to resort to violence
- They can’t explicitly say black people can’t vote because of the 15th amendment
- Three legal things that they bring together:
 - Poll taxes
 - State level because states pass laws about voting
 - States would pass poll tax (voting poll)
 - Meaning voters have to pay tax in order to go vote
 - Impacted Black people heavily because many were sucked into sharecropping/debt and were very poor
 - Not likely to be able to afford this tax
 - Literacy tests
 - Not just about literacy tests
 - If you’re going to vote, you need to be able to read and write
 - Education is more available to black people, but most people are extremely limited in access to education
 - Most families have >1 family member working to survive
 - Would bar a lot of black men from being able to vote
 - This was intended to bar black men, so how do they not bar poor white men from voting?
 - Pass a grandfather clause
 - If your grandfather could vote in x year, you can vote
 - Most black men’s grandfathers could not have voted in that x year, so they couldn’t get a free pass under this clause
 - White people, regardless of class, money, etc could vote, but it barred black people from voting
 - Meant to target Black men from voting
 - Ex: in Louisiana
 - By 1896: 130k registered black voters, but in 1904: 1k registered black voters
- These strategies were very effecting (not entirely), but very big disenfranchisement

Jim Crow Segregation:

- If black people couldn’t vote, democratic white people regained power in the government and passed the Jim Crow laws
- Jim Crow was a racist caricature of a Black person in an 1839 NY minstrel show
- Instilled rigid segregation between white and black people
- This is *de jure* segregation, or segregation that is legal and under the law
- This is US-wide, not just in rural areas
- Popular ideology at the time: scientific racism
 - Not just applied to immigrants, also applied to Black people

- People are very happy to apply this to justify segregation
- Even in places that don't have actual laws, there is *de facto* segregation → just happens even though there isn't a law
 - Black people won't/can't buy a house in a white neighborhood
- Sometimes immigrants would fall in the "white side" of things, sometimes immigrants would fall in the "black side" of things
 - In places with very few Asian people, there won't be much segregation
 - In CA, they could say no you have to go to the Chinese school

Plessy vs. Ferguson, 1896:

- How to uphold Jim crow? SC has a big role in this
- One step in the process
- 1883 civil rights cases (5 different that get decided in one case):
 - 8-1 SC decision that overturns an 1875 civil rights act that guaranteed equal access to public accommodations
 - Now, there's no longer a legal requirement to provide equal access to public accommodations
- This gets challenged and then upheld with Plessy vs. Ferguson:
 - People challenge, but SC rules 7-1 that Jim Crow laws don't violate the 15th amendment as long as accommodations are "separate but equal"
 - Embeds segregation in the law
 - As long as there is an equal accommodation for both White and Black people, things can be segregated

Enforcing Segregation:

- Imprisoning people under Black Codes → very vague laws, just arrested Black people without reason
 - Forced those people into prison labor
 - Subsidizing industrialization
- Lynching:
 - Violence
 - Used to shut up people who threatened segregation and white racial superiority
 - Prominent community leaders would participate in lynching
 - Nobody is hiding, very public, very blatant

"Accommodation" vs "Agitation":

- What should we do in the face of all these things
- Two prominent stances
- Accommodation:
 - Focuses on educational and vocational training
 - Lets not challenge segregation
 - Will get educated, work hard, become middle class, eventually they will have to accept us
 - Most commonly associated: Booker T. Washington → person who represents this view the most
- Agitation:

- How are we going to get education if there's no equal schools or any schools?
- Education, but we need voting rights and political power → need to create change, not just wait for it
- Lets protest and make this happen
- Most prominent person: W.E.B Du Bois (first Black person to get a degree from Harvard)

Considering Intersectionality:

- Most people aren't just one thing, Black people aren't exclusively identified as Black → their class, their gender, their race, etc all matter
- Where do our different identities intersect
- An Ex: 1881 Atlanta Washerwoman's Strike
- Lucy Parsons