REMEMBERING JIM CROW

A documentary by American RadioWorks

Introduction

Deborah Amos: From Minnesota Public Radio and NPR news, this an American RadioWorks special report, "Remembering Jim Crow".

Music: slow guitar blues

Amos: This is Deborah Amos. For much of the 20th Century, African Americans in the South were barred from the voting booth, sent to the back of the bus, and walled off from many of the rights they deserved as American citizens. Segregation was legal and the system was called Jim Crow.

Man's voice: Well my grandmother always told me, you have a certain place and stay in it.

Woman's Voice: My grandfather was just as afraid of a white man as he was a rattlesnake.

Man's Voice: At that time, you did something that you shouldn't do and you were black, they would hang you.

Woman's Voice: And when they got ready to lynch him, they'd have a picnic.

Amos: In the coming hour, "Remembering Jim Crow," a special report from American RadioWorks, the documentary project of Minnesota Public Radio and NPR News. First, the news.

Part One

Amos: This is a special report from American RadioWorks, "Remembering Jim Crow". I'm Deborah Amos.

Slow Guitar Blues

Amos: It lasted about 80 years. It seized every state in the American South. People died because of it, went hungry because of it, lived in fear and misery because of it. They called it Jim Crow. White authorities in the South imposed a system of laws and social customs designed to deny African Americans their dignity and their rights as citizens.

Southern, male voice#1: Alabama: All passenger stations in this state operated by any motor transportation company shall have separate waiting rooms or space and separate ticket windows for the white and colored races.

Southern, male voice #2: North Carolina: School textbooks shall not be interchangeable between the white and colored schools, but shall continue to be used by the race first using them.

V1: Mississippi: The marriage of a white person with a Negro or mulatto or person who shall have one-eighth or more of Negro blood, shall be unlawful and void.

Music: Jump Jim Crow

Litwack: I'm Leon Litwack, I'm a professor of history at the University of California at Berkeley. The term Jim Crow first appeared in minstrelsy in the early 19th century. Thomas "Daddy" Rice who was a white minstrel popularized the term. Like so many he used burnt cork to blacken his face. He dressed himself in the garment of a beggar. He grinned, of course, broadly. And then he imitated the dancing and singing and demeanor generally ascribed to Negro character.

Music: I went down to de river, I didn't mean to stay, but there I see so many gals, I couldn't get away. Chorus: Wheel about, an' turn about, an' do jis so; eb'ry time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow.

Litwack: And calling it "Jump Jim Crow," he based the song on a routine he's seen performed in 1828 by an elderly and crippled Louisville stableman who belonged to a Mr. Crow. The public, North and South, responded with considerable enthusiasm to Rice's caricature of black life. And Jim Crow had entered the American vocabulary.

Music: De way dey bake de hoe cake, Virginny nebber tire; dey put de doe upon de foot, an' stick 'em in de fire. Chorus: Wheel about, an' turn about, an' do jis so; eb'ry time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow.

Amos: Jim Crow ruled the South well into the 1950s and 60s. Four generations of African Americas endured segregation and race relations today are deeply marked by the experience. Correspondent Stephen Smith sifted through hundreds of recorded interviews with the last generation of black women and men who experienced, and remember Jim Crow.

Stephen Smith: In the early 1990s, dozens of graduate students at Duke University in North Carolina and other schools fanned out across the south with tape recorders, microphones and curiosity. Their mission: to capture and preserve stories of 20th century segregation before the black men and women who survived Jim Crow passed away.

Woman's voice: What is your name, sir?

Gratton: OK, my name is Charles Gratton. I was born July the 16th 1932, Birmingham Alabama. (voice fades under)

Smith: The students interviewed more than a thousand people, and produced an extraordinary record of what African Americans endured under Jim Crow and how they fought back.

Grafton: I can remember my mother would have the occasion to send me to this grocery store I told you about that was approximately a mile away, she would give me instructions before I'd leave home and tell me, say, "Son, if you pass any white people on your way, you get off the sidewalk. Give them the sidewalk. You know, you move over. Don't challenge white people."

Pointer: If you went to town during the week Monday through Friday the sheriff would say, "What are you doin' up here?" You better get out of town. But on Saturday you could stay all day. That was the day they set for the Blacks.

Voice: Why?

Pointer: I don't know. You could just stay up there all day long. Through the week you weren't allowed up there.

Robinson: Because they got paid on Fridays, they'd come to town on Saturdays and spend the money. That was their attitude. So, black people, would see, this was like a picnic to them. They would see their friends, their relatives. They'd make acquaintances and what not. That's the reason Saturday was the day they would call Black people's day.

