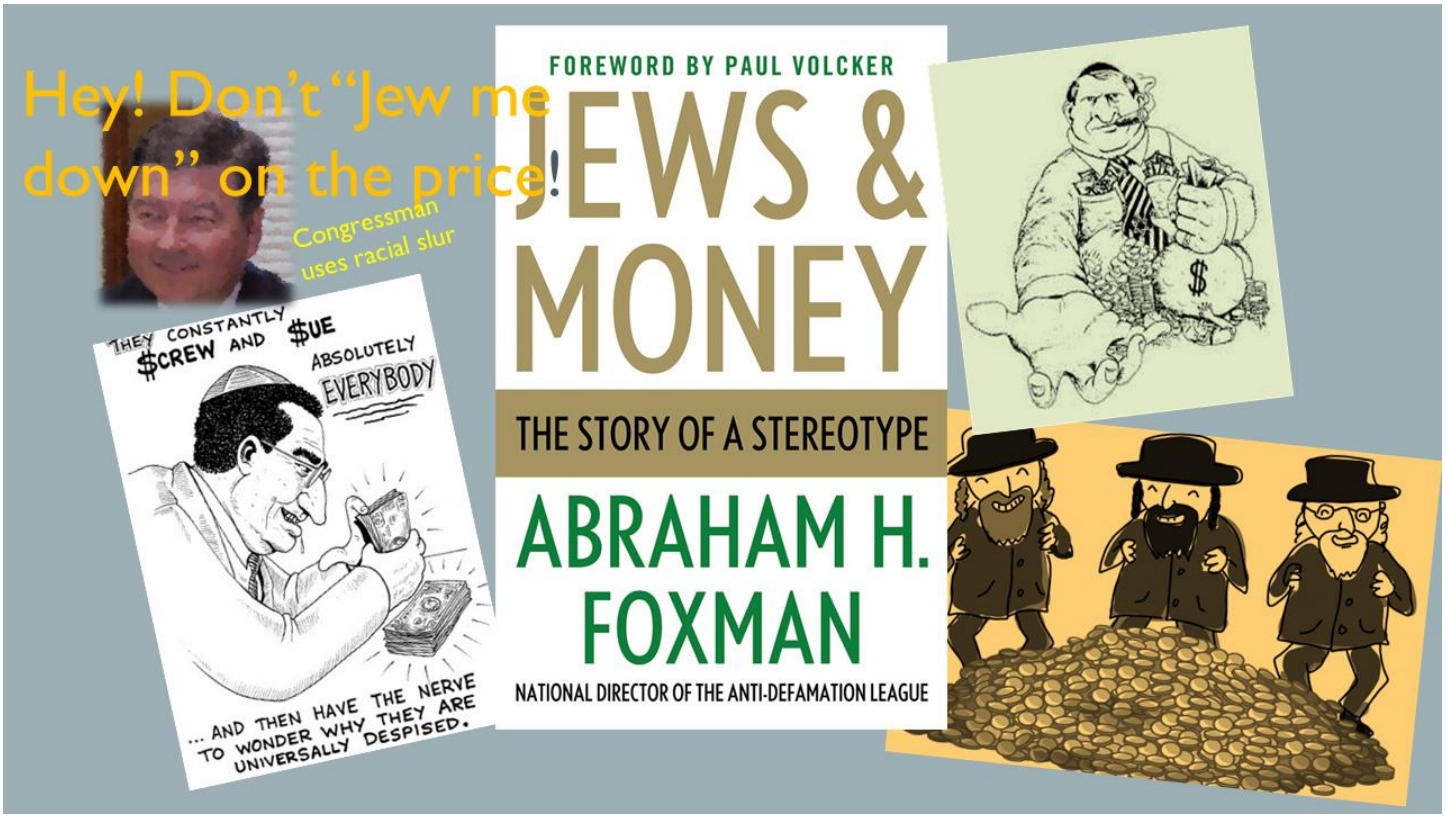
Folks/Guys: Please study the images and the text in this reading carefully. In the creation and dissemination of insidious stereotypes of negativity by the mass media, includes the entertainment industry, nothing compares to the power of images (regardless of whether they are *still* images or *moving* images—films, tv, and videos) in socializing the masses to the acceptance of prejudice and hate of the "**Other**" to the point of naturalness—meaning it becomes "natural" to assume, for example here in the United States, that black people are intellectually inferior or that Jews are a cunning money-grubbing people or that the Irish love their drink (meaning they are brawling drunkards) or that Italians are lazy, pasta-loving members of the Mafia. However, a common ploy among racists, sexists, etc. in popularizing **stereotype** images is to claim that such images constitute "art" and therefore should not be opposed or erased from the media, and what is more, it is protected by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Three points emerge here: First what is "**art**"? Who decides when an "object" is art? Is the First Amendment about protecting the right to popularize material that contributes to oppression, terrorism, and so on? Or was the First Amendment originally conceived to protect the citizenry from the tyranny of the State (but today has been hijacked for ulterior purposes)? Note: Bolded terms are defined in the course glossary.


