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