Welch: You couldn't go to eat in a restaurant. If they served you at all you went around to a window at the back of the place, right at the kitchen. You see?

Pointer: My grandfather, he was just afraid of a white man as he was a rattlesnake. Because he'd been beaten and knocked about so much, no matter what you say or do let them have their way, don't you say nothing back to them. No matter what they did.

Randolph: Well my grandmother always told me, "You have a certain place, and stay in it." That was automatic, you didn't have to think about it. You knew it and you were taught it.

Music: Slow guitar

Litwack: Jim Crow emerges in the 1890s in response to perceptions, not altogether incorrect, perceptions of a new generation of black southerners, born in freedom, undisciplined by slavery, unschooled in the old racial etiquette, and in response to fears that this generation could not be expected to stay in its place without some kind of legal coercion.

Sullins: It meant the ugly signs that you saw, you saw them at the railroad stations, saw them at bus stations, saw them traveling that said "Negroes to the rear" and it meant that room that was for white was always bigger, always had more seats and was always better kept. So that was the crux of Jim Crowism. To prevent a group of citizens from being a part of what they rightfully should have been a part of.

Gilmore: My name is Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, I'm a professor of history at Yale University. Jim Crow was a word that white and black southerners used for an elaborate system of white supremacy, a system that was established both through legislation and the courts, and through custom. It could mean anything from being unable to vote, to being segregated, to being lynched. It was part and parcel of a system of white supremacy. Sort of like we use the word apartheid as a codeword to describe a certain kind of white supremacy.

Young: White men and women were addressed as Mr. and Mrs. You didn't address blacks that way. And don't make a mistake talking to a white person about a black person and call him Mr. I was talking about some black woman who was supervisor of the schools for black folks and I kept saying Miss So-and-So. Finally the white woman stopped me and said, "Young, that woman you're talking about, is she black or white?" I said she's black. "Well, don't Miss her to me then. Just call her by her first name. Don't ever Miss a black person to me." I said no ma'am.

Gilmore: Jim Crow was a political movement that began with state constitutions. For example in Mississippi, writing in laws that took the right to vote effectively took the right to vote away from black people. Basically it's about power: who has it, who keeps it, who vies for it.

Litwack: In other words, a way had to be found to disenfranchise blacks without risking any federal intervention or any legal challenges. Whites reached a sort of consensus, that is since blacks were deemed to be ignorant and illiterate, they were unfit to vote. So most states then imposed property and or literacy qualifications for voting. And then they went ahead and provided loopholes through which only white men could squeeze.

Sullings: They'd ask college professors with PhDs to write certain parts of the Constitution, to prove that they could read and write. Long passages. And they would say, didn't put a period, didn't write straight on the line. Anything like that. And of course our registrars could hardly read or write themselves.

Music: blues guitar

Lucas: Maurice Lucas, Mayor of the town of Renova Misssissippi, located about 90 miles south of Memphis. There wasn't any opportunity unless you taught school or was a preacher. That was it. Only the domestic folks that had decent jobs with the white folks where took care of the washing and ironing for the white folks were the only ones who had a decent place to stay unless you owned your own land or something. That was it. The only people you saw with shirt and tie

on through the week was a school teacher or a preacher. And if them white folks caught you with a shirt and tie on they wanted to know what the hell you was doing.

Music: Sharecropping Blues Well I work all the week in the blazing sun, Lord I work all the week in the blazing sun. Lord I work all the week in the blazing sun.

Conrad: I'm Glen Conrad, I'm director for the Center for Louisiana studies at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. What happened after the civil war is the plantation system survived with the planter providing housing, foods and things like this. I would best describe African Americans during the Jim Crow era as being comparable to serfs.

Lucas: When my granddaddy was sharecropping, it was a system designed to keep you owing them. You never got free.

Robinson: For instance here's a man with 10 children. In December he's told, and this goes for all of the plantations, he's told to come to the big house and have a settlement. Okay the settlement would go like this. "Well, John, you made 25 bales of cotton. And now you know that the old mule died, had to have another mule, got to pay for that. Now John, your daughter took sick and you called me and told me you had to take her to the doctor and I had to call the doctor up. You know it costs some money for that so I'll take that out. Now John, you're almost out of debt, but you're not out of debt yet."

Chatman: My name is Thomas Christopher Columbus Chatman Senior. I was born in Coffee County, Georgia. When we had gathered our crops, sold all the money crops like tobacco, peanuts, and cotton, my father told me that Saturday, "Well boy, let's go and settle up." So we went up to Mr. Thomas' house to the back yard as usual and he came out on the back porch. I had kept a record myself of everything we had got from that man that year and I know we didn't owe him any money. So he came out on the porch and he started thumbing through his book, and finally he looked up at my father and said: "John, you don't have any money coming but you cleared your corn." Well, when he said that I reached for my book, my daddy stepped on my foot because he knowed them crackers would kill you if you'd dispute their word, you know. The first thing went through my mind was, how could this man take all our money and my father had six other children down there, raggedy, no money, winter was coming and he's going to take it all.