Hey! Don't "Jew me down" on the price!
Congressman uses racial slur
THEY CONSTANTLY $CREW AND $UE ABSOLUTELY EVERYBODY
... AND THEN HAVE THE NERVE TO WONDER WHY THEY ARE UNIVERSALLY DESPISED.
FOREWORD BY PAUL VOLCKER
JEWS & MONEY
THE STORY OF A STEREOTYPE
ABRAHAM H. FOXMAN
NATIONAL DIRECTOR OF THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE


DRUNK-O-METER
SOBER
BUZZED
DRUNK
SMASHED
IRISH
IRISH-AMERICAN DYNAMITE SKUNK
THE MOST RECENTLY DISCOVERED WILD BEAST.
Black
Irish
I'M SICK OF ALL THE IRISH STEREOTYPES AS SOON AS I FINISH THIS DRINK I'M PUNCHING SOMEONE


CHINESE?
NO! NO! NO!
Come to 10th and A Streets at 7:30 Monday evening and express your opinion on the Chinese question.
SHALL WE HAVE
CHINESE
NO! NO! NO!

How America Bought and Sold Racism, and Why It Still Matters

By Lisa Hix — November 10th, 2015

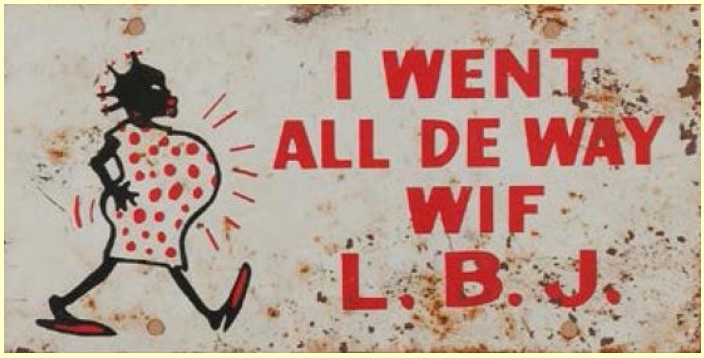
Source: http://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/how-america-bought-and-sold-racism/

Today, very few white Americans openly celebrate the horrors of black enslavement—most refuse to recognize the brutal nature of the institution or actively seek to distance themselves from it. "The modern American sees slavery as a regrettable period when blacks worked without wages," writes Dr. David Pilgrim, the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion and a sociology professor at Ferris State University and the author of *Understanding Jim Crow: Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice*, who has spent his life studying the artifacts that have perpetuated racist stereotypes.

"If you're trying to convince the nation that black people are not equal, then you come up with ideas like this: Black people don't feel pain the same way white people do."

The urge to forget this stain on our nation's history is everywhere. In Texas, McGraw-Hill recently distributed a high-school geography textbook that refers to American slaves as immigrant workers. At Southern plantation museums that romanticize the idea of genteel antebellum culture, the bleak and violent reality of enslaved plantation life is whitewashed and glossed over. Discussions about how slavery led to modern-day racism are often met with white defensiveness. How many times have black people heard this line? "Slavery happened a long time ago. You need to get over it."

The truth is when President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, the economic subjugation of African Americans, and the terrorism used to maintain it, did not come to a grinding halt. The Jim Crow racial caste system that emerged 12 years after the Civil War ended in 1865 was just as violent and oppressive as slavery—and it lasted nearly a century. Up through Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination in 1968, black people across the country, in Northern states as well as Southern ones, were routinely humiliated, menaced, tortured and beaten to death, and blocked from participating in business and public life. Thanks to smartphone and social-media technology, we're seeing how such violence continues in 2015, 50 years after the height of the Civil Rights Movement.



