



Ethnic Studies Lesson 4F:

African American Reconstruction and the Great Migration

TOPIC:

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

GRADE LEVELS:

11-12

TIME:

1½ HOURS

California Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum Themes, Values, and Principles Alignment

Themes:

2. History and Movement

Values and Principles:

2. Celebrate and honor Native People/s of the land and communities of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color by providing a space to share their stories of success, community collaboration, and solidarity, along with their intellectual and cultural wealth.
6. Connect ourselves to past and contemporary social movements that struggle for social justice and an equitable and democratic society, and conceptualize, imagine, and build new possibilities for a post-racist, post-systemic-racism society that promotes collective narratives of transformative resistance, critical hope, and radical healing.

California English and Social Science Standards Alignment

English Language Arts Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**Reading—Informational Text (RI.11-12)**

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem. (RI.11-12.7)

Social Sciences Standards (11th and 12th Grade):**History-Social Science Content Standards—(Grades 9-12)**

Evaluate the impact of the Reconstruction Era on African Americans in the South, including the rise of Jim Crow laws, disenfranchisement, and segregation. (8.4)

Examine the social, economic, and political factors that contributed to the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North and West. (8.4)

Analyze the experiences of African Americans in the South and the impact of segregation, discrimination, and violence on their lives and communities. (11.1)

Lesson Purpose

Students will investigate Jim Crow laws, Supreme Court cases, and Southern experiences after the Civil War in order to understand the motivations for the Great Migration.

Essential Questions

What laws, court cases, and experiences kept African Americans from realizing the full equality guaranteed by constitutional amendments after the Civil War?

How did African Americans respond to their lack of rights after Reconstruction?

How has life changed for African Americans over the last 250 years?

Materials

[The Equality Amendments: 13, 14, & 15](#)

[NBC News: Jim Crow Laws In the South](#)

[Georgia Public Education: Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation in America](#)

[WORKSHEET](#)

[National Archives: The Great Migration North](#)

[National Archives: Exodusters and Western Expansion](#)

[Communities Count: The Great Migration and Seattle](#)

[PBS: The Great Migration: Creating a New Black Identity in Los Angeles](#)

[Oakland Here and Now: Black Oakland's Story](#)

[University of Washington: The Great Migration \(African American\)](#)

[Unit 4 KWL Chart](#)

Vocabulary

Reconstruction
nadir

13th, 14th, 15th Amendments

Jim Crow laws
Great Migration

Lesson Steps

Step 1:

- As a class, ask students what they already know about the period after the Civil War. Why might this period have been called Reconstruction? What do they know about the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution? As a class, have them watch [The Equality Amendments: 13, 14, & 15](#). Students should take notes on the who, what, when, where, and why in order to help create an event card. Post the event card on the timeline. Also, ask students if they have heard about any cases where the Supreme Court made a poor decision, or a decision that impacted one race detrimentally.
- As a class, ask students if these amendments immediately solved the problems in the Southern former slave states of racism, white supremacy ideology, or equality. Why or why not? What do students already know of the Jim Crow laws? Who was Jim Crow? Have students work in pairs to watch [NBC](#)

[News: Jim Crow Laws In the South](#) and [Georgia Public Education: Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation in America](#) to answer the question on this week's [WORKSHEET](#).

- When students have completed their worksheet, have them join another pair to check their answers and complete their work. Have groups of four share their answers with the class. How were laws and court cases used to support equality? How were they used to suppress equality? What does “separate but equal” mean? Help students create an event card for the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case and place it on the timeline.