Music: I ain't treated no better, Lord, than a mountain goat, boss takes my crop and a poll tax takes my vote

Smith: We heard from Charles Gratton, Anne Pointer, Emilia Robinson, John Welch, Della Sullins, Kenneth Young, Maurice Lucas, and Thomas Chatman. For American RadioWorks, I'm Stephen Smith.

Amos: Coming up, the terror of lynching, and how African Americans fought Jim Crow.

Woman's voice: And when they got ready to lynch him, they would have a picnic and hundreds of people would come. The wives would bring a picnic basket and bring her little children and they would have the lynching.

Man's voice: We got wind that the whites were going to come and get him, so the bird got around, if you've got guns, come on down we'll just have to have a showdown.

Amos: I'm Deborah Amos. You're listening to "Remembering Jim Crow," a special report from American RadioWorks, the documentary project of Minnesota Public Radio and NPR News.
Music: "Sharecropping Blues": Lord, I'm leaving here cause I just can't stay I'm goin' where I can get more decent pay.
Amos: Our program continues in just a moment, from NPR, National Public Radio.

Part Two

Amos: This is a special report from American RadioWorks, Remembering Jim Crow. I'm Deborah Amos.

V1: Louisiana: All circuses, shows, and tent exhibitions, to which the attendance of more than one race is invited shall provide not less than two ticket offices and not less than two entrances.

V2: Mississippi: The prison warden shall see that the white convicts shall have separate apartments for both eating and sleeping from the Negro convict.

V1: North Carolina: The state librarian is directed to fit up and maintain a separate place for the use of the colored people who may come to the library for the purpose of reading books or periodicals.

Amos: In addition to repressive laws, Jim Crow dominated southern custom and culture. Breaking those unwritten rules could be fatal for blacks. So African Americans invented ways to endure and resist Jim Crow. Here's correspondent Stephen Smith.

Smith: There were a lot of rules to follow. Blacks visiting a white home were expected to use the back door. If a white employer was driving his black maid home, she had to sit in the back seat. Blacks were never supposed to contradict white people. And perhaps the most serious rule of all: under no circumstances could a black man show interest in a white woman.

Robinson: Some white man might feel that I don't like the way that Negro looks at my wife or that white woman. And string him up to a tree. And when they would get ready to lynch him, they'd have a picnic. They'd have told the people, we're gonna have a lynching. And hundreds of people would come. The wives would bring a picnic basket, and bring her little children, and they would have the lynching.

Smith: That was Amelia Robinson of Tuskegee, Alabama. When whites committed crimes against blacks, it was common for the police and the courts to treat the matter lightly, if at all. Blacks on the other hand, were constantly watched, and often mistreated, by the law. Price Davis remembers the harassment blacks faced just driving to the beach through Pageland South Carolina.

Davis: And you had this big belly sheriff going to sit on that square, the little square. And if you came through there and you were black, you were going to be stopped. And once you got stopped you were going to have to pay out that 15 dollars, which was a lot of money. You going to pay something. We would watch three or four carloads of blacks go through. We'd give them about five minutes or ten minutes to get into Pageland. And we know that sheriff has them. And that was what we called running the gauntlet. That was running the gauntlet. We would go through driving ten miles an hour, fifteen miles an hour. But the minute you got out of his sight you'd better hit it down, because as soon as he would take care of those three blacks, you were going to be next.

Smith: The rules of Jim Crow could be fickle. Some times the color line was strictly enforced, sometimes it wasn't. For example, it was not uncommon for white men to have sex with black women. While some of these relationships were consensual, many were not. Historian Raymond Gavins is a director of the oral history project at Duke University, the source for many of the recordings in this program.

Gavins: In some of the stories, there are references to women who were involved in domestic work and who were exploited or, in fact in other instances, women who were being kept in the black community by white men.

Pointer: If he had a big house, he had a small house. And this house for his black mistress. And one man he had another young girl wasn't but 13 years old. And she came there to wash dishes for his wife. When his wife knew anything she's pregnant, and she's having babies one after the other. And she stayed there and took it. Now, I wouldn't taken that. Just like Pinkert. His mother had 10 children. Did he tell you about it?

Pinkert: Okay, my name is Otis Pinkert. Sure, I had a white father. He was very nice to us, too. All of us.

Woman's voice: Ten children in your family.

Pinkert: Ten children

Woman: Your mother and your father weren't married.