Top: Graphic images of black children being eaten by alligators were popular souvenir postcards, even in the 1930s. Right: This 1960s license plate mocked Lyndon B. Johnson's presidential campaign slogan, "All the Way With L.B.J." (Images from *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Just last month, Ben Fields, a white sheriff's deputy in Columbia, South Carolina, responded to an

uncooperative African American schoolgirl by putting her in a chokehold, dragging her out of her school desk, and throwing her body across the room. In June, Eric Casebolt, a white police officer in McKinney, Texas, was recorded grabbing Dajerria Becton, a seated 15-year-old black girl in a bikini, turning her over, and pinning her down, even though she was not involved in the incident at hand. Nearly a year ago, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old black boy, was shot and killed by police in Cleveland, Ohio, for carrying a toy gun, and when his 14-year-old sister ran to him, police wrestled her to the ground and handcuffed her. In 2013, a Sanford, Florida, neighborhood watch crime captain George Zimmerman was acquitted of second-degree murder, for fatally shooting Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old black boy walking home from the store.

To understand why black kids like these are subjected to so much hostility and abuse, you have to look at the toxic beliefs white Americans embraced during slavery and throughout the Jim Crow era, which still pollute our culture today. These include the absurd notions that black people don't feel pain, that without strict control black people are inclined to violence, and that black children are not innocents, but wild, unruly animals that need to be tamed. The ugly history of such ideas are documented in explicit detail at the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, located at Ferris State University in Big Rapids, Michigan, a place Dr. David Pilgrim, the museum founder, sometimes refers to as a "Black Holocaust museum." The museum is featured in Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s PBS documentary series, "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross."

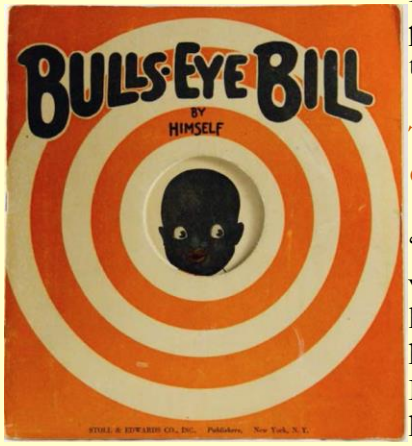
To justify the exclusion of and violence toward African Americans after the Civil War, pop culture—encompassing everything from mass media and entertainment to product advertising and tchotchkes—churned out objects, images, songs, and stories designed to reinforce widespread beliefs about white supremacy and black inferiority. Pilgrim has pulled together some 12,000 examples of such so-called "black memorabilia," and he clearly explains the meaning and purpose behind them—both at the museum and in his new book, *Understanding Jim Crow*, published by the nonprofit wing of PM Press, Friends of PM, which funded the book through a Kickstarter campaign this fall.

A "Running Nigger Target," with bullet holes, from the 1960s. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

America has a long history of casual brutality toward African Americans, and *Understanding Jim Crow* puts the current violence into context. It explains, for example, how in the late 19th century, nearly every city had a carnival with a game known as "African Dodger" or "Hit the Coon," in which white revelers paid to throw baseballs, or rocks, at a black man's head—not a fake wooden head, but an actual person sticking his head through a painted canvas in the booth. Even children were desensitized through toys, like the McLoughlin Brothers' board game Chopped Up Niggers.

"If you're trying to convince yourself, the nation, and black people themselves that black people are not equal, then you come up with ideas like this: Black people don't feel pain the same way white people do, black people deserve to be hit, it's fun to hit black people," Pilgrim tells me.

African Dodger wasn't even the worst of it. The public lynching of black people was also a popular, savage spectacle: According to the book, scholars have recorded 3,440 public lynchings of black men and women on American soil between 1882 and 1968, which doesn't account for undocumented lynchings or those that happened under the cover of night. The descriptions of these lynchings are shockingly, upsettingly gruesome.



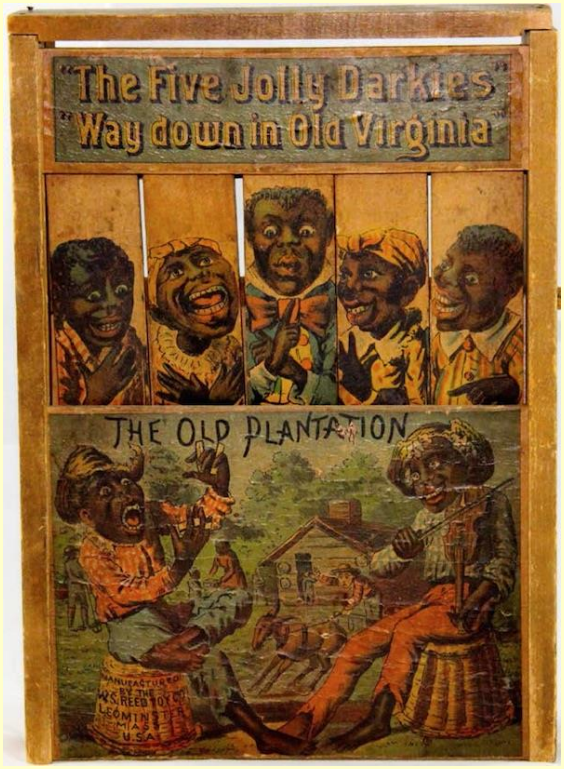
How horrific did they get? A mob of hundreds of white people would participate in slowly torturing the victims, first humiliating and mutilating them, then beating them until they were disfigured, and finally killing them.