Step 2:

- Ask students if they know of any events in recent history where people have moved from one state in the US to another if they did not like local laws. (Examples might include COVID restrictions, abortion rights, taxation, etc.) The same was true of former slaves moving out of the Jim Crow South, and it was called the Great Migration. During the first phase of migration, nearly 6 million African Americans moved out of the South. In some cases, though, Blacks encountered similar segregation and racism as they had in the South. Some felt this period of hopelessness, after the gains made in Reconstruction, took them to the lowest point (or nadir) of their quest for equality—as termed by Reconstruction historian Rayford W. Logan. Break students into the following groups and have students use chart paper to illustrate with maps and words their research. Make sure students address the struggles the migrants encountered.
 - [National Archives: The Great Migration North](#)
 - [National Archives: Exodusters and Western Expansion](#)
 - [Communities Count: The Great Migration and Seattle](#)
 - [PBS: The Great Migration: Creating a New Black Identity in Los Angeles](#)
 - [Oakland Here and Now: Black Oakland's Story](#)
- When students complete their research, have students do a gallery walk around the classroom and put additional questions they have on Post-it notes on the presentation. Have groups present their posters and address the additional questions.

Step 3:

- As a class, show students the interactive graph in the middle of the page of [University of Washington: The Great Migration \(African American\)](#). Have students note the growth of migration to California after 1950. Ask students what avenues were left to African Americans after the Civil War for participating in the political world, especially considering Jim Crow laws and Supreme Court decisions about “separate but equal.” (Answers might include voting, violence, leaving the areas.) What might “voting with your feet” mean? Could this way of finding their rights through movement also apply to the Underground Railroad and escaping slavery? Would either or both require bravery? How do these questions reflect on the spirit of previously enslaved African Americans?

Step 4:

- As a class, ask students to answer this lesson's questions, “What laws, court cases, and experiences kept African Americans from experiencing the full equality guaranteed by constitutional amendments after the Civil War?” and “How did African Americans respond to their lack of rights after Reconstruction?” Also, ask this unit's question, “How has life changed for African Americans in the last 250 years?” Document what has been learned on this unit's KWL chart.

Essential Question Assessment, Application, Action, and Reflection

As time permits, and for homework, have students watch [National Archives: Racial Violence and the Red Summer of 1919](#) in order to answer the following questions in a short paragraph: “What does the term *nadir* mean? What aspects of the Great Migration and African American service during World War I fueled the race riots across the country?”

Additional Readings and Resources

Bernstein, David E., and Ilya Somin. “Judicial Power and Civil Rights Reconsidered.” George Mason University School of Law Working Paper Series, Paper 9, 2004. <https://law.bepress.com/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1008&context=gmulwps>

[California Department of Parks and Recreation: Colonel Allensworth State Historic Park](#)

[National Archives: Racial Violence and the Red Summer of 1919](#)

Sowell, Thomas. *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, 1981, 183-224.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS REGARDING ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES: America is a pluralistic country, ethnically. It is also a pluralistic country politically—left, right, and center. Ethnic studies educators have ready access to resources from the left-of-center in the [2021 California Model Curriculum](#) and in the [Liberated Model Curriculum](#). This Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum favors teachers exposing students to views from across the political spectrum. Educators often lack guidance to materials from outside the left-of-center. Therefore, in the sections on Additional Readings and Resources, the Comparative Cultures Ethnic Studies curriculum alerts educators to credible resources that provide an alternative to the other Model Curricula. In doing so, this curriculum encourages educators to acquaint students with evidence-based views from left, right, and center.

Ethnic Studies 4F: African Americans and Reconstruction

After watching [NBC News: Jim Crow Laws In the South](#) and [Georgia Public Education: Jim Crow Laws and Racial Segregation in America](#), answer the following questions. Make sure to note where your information came from.

1. Who was Jim Crow?
2. What were some methods that were used to deny the right to vote to African Americans?
3. What Supreme Court case decided the “Separate but Equal” policy and in what year? What is the who, what, when, where, and why of this case?
4. What were some other ways that Blacks were denied basic civil rights after the Reconstruction era?
5. What other questions have come up for you about this time period?

Ethnic Studies 4A: KWL Chart

KNOW	WONDER	LEARNED
<i>What do we think we already know about this topic?</i>	<i>What do we wonder about this topic? Write your questions below.</i>	<i>After the research is completed, what did we learn? Make sure to cite your source.</i>