Pinkert: No, he was married to, you know, to his wife. They lived on the next road across the…His sons, his oldest son's used to bring food to my house, bags and whatnot just loaded. That was our food for years.

Woman: Was that unusual that there were such good relations?

Pinkert: Yes. That's unusual, very unusual.

Smith: Some blacks who had white parentage were so light skinned they could pass themselves off as white people, when necessary. Maurice Lucas.

Lucas: During the depression Daddy Will and Mama bought most of the groceries for the people in this community. They could pass for white and grandpa and granddaddy and grandmamma used to go to Cleveland and buy all the groceries for folks in this town. But I know they used to go to town and buy wagonloads of food for people in this community.

Music: Guitar

Smith: African Americans in the South devised countless ways to shield themselves and their families from the predatory and humiliating customs of Jim Crow. Wilhelmina Baldwin of Tuskegee remembers how her father tried to protect the family by keeping the children away from segregated places.

Baldwin: Well, there were just certain things that we did not do. For instance going to, wherever we went out of town, they took us. We never had to go to the bus station for anything. Until I got to be 10 years old, they didn't take me to buy shoes. They bought my shoes. And if they didn't fit, they'd take them back and get another size. They bought the clothes for all of us like that. So we, we didn't get into the stores to have to deal with the clerks and whatnot.

Smith: Rather than sequestering their children from Jim Crow, some families taught survival lessons early.

Newsome: Cemore Morton Newsome. I guess that's the one thing my father did say, he always used to say, "You have to be very careful where you go, what you do, because anytime something goes wrong, and if you're there whether you're guilty or not, your guilty by association."

Smith: Blacks needed a way to shield themselves, as much as possible, from the capricious hostility of Jim Crow. They created something of a parallel country within America, what the

scholar W.E.B. DuBois called living "behind the veil" from whites. Historians Leon Litwack and Darlene Clark Hine:

Litwack: What blacks did essentially was to draw inward, to construct in their own communities a separate world.

Hine: The institutions that sustained them were the churches, were the schools, were the social clubs, were the fraternal organizations, the sororities. And their culture, their music, whether the blues, spirituals, storytelling, humor, or what have you.

Litwack: Within very rigidly prescribed boundaries they improvised strategies for dealing with whites. Most tried to enjoy the personal and family experiences that life had to offer.

Hine: All of this was done very often without white southerners being aware of it.

Smith: One strategy blacks used was to conceal their real thoughts and feelings from whites. It was a tactic passed down from slavery times when black slaves veiled their ideas and actions to avoid getting in trouble with the slave owner. Georgia Sutton of Newbern North Carolina:

Sutton: My mother told me nobody ever knows what goes through your head. She used to say, that lady I work for is foolish enough to believe that I really like her. She said I'm not thinking about her one way or the other. Just pay me what she owes me. And I learned, too, that I could smile on the outside.

Smith: On the other hand, Olivia Cherry of Chesapeake, Virginia frowned when white employers couldn't be bothered to remember her name. It was common for whites to call black people generic names like Uncle or Auntie or Jim or Susie.

Cherry: And she would call me, I would be upstairs cleaning the bathroom, and she said, "Susie." They loved to call me Susie. "Susie." So I didn't answer. I was a spunky kid then. I was like thirteen or fourteen, and I didn't answer. Finally, she come to the steps and said, "Olivia, you hear me calling you?" I said, "Now I hear you. Now you said, 'Olivia.' That's my name." Then there was this white man and his girlfriend. They had a raspberry farm. Here goes my name again. The man said, "Hey, Susie. Susie. You missed some on your row." I knew he was calling me, because this was my row, but I just kept on working. He said, "Susie, don't you hear me talking to you?" I said, "I told you before, my name is Olivia. Olivia. Can you say that?"

Music

Smith: Starting in the 1890s, hundreds of thousands of African Americans began to resist Jim Crow by getting out of the South altogether. It was called the great migration. Most moved north after World War One when the south was particularly violent. Price Davis of Charlotte North

Carolina headed north to opportunity as soon as he finished high school, even though his parents wanted him to go to a local black school called Smith University.

Davis: I did not want, and I've got to repeat this, I did not want to be the most educated elevator operator down here in the south. Used to have to operate them by hand and all the boys that I knew that had graduated from out here at Smith, they were either operating an elevator or whatnot. I knew that I was going to leave and go to New York and I said I'll go to New York and get me a job in the union and I'll make me some money.