This piece is an undated "book" of dart targets. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"In 1930s Florida, Claude Neal was accused of sexually assaulting a white woman," Pilgrim tells me. "He probably didn't. But either way, we don't know because he never got a trial. A mob took him from jail, brutally beat him, and eventually hanged him and drug his dead body through town. During the beating, someone from the crowd—and we're talking about hundreds and hundreds of people—cut off his genitalia and then made him eat it and say he liked it. This happened in the light of day. That brutality seems almost incomprehensible to our brains today, but it happened thousands of times all over this nation."

This story and others in the book are painful to read, but Pilgrim thinks it's important that Americans examine the evidence our nation's racist history, even if it hurts. In the museum, he's gathered appalling souvenir postcards of lynchings and "whites only" segregation signs alongside depictions of black people as docile, hapless buffoons or inherently violent or sexually aggressive subhuman creatures.

Stock caricatures such as Mammy, Uncle Tom, Sambo, pickaninny children, coon, Jezebel, Sapphire, and the black brute were employed to spread these messages to millions of people. Companies mass-produced these images in every form—including postcards, cleaning products, toys and games, ceramic figurines, ashtrays, cast-iron banks, children's books, dinnerware, songbooks, tea towels, cookie jars, matchbooks, magazines, movies, gag gifts, salt-and-pepper shakers, planters, fishing lures, trade cards, ads, records, and tobacco tins. If you lived during the Jim Crow era, you'd encounter such caricatures everywhere, in your newspaper, on restaurant walls, on the shelves at stores, and at the cinema or live theater.



Children's target games with African American caricatures taught kids it was fun to hurt black people. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

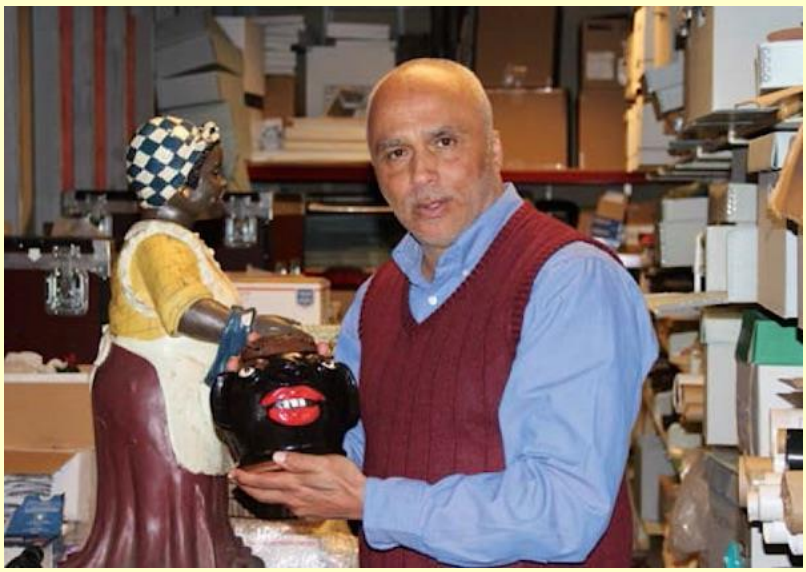
"If you believed that black men were Sambos, childlike buffoons, for example, then why would they be allowed to vote?" Pilgrim says. "Why would they be allowed to hold office, serve on a jury, or attend public schools with whites? If black men were brutes who were a threat to white women, why would they be allowed to share beaches, public-school classes, or taxicabs? If black women were Mammies whose best roles in life were serving white families, why would they be allowed in other occupations when the society needed them for that? So the caricatures, and the stereotypes which accompanied them, became rationalizations for keeping blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy. Perpetuating these

caricatures was a way to make sure you didn't have to compete against black people economically. In short, it was a way of sustaining white supremacy.

"Some people are surprised when they see two dozen objects on President Obama, where he's portrayed as a monkey, a Tom, a coon, or a Sambo. If you don't know history, then you don't know what those things are."

