

Name: _____ Date: _____

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD

Historical Context

We will be reading a class novel called TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD that we will explore from many angles. In order to frame the novel for you **before we read it**, you need to build some background knowledge of the history of the American South, and the period following the Civil War of 1861-65 in particular. This is essential to a proper understanding of *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The novel is set in the period from 1933 to 1935, but the past is still strongly alive in the minds of the characters, and the moral and social issues with which the novel is concerned are those which were fought over in the Civil War.

The author, Harper Lee, was born in 1926 in Monroeville, Alabama (**about a 4 ½ hour from Brighten.**) Her father practiced law in the town and Harper Lee studied law at the University of Alabama. The southern states in the 1930s and 1940s of Harper Lee's girlhood were strongly influenced by their history of slavery, which had officially ended with the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Brief History Concerning Civil War

The bond between the states in the American Union was always fragile. From the time the original 13 colonies declared their independence from Britain in 1776 there was always the possibility that individual states would break away from the group. It was the issues of slavery and state's rights which eventually caused the split between North and South in 1861.

The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments known collectively as the **Civil War Amendments** were designed to ensure equality for recently emancipated slaves. Here are the basics:

- The 13th Amendment** banned SLAVERY and all involuntary servitude, except in the case of punishment for a crime.
- The 14th Amendment** defined a citizen as any person born in or naturalized in the U.S., stating that Black people were **now eligible** for CITIZENSHIP!
- The 15th Amendment** prohibited the government from denying U.S. citizens the right to VOTE based on RACE, or past servitude.

After the war the US the legal rights of African Americans began to slowly erode. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, many African Americans still enjoyed the rights granted in the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, along with the 1875 Civil Rights Act. Blacks and Whites rode together in the same railway cars, ate in the same restaurants, used the same public facilities, but did not interact as equals.

That was about to change altogether.

In the case of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896), the court held that the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was unconstitutional and ruled that the 14th Amendment did not prohibit individuals and private organizations from discriminating on the basis of race, hence the southern **slogan "separate but equal"**. This ruling was the start of **legalized** racial segregation. Laws were enacted that restricted all aspects of life and varied from state to state. Some states said that such laws were written to "protect" both races. These segregation laws would become known as JIM CROW LAWS.

Cultural Differences between North and South

The South was an agricultural society, deriving its wealth from the production of cotton, tobacco, rice, sugar and hemp on plantations worked by black slaves.

The Northern states had a more urban, industrialized economy and as time passed Northerners became more and more unwilling to condone what they felt to be the evil of slavery in the South

The Southerners justified their practice by arguing that the black race was inferior and that the imported Africans were actually fortunate to be American slaves as their slavery brought them into contact with Christianity. The slave system was often enforced with great brutality, and Southern whites tended to regard their black slaves as ignorant, simple minded, lazy, irresponsible and in need of firm guidance from their white superiors. This attitude may be observed among the white inhabitants of Maycomb County in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Slaves had labored on the cotton plantations of the South. After the Civil War, in which the Southern states were defeated by the Northern (or Yankee) states, African American slaves (referred to as Negroes at the time) were freed. However, often they became worse off economically because the use of new machinery was decreasing the demand for their labor.

The African Americans, while no longer enslaved, did not have equal access to voting, education and employment opportunities. In 1929, the Great Depression in the United States led to a collapse of the economy. The Southern, mainly rural, states were the worst affected. Many white farmers became bankrupt and found themselves competing for a living with landless African Americans. In addition, the

Harper Lee's novel should not be seen as a simple attack on white Southern culture, however. You will be able to infer that, while the author is indignant about the cruel treatment of African-Americans, she also feels a nostalgic affection for some aspects of Southern tradition, and this is apparent in her novel.

THE WEB-QUEST YOU WILL PARTICPATE IN IS DESIGNED TO GIVE YOU THE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE ABOUT **JIM CROW LAWS** AND SEGREGATION NECESSARY TO HELP YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF **TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD**.

GET READY TO LEARN...

JIM CROW WEB-QUEST

The Jim Crow Laws were laws designed after Reconstruction to separate much of the United States based on race. These laws were legalized in the Plessy v Ferguson ruling in 1896 as long as facilities and access were equal for Whites and Blacks. Unfortunately for Black Citizens, there was little equality. The Jim Crow Laws would remain until the passage of Civil Rights Act in 1964 and 1965.

STATION 1: BBK: BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE – WHAT WERE JIM CROW LAWS?

Directions: Watch the *Vision Chasers* YouTube video titled, “What were The Jim Crow Laws” and answer the following questions in complete sentences. [Note: Not all questions are directly from the video]

1. What is the origin of the term “Jim Crow?”

2. What was the main purpose of The Jim Crow Laws?

3. How did it make you feel as you heard examples of Jim Crow Laws that were actually enforced at one point in time?

4. What caption would you give to the picture BELOW:



WRITE CAPTION BELOW

For questions 6 & 7, use the following excerpt from the arrest record below

We received a call upon arrival the bus operator said he had a colored female sitting in the white section of the bus, and would not move back.
We (Day & Nixon) also saw her.
The bus operator signed a warrant for her. Rosa Parks, (cf) 634 Cleveland Court.
Rosa Parks (cf) was charged with chapter 6 section 11 of the Montgomery City Code.
Warrant #14254

7. According to the record, what was the crime?

8. What is the name of the person who broke the law?

STATION II: PHOTOS – PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

AFTER VIEWING THE SLIDE SHOW, READ THE COMMENTS FROM OTHERS WHO HAVE VIEWED THE PHOTOS. **CHOOSE ONE COMMENT, CITE IT (COPY THE COMMENT) AND RESPOND TO IT.**

Q1. DO YOU AGREE/DISAGREE? DID IT SURPRISE YOU?

Q2. WHY/WHY NOT?

Q3. WHERE WERE THE PHOTOS TAKEN?

Q4. WHAT IS ATTITUDE OF THE COMMENTER YOU CHOSE? DO YOU AGREE WITH THEIR STATEMENTS? WHY/WHY NOT?

III. MEET "JIM CROW" - PRIMARY SOURCE ANALYSIS

TASK 1: USE PRIMARY SONG ANALYSIS WORKSHEET TO COMPLETE THE TASK

TASK 2: USE THE CARTOON ANALYSIS WORKSHEET TO COMPLETE THE TASK.

IV. BBK: ORAL HISTORY - VISUAL INTERPRETATION

PERSERVERENCE - per·se·ver·ance – *noun* - steadfastness in doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success.

1. After viewing the Story Corp narrative, write a GIST statement detailing the important facts of the story.
2. How does Ms. Burroughs embody the term PERSERVERENCE?

V. LITERAL/ORAL HISTORY PRIMARY SOURCE TRANSCRIPT

Briggs v Elliot

Directions: After viewing the photographs and reading the transcript, use this compare/contrast organizer to explore the similarities and differences in the school experiences for blacks and whites in the Jim Crow south.

Topic: Southern Schools in the Jim Crow South