Music: New York jazzy music

Davis: And everything changed. The whole atmosphere changed. I got there at Washington, D.C., changed buses and a black woman come up and she told me she said this is good now son. You can sit wherever you want to sit on the bus. I said "I can?" She said, "Yeah." She said. "You get you a seat." I did not move to the front but I did not sit in the back. I moved middle ways. When I got to New York, got a cab and went to Harlem, I looked around. I saw a black policeman directing traffic. I said, "Oh, my God, this is the Promised Land!"

Music: blues sound

Smith: Many blacks who moved North found something short of the promised land. In New York and many other cities, blacks were still unwelcome in some clubs, restaurants and neighborhoods. Jim Crow in the north wasn't law, but it was still custom.

Jazzy music ends, guitar music begins

Smith: Blacks who stayed in the south grew increasingly restless with Jim Crow, and increasingly ready to speak out. Lillian Smith of Wilmington North Carolina worked as a domestic for a white family.

Smith: The little boy, he had heard somebody say nigger. He was about six years old. And so when I was baby-sitting with him one night, he said, "You're a nigger, aren't you?" I said, "I beg your pardon? What did you say, child?" He said, "I said you're a nigger, aren't you?" So I sat him down and I said, "Listen, let me tell you something, " I said, "now I'm sure you heard this from an adult. Did you not?" He said, "Yes. I heard my parents say it and I heard others say it." I said, "Well, I want to tell you something. The word "nigger" really refers to an act. Anybody can be a nigger if they commit a niggardly act. My name is Lillian, and there's nowhere on my birth certificate that say I'm a nigger. It does say I'm a Negro, but that's a white man's term. That's not a term my family invented. And it wasn't one God invented." And they apologized and so I stopped working for them. I told them, I said, "The atmosphere has been tainted," and I said, "I don't no longer want to work for you anymore. "

Music…up-tempo jazz

Smith: After World War One, blacks across the country got bolder about demanding the rights of dignity and citizenship. But it was still potentially lethal to do so in the South. For example, Southern whites used lynching and mob violence to shut down voter registration campaigns. Then came World War Two. More than a million blacks served, and they came home hungry for justice. Historian Darlene Clark Hine.

Hine: World War Two looms as perhaps the most important moment in the 20th century in the whole struggle bringing down Jim Crow. If they could die for freedom abroad, they could die for freedom at home. And when they came home hundreds of thousands of black men and women were determined that Jim Crow's days were numbered.

Robinson: Their hope was in Franklin Delano Roosevelt. He came in with a program helping those who were farthest down the ladder. And that gave African Americans hope. That gave them the opportunity to realize that things can be better. This is a chance for us to thrust forward. And that is why we decided, after the war was over, that we will fight for civil rights and for the right to vote.

Smith: Amelia Robinson. In Columbia, Tennessee, the fight began just a few months after the World War Two had ended. It was 1946, a mild February day in the heart Jim Crow country.

Sounds of Columbia's main square

Smith: A 37-year-old black woman named Gladys Stephenson stopped at an appliance store here on Columbia's main square to pick up her radio, which was being fixed. Her 19-year-old son James was with her. He was just back from serving in World War Two. Gladys and the appliance store clerk got into an argument about the cost of the repairs. James intervened.

Stephenson: He said, "What you stop back here for boy, to get your teeth knocked out?" I said, "Yeah, if that's what it takes," so I kept walking and when I got to the door he hit me in the back of the head and I turned around and grabbed him, smacked outside the door and hit him three times: bam! bam! bam! Turn him loose, he fell through the window.

Smith: It was bad luck for the clerk that James Stephenson was a Navy boxing champ. It was bad luck for the Stephensons that the clerk was the brother of a local cop. Whites started gathering in the square at the news that a black man had beaten a white man.

Kimes: At that time, you did something that you shouldn't do if you were black they'd hang you.

Smith: Edward Kimes was in the middle of events that day.

Kimes: We got wind that the whites were going to come and get him. So the bird got around, if you got guns come down, we'll just have to have a showdown. Got tired of being kicked around.

Smith: More than a hundred men gathered in the black part of town, which whites like Bernard Stofel called Mink Slide.

Stofel: I was a policeman back in '46. They got to shooting down at the Slide, on east 8th Street. And they shot out all the streetlights, it done got dark then. And we said well we better go down there and talk to them boys. They were shooting right up that sidewalk. And they got all four of us.

Smith: The police officers were shot but they all recovered. James Stephenson slipped away to a northbound train. Tennessee state patrolmen stormed the black neighborhood the next morning, arresting people and destroying black businesses. The news made national headlines, black veterans in the south were fighting back against Jim Crow.

Music: Can't you hear that train whistle blow? Can't you hear that train whistle blow? Can't you hear that train whistle blow? Lord I wish that train wasn't Jim Crow.