"At the Jim Crow Museum, our goal is not to make some people look right and some people look wrong, or make some people feel good and some people feel bad," he continues. "It's simply just to deal with what was, and what is. If you are in higher education, you have to believe in dialogue. We do have people come in who lack a solid knowledge about history. But the museum is presented in a very academically sound way, so we can then have those discussions about, for example, what was blackface entertainment, how did immigration impact blackface entertainment, and how did Jim Crow become a synonym for the ways of acting, thinking, and feeling throughout the whole nation. Obviously, because it's race, it's sometimes hard for people to separate the emotional pieces, but there's a way you can study race intelligently, and that's what we're trying to do."

Pilgrim grew up in Mobile, Alabama, at the tail end of the Jim Crow era. He was 5 when the African-American 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham was bombed, killing four schoolgirls. He was 7 years old in March 1965, when Martin Luther King, Jr., and other Civil Rights activists marched from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, as a protest against local laws that prevented African Americans from voting. Newspaper photographers and television cameramen captured state troopers and sheriff's possemen attacking the protesters, causing a national uproar that prompted President Lyndon B. Johnson to push Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act in August. Pilgrim was 10 years old when King was shot and killed in Memphis, Tennessee, on April 4, 1968.



Dr. David Pilgrim with some of the items he's collected. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Thanks to the Brown vs. Board of Education desegregation ruling of 1954, "most of the segregation signs were taken down in the 1950s, but a few lasted into the '60s," he says. "I mostly ran across the residue of Jim Crow, especially in the practices. My elementary school was all black; my high school was all black. It was still two worlds—a white world and a black world. My ancestry is mixed, so I grew up thinking about race a lot."

Pilgrim first encountered a piece of so-called "black memorabilia" at flea market in Mobile when he was a little kid. "I remember purchasing a ceramic Mammy salt-and-pepper shaker, and I broke it in front of the seller," he recalls. "I would like to think it was an act of philosophical integrity, but in reality, I probably just hated the thing, if you can hate an object."

But Pilgrim, who sometimes refers to himself as a "garbage collector," became fascinated with these grotesque racial caricatures, and by the time he was a teenager, he had accumulated a small collection of them.

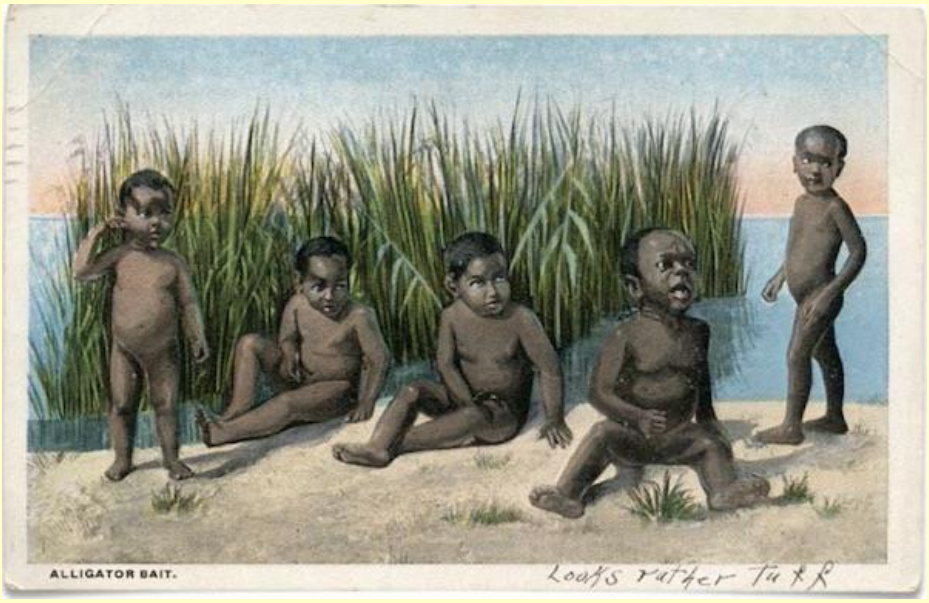
When he attended Jarvis Christian College in the late 1970s, a historically black college near Hawkins, Texas, he got more serious about his collection, buying what he could afford on a tight budget—the most brutally racist objects were usually prohibitively expensive. At the same time, his studies at Jarvis delved into the history of black activism, from the well-known heroes like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois, to the sharecroppers and domestic workers who put their lives on the line to fight segregation.