Smith: One returning black serviceman met Jim Crow at the train station. Navy vet Otis Pinkert earned three promotions in the war, but on the train ride home he was forced to sit in the Jim Crow car. He was furious. When he got to Tuskegee, Otis Pinkert turned that anger into action. By himself, he started a protest at a local store that sold primarily to black people, but wouldn't employ any.

Pinkert: I walked the picket line by myself. I did it for about two weeks. And closed it up. Closed Big Bear up. That was the name of the business, Big Bear. So two guys from Montgomery came up, said, "Mr. Pinkert, what can we do to stop this situation?" I said, "All I want is one black man in that business. That's all I want." They said, "Well, okay Mr. Pinkert, we'll go to Montgomery and talk to the boss and we'll be back tomorrow." I said, "Okay." So when they came back I thought to myself, shoot, I don't want no assistant manager, I said, I want a manager. So when they came back they said, "Okay Mr. Pinkert we're ready, you find us one we'll hire him." I said, "No I'm not ready. I want a black manager." They say, "What?" Said, "We got to go to Montgomery again and talk with the boss." So they went to Montgomery again and when they came back they said, 'Find us one and we'll hire him."

Smith: One victory by one man in one town.

Music: slow guitar

Smith: Year by year, African Americans took on segregation. They fought Jim Crow laws in the state and federal courts, they resisted in public theaters and on buses, and by the 1960s they took

their protest to the streets. The civil rights movement was at full strength and Jim Crow was collapsing. The Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act of the mid-1960s marked the end of the era. It had taken 80 years to bring Jim Crow down. For American RadioWorks, I'm Stephen Smith.

Amos: You're listening to "Remembering Jim Crow", a special report from American RadioWorks, the documentary project of Minnesota Public Radio and NPR News. I'm Deborah Amos. Coming up: how whites in one Louisiana town remember segregation.

Man's Voice: You wouldn't have dreamed of shaking hands, my father or me would not have dreamed of shaking hands with a black person.

Woman's Voice: I think they were happier than the white people. Because nothing worried them.

Amos: "Remembering Jim Crow" is made possible in part with a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Major funding for American RadioWorks comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. To learn more about the Jim Crow era and see photographs from the period, visit our website at American RadioWorks-dot-org. You'll also find information on ordering a tape copy of this program. That's on the web at American RadioWorks-dot org.

Music ends

Amos: This is NPR, National Public Radio.

Part Three

Music: Louisiana blues…

Amos: This is "Remembering Jim Crow", a special report from American RadioWorks. I'm Deborah Amos. By the early 20th century, every state in the South had laws in place to segregate and restrict the lives of blacks.

V1: Alabama: It shall be unlawful for a Negro and white person to play together or in company with each other at any game of pool or billiards.

V2: Georgia: No colored barber shall serve as a barber to white women or girls.

V1: Florida: the schools for white children and the schools for

Voices overlap in reading laws ending with "Are hereby forever prohibited"

Amos: In the bayous of south Louisiana, Jim Crow was rooted in sugar cane fields and rice farms. A plantation aristocracy ruled there until the 1960s. Blacks in the region recall harsh times. As for the whites, Anthropologist Kate Ellis spent a year in Iberia Parish and found that they remember the Jim Crow past in a very different way.

Ellis: Most of the older whites I spoke to remember growing up in a culture where there was simply no question, blacks were inferior and treated as such. Others remember segregation as a more benign arrangement.

Laveux: All the black people who lived in a small town like this, they knew everybody knew everybody else. Except we didn't know the colored peoples that well but I think they all knew the white people .

Ellis: Really?

Laveux: And looked up to the white people I'll tell you.

Ellis: They did.

Laveux: Because they knew that's where their bread was buttered. You know the white people helped them. Gave them work and everything.

Ellis: This tape is with Mary Laveaux. She asked me not use her real name. Mary's lived her entire 91 years in Iberia Parish and belongs to one of the old plantation families. She doesn't remember blacks resenting the rules of Jim Crow. For example, she says blacks chose to sit in the back of the bus.

Laveux: It was just part of their, they understood that it looks like. I don't think that the white people were cruel to them and made them do that.

Ellis : Yeah.

Laveux: But they felt that was part of them.

Ellis: So it wasn't something that white people were doing to…

Laveux: The white people I think were good to them.

Ellis: Mary was raised by a black nanny and surrounded by black tenants on her family's plantation. She says the black people who worked for her family were poor, but happy.

Laveux: They had a little church back there and they would sing the most beautiful gospel music, sing you know. They had beautiful voices, some of them they'd sing and sometimes we'd go there at night and park about a block away just to listen, they just had that rhythm.

Ellis: So it was kind of joyous, the music.

Laveux: Oh yes. Oh they would play the music and dance. And their way of life, I think they were happier than the white people. Because nothing worried them, you know? Some white people, they were worried of sometimes about losing their land or trying to make things go, you know, they were the leaders. But the black people, nothing bothered them.

Sounds of the bayou

Ellis: New Iberia lies deep in south Louisiana's bayou country, where the night is filled with sounds from the swamps. It's a small town, just 35-thousand people. About a third of them are black. This part of the state is called the sugar bowl, because sugar cane is the primary crop. On the main street, you can still find some of the antebellum homes that belonged to the plantation gentry, complete with white columns and towering oaks. Some of the homes belong to the great grandchildren of the plantation owners.

Barrow: Well, my name is Barrow. Leonard Barrow Junior. And my connection with New Iberia is I was born here in 1917 on East Main Street. It was very segregated without a doubt. From the time I grew up, you had white folks and black folks. And basically the black folks worked for the white folks. They sort of lived in their part of town and we lived in our part of town and…

Ellis: And why was it that way?

Barrow: It's…I guess if you didn't grow up here it would be difficult to understand, it was two separate worlds. You know, you just didn't become part of their world, you didn't go into their houses, they worked in your house, but it was just the way it was, it had always been that way.

Leonard Barrow is a retired fighter pilot who returned to New Iberia after a long military career. He comes from a planter family that always had close contact with blacks, first as slave owners, then as employers, always as superiors.

Barrow: God, there was a fellow who worked for my father for a number of years in the rice field and we ran into each other one day and boy he came and threw his arms around me you know it uh…now this is another funny thing, you wouldn't have dreamed of shaking hands back in those days.

Ellis: The black man you ran into or your father?

Barrow: My father or me would not have dreamed of shaking hands with a black person.

Ellis: Some whites that I talked to say blacks were never treated poorly during Jim Crow, they were always treated well, they had their place and we had ours but they were always treated well. I'm wondering how you see that? If you would agree?

LB: Well, being treated well has a pretty broad spectrum of uh…The blacks definitely lived at a much lower standard. Much lower. Many of the houses didn't have running water, many of the houses didn't have electricity, heat was rudimentary, of course nobody had air conditioning.

Ellis: Do you remember any whites openly questioning the way things were?

Barrow: Certainly not! Heavens no! Why? Why would they have questioned it? I mean, this is they way it was. You grew up, you know it's kinda like, I'm a Catholic because my parents were Catholics. Never questioned why. That's the way it was.

Ellis: What about blacks? Do you remember blacks ever uh…

Barrow: raising the question?

Ellis: Yes.

Barrow: No. No, they knew their place.

Ellis: We are in the New Iberia public library and we are looking at a 1940 city directory um from New Iberia, so it goes by street and it lists every resident as well as every business. And by every resident who is colored, or black, and also by every black owned business there is a little 'c' denoting their race, colored. And not surprisingly, when you look at the people who's name has a little 'c' in front of them, many of them are maids or laborers, a few teachers a cook, a seamstress, a brick mason, again cook, cook, pastor.

Music: Simple guitar blues

Ellis: Whites sometimes had close relationships with blacks who worked for their families. Henry Dauterive is also from the planter aristocracy. As a boy, Henry says he learned one of his sharpest lessons about the color line in his family's kitchen.

Dauterive: We had a handyman, chauffeur, aide-de-camp, whatever, who worked for my father and he often sat in the kitchen waiting his orders and I loved him to death. He taught me how to ride a bicycle, he taught me how to shoot a gun. And, so I ran in the kitchen at age seven and I jumped in his lap and I kissed him on the mouth. Well, he sat there and then he tried to explain to me that I couldn't do this. He tried to say, "You can't kiss black folks." It just puzzled me.

Ellis: Did you ever ask your parents about that?

Dauterive: My parents. When I was 16, I went off to Tulane to college, and the world became much, much larger and I came back and I had the temerity to tell my grandfather that it was possible for a black person to be as smart as a white person. Now that was also crossing the line. He knew that they were inferior, he knew that they were servants, he knew that they were ignorant and dirty and diseased and everything. He was not happy.

Ellis: Henry Dauterive is a tall, silver-haired man with a genteel, patrician manner. In the 1960s, he used his position as a prominent New Iberia lawyer to try to get a black school principal in the local Kiwanis club. He tried to bring blacks and whites together in the Catholic Church. But Henry makes it clear that he never crossed the color line very far.

Dauterive: I don't want to sound as though I were something really good. Because I recognized this and perhaps cared a little bit more, but it was only a little bit more.

Ellis: When some whites look back on the Jim Crow period, they often describe blacks as apathetic, as not being interested in furthering themselves or getting a better education.