David Pilgrim's first piece of black memorabilia was a Mammy figure like one of these. He destroyed it in front of the seller. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"At Jarvis, we talked a lot about the Jim Crow period," he says. "We talked about this new America that was being created, that we were transitioning to, after the Civil Rights Movement. So my collection became less of a personal fascination and more of a question of 'How does this relate to all the discussions that I'm having about race?' During that period, it also became really functional because I started giving presentations on race in America, where I would use the objects that I collected as visual aids."

Pilgrim went on to study sociology at Ohio State University's graduate school. There, Pilgrim learned that racist memorabilia was not just a Southern phenomenon. "Some of the more significant pieces in my collection were actually collected in the North," Pilgrim says. "It's hard sometimes to know where a piece originated. At summer flea markets and antiques shows in the North, some of the dealers are from the South or from border states. But it is also the case that every place I've gone, these objects have also been manufactured, not just sold and distributed. I have pieces that originated in every state, including New York and Michigan, and outside the country."

While in grad school, Pilgrim would peruse antiques shows and purchase low-dollar items like a postcard depicting a black man being devoured by an alligator, or a matchbook with a Sambo-type caricature with a huge penis. In *Understanding Jim Crow*, he writes, "My years at Ohio State were, I realize now, filled with much anger. I suppose every sane black person must be angry—for a while."



This 1920s "Alligator Bait" postcard is a variant of a 1896 print. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

In 1990, Pilgrim joined the sociology faculty at Ferris State in Big Rapids, Michigan, and a year later, he sought out an elderly black woman who was a small-town antiques store owner rumored to have a huge private collection of black memorabilia. "If I live to be a hundred, I will never forget the feeling that I had when I saw her collection; it was sadness, a thick, cold sadness," he writes. "There were hundreds, maybe thousands of objects, side-by-side, on shelves that reached to the ceiling. … Every conceivable distortion of black people, our people, was on display. It was a chamber of horrors." Right there, Pilgrim resolved to start a museum.

"What I hoped by building this museum was that we could talk about race, even the more painful things, in ways that are intelligent. That is what a mature nation does."

The woman explained to Pilgrim that in the 1960s and '70s, chagrined white people would give her these objects, as they wanted to distance themselves from such blatant racism after the Civil Rights Movement. Other whites, wracked by liberal guilt, destroyed their Mammy cookie jars and Uncle Tom ashtrays. But in the mid-1980s, publishers like Schiffer and Collectors Books released price guides devoted exclusively to "black collectibles," which helped establish the current market for racist antiques. (The promotional text for the 2008 edition of Jan Lindenberger's *Black Memorabilia for the Kitchen*, first published in 1992, reads, "An avid group of loyal collectors, spanning generations and races, can't get enough of these rare and quirky antiques.") Black celebrities including Oprah Winfrey, Spike Lee, Whoopi Goldberg, and Anita Pointer of the Pointer Sisters started collecting these items for much the same reason Pilgrim did.

"Before the '80s, you could buy a lot of these objects very inexpensively," Pilgrim tells me. "The new collectors books artificially increased the market, both the demand and the prices that people were asking. In just a couple of years, things that I had been buying for a nickel and a dime were selling for tens of dollars, and in some cases, hundreds of dollars."

A collection of coon- and Tom-type objects in the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia became a reality in 1996, after Pilgrim donated his full collection to his employer, Ferris State University, with the stipulation the items would be displayed and preserved. "Most collectors are soothed by their collections, but I hated mine and was relieved to get it out of my home," Pilgrims writes in *Understanding Jim Crow*. "I had small children. They would wander to the basement and look at 'daddy's dolls'—two mannequins dressed in full Ku Klux Klan regalia. They played with the racist target games. One of them, I do not know which, broke a 'Tom' cookie jar. I was angry for two days. The irony is not lost to me."

In *Understanding Jim Crow*, Pilgrim writes that he reached new heights of outrage in the late 1990s, when he read *The Turner Diaries*, a piece of violent white-nationalist propaganda written in 1978 by William L. Pierce, the founder of National Alliance. He had a difficult time containing his feelings while giving a museum tour to a group of students. To his surprise, afterward, a middle-aged white man who had been in the group said to him, without prompting, "I am sorry, Mr. Pilgrim. Please forgive me."

"He had not created the racist objects in the room, but he had benefited from living in a society where blacks were oppressed," Pilgrim writes. "Racial healing follows sincere contrition. I never realized how much I needed to hear some white person, any sincere white person, say, 'I am sorry, forgive me.' His words took the steam out of my anger."

Dr. David Pilgrim gives a talk to visitors at the Jim Crow Museum. Behind the crowd is part of Jon McDonald's 2012 mural "Cloud of Witnesses," which honors some of the people who were killed in the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. (From the Jim Crow Museum Facebook page)

Of course, no amount of apologizing can undo the past, but Pilgrim believes that looking at the horrible truth and having an open, thoughtful conversation about race could go a long way toward healing this nation.

"I had a chance to talk to Naomi Tutu—who is a daughter of Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission," a court-like government organization established in 1996 to address the horrific crimes of the Apartheid, Pilgrim says. "I'm starting to hear more and more Americans, especially grassroots activists, saying that what we need to do as a country is stop for a minute, look at some of the atrocities committed here, and own up to them."

In order to own up to one's history, though, one needs to know it. And a big gap in modern knowledge starts with where the name of America's punishing post-Civil War hierarchy comes from. The term "Jim Crow" originated an 1828 comedy sketch created by Thomas Dartmouth "Daddy" Rice, a white actor who performed little skits between play acts at the Park Theater in New York decades before for the Civil War. Considered the "father of blackface," Rice darkened his skin with burnt cork, dressed in rags, and performed a song-and-dance routine in exaggerated black vernacular. Legend has it Rice encountered an impoverished black stablehand in the city who inspired the character and his namesake tune. A smash hit, Rice's Jim Crow became his signature character and then a full-blown one-man show, which took him all over the country in 1832. Comically incompetent, constantly smiling, and childlike, Jim Crow evolved into a caricature similar to the one known as "Sambo."

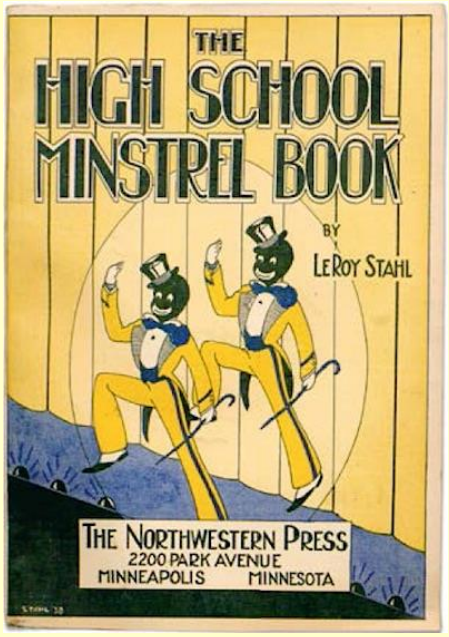
Famous white blackface performer Bert Williams posed for Raphael Tuck & Sons' "Coon Studies" postcard series, produced in 1904. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Thanks to Rice's success, other white burlesque actors, clowns, and comedians began corking their faces and adopting his Jim Crow character. Others came up with more stock blackface characters such as Zip Coon and Jim Dandy, both of which mocked well-dressed free blacks for "putting on airs." Chronically lazy and given to malapropisms, these onstage "coons"—named after raccoons—tried, and failed, to prove their intelligence.

"In most instances, the black facilities were grossly inferior—generally older, less well-kept. In other cases, there were no black facilities."

In 1843, four white actor-musicians with experience as blackface circus clowns came together and created a feature-length show of blackface entertainment, incorporating songs, dances, and comedic riffs using a supposed slave dialect. Calling themselves the Virginia Minstrels, they took their popular act all over the United States, launching the theatre genre known as the minstrel show. In 1845, Christy's Minstrels took the concept further and developed the standard minstrel-show format—which was the first unique art form to originate in the United States.

In 1848, William Henry Lane became the first African American minstrel performer, and in the 1850s, all-black minstrel shows, featuring at least a few performers who corked their faces, became a curiosity for white theatergoers. At that point, playing up these caricatures was the only way for black actors to get a job in theater, and they were paid a fraction of what the white actors made. But after the Civil War, some sly black minstrels were able to exploit the format to subtly mock white people at their shows, which were heavily attended by newly freed blacks but rejected by the black intellectual class.



This Minnesota "High School Minstrel Book" was published in 1938. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"Even when enslavement ended in the U.S., the minstrel shows did not end," Pilgrim says. "The professional shows lasted another two decades, but amateur shows lasted even until the 1900s."

After the Civil War ended in 1865, Republicans in Congress pushed for what became known as Radical Reconstruction in the 11 Southern states that had seceded from the Union. Following Emancipation, these states had passed "Black Codes" restricting the freedom of former slaves to move through public places, conduct business, and own land and guns. New "vagrancy" laws allowed police to arrest freed people for the smallest of arbitrary infractions and then force them to do free labor under the "convict-lease system," the forerunner to the current penal system.