Dauterive: It is an attitude that the whites have that the black is inferior. I am not at all sure that they're wrong. Today even. I'm not at all sure. In fact, I tend in that direction to think it, because I've watched it now with interest for so many years

Ellis: Henry says that a lifetime of observing blacks, as legal clients and employees, has convinced him he was naïve at 16 to think black people could be as smart as whites. As Henry sees it, blacks are inherently less intelligent and less motivated than whites. This is precisely the same view of African Americans that his parents' generation used to justify Jim Crow.

Music: Guitar blues

Ellis: I interviewed nearly 50 older white people in the parish. Most of them think like Henry Dauterive and Leonard Barrow: they recognize the injustice of Jim Crow but feel no particular remorse. It's just the way it was, they say. On the other hand, Deanne and Smitty Landry say they do regret being so oblivious to the hardship blacks faced.

Smitty Landry: I think that when we were growing up we did have the attitude that they are happy, they are getting along, and you know why should we care about them or sense the injustice and uh unfairness.

Deanne Landry: No one ever ran over with a casserole.

S. Landry: In the way that they were treated.

D. Landry: My regret is the sort that when they were at home at night after they worked for mother, I didn't care if they had heat I didn't care if they had food, that was not at all on my mind.

S. Landry: We didn't think about that.

D. Landry: Did they have clothes? No.

Ellis: Virtually all older whites I spoke to agree that Jim Crow is dead and gone. Racism may not have vanished, but it no longer hold blacks down, they say. The Landry's add that people who call attention to past discrimination are just prolonging the problem.

S. Landry: I draw the line in the belief that we should not look at the past and create a sense of paranoia over what has happened I think that the blacks.

D. Landry: We have to go on.

S. Landry: I think that we should you know put that behind us and then say "Okay, you are what you make of yourself now, you're given we have given you all the opportunities you can have, do not belabor the question of what happened in the past, and how bad it is and we should give you things." I think that is a psychologically defeating attitude.

D. Landry: It is, it is.

S. Landry: It will hold that whole race black if you keep back.

D. Landry: It didn't happen to them actually it happened to their ancestors.

S. Landry: You need retribution because of all of this, well I don't think that that's, that's healthy.

Ellis: The Landry's admonish blacks not to dwell on the past, yet many white southerners dwell on their past, especially their Confederate ancestry. Some are nostalgic about family fortunes lost during the civil war. Leonard Barrow, for one, says he never got a chance to enjoy the comforts of being from the plantation gentry.

Barrow: I didn't inherit enough to buy my wife's Oldsmobile when my folks finally died, but my grandparents' grandparents had three plantations over on the Mississippi river. I don't know how many slaves they had. They were awful nice, you know you'd go hunting, "Boy, clean those ducks", you know "Skin that deer" uh, "Shine my shoes, " I believe I could have gone for that. Yeah I think you could have too.

Ellis: During my year in Iberia Parish, I also spoke to a lot of older African Americans about Jim Crow. One man often wept as he recalled the days when white people called him "boy" even though he was a grown man. Memories of Jim Crow are sharp as ever among older blacks. In fact, some don't see Jim Crow as dead at all. They told me that many whites in Iberia Parish still

view blacks as inferior and that modern-day racism is a direct legacy of Jim Crow. For many of the whites I talked to, that legacy doesn't exist. They say Jim Crow ended 40 years ago and is better off forgotten.

Amos: Kate Ellis is an anthropologist from Boston. She's completing a book on how blacks and whites recollect the Jim Crow years in south Louisiana. "Remembering Jim Crow" was written and produced by Stephen Smith. Coordinating Producer Sasha Aslanian. Project directors Nancy Fushan and Matt Weiland. Production support from Stephanie Curtis, Rachel Miller, Seth Lind and Tina Tennesen. The editor was Deborah George. The executive producer for American RadioWorks is Bill Buzenberg. I'm Deborah Amos. "Remembering Jim Crow" is based, in part, on the oral history project, "Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South." Additional recordings by American RadioWorks. "Behind the Veil" is a project of The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. Directors of "Behind the Veil" are Duke University historians, William Chafe, Raymond Gavins, and Robert Korstad. Research assistance for this program was provided by Keisha Roberts, Paul Ortiz and Iris Tillman-Hill. Consultants included Darlene Clark Hine, Leon Litwack and Kenneth Warren. Funding was provided in part by a grant from the national endowment for the humanities. Major funding for American RadioWorks comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. To learn more about segregation in America and to order tapes of this program, visit our website at American RadioWorks-dot-org. This documentary is also available in a book and CD set titled "Remembering Jim Crow" published by the New Press. American RadioWorks is the documentary project of Minnesota Public Radio and NPR News.

Guitar blues