"Poor blacks were rounded up and placed in prisons so that they could be worked for free," Pilgrim says. "Some of them were locked up in these places for 20 or 30 years. But unless you put that history in a movie, most Americans won't know it occurred."

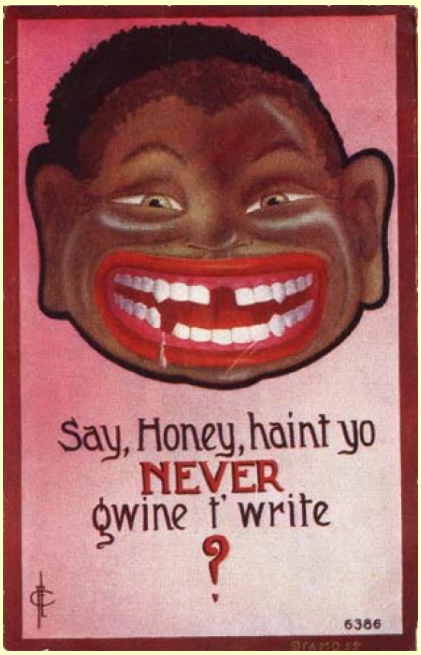
A photo from a small-town minstrel show in 1947. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Other former slaves—who never got paid for their pre-war labor—became indebted sharecroppers at the plantations that had formerly enslaved them. The federal government's Freedmen's Bureau, which often negotiated these sharecropping contracts, also attempted to round up so-called black "vagrants" and put them to work, either through the prison system or through sharecropping. Many white people in the South irrationally feared that, without labor to keep them busy, black people would "regress" into dangerous savages, running rampant in the streets, overcome by lust for sex and blood.

"If you believed that black men were Sambos, childlike buffoons, then why would they be allowed to vote?"

Gaining more power in Congress in 1867, Radical Republicans put former Confederate states under the control of the U.S. Army. They imposed punishments on former Confederate leaders—even removing most Southern representation from Congress—protected the rights of newly freed black men, and sought to squelch resistance from the Ku Klux Klan and other vigilante groups. Passing the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, the Republicans granted black men citizenship and the rights to vote and hold political office under the Constitution. The Reconstruction state legislatures, made up of blacks and whites, created the earliest public school systems in the South and many charities. U.S. president Ulysses S. Grant, who was in office 1869-1877, promoted Radical Reconstruction and aggressively employed the military to protect African Americans in the South.

But when less-radical Republican Rutherford B. Hayes took office in 1877, in the name of reuniting the country, he abandoned Reconstruction, pardoning Confederate leaders and pulling the U.S. Army out of the Southern states—which promptly passed a series of anti-black laws, like poll taxes, that became known as "Jim Crow" laws. In the 1890s, Southern states, under Democrat control once again, passed new constitutions that made it even more difficult for black men to vote.

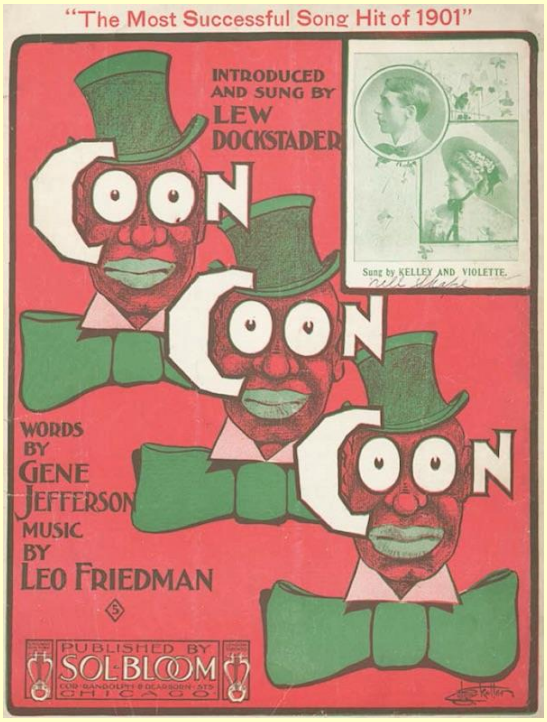


A sinister 1910 postcard. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"If ever you had a Hall of Shame, Rutherford B. Hayes would be in it," Pilgrim says. "But the truth of the matter is if you look at the period right after the Civil War, the period of Reconstruction, there were a lot of whites who were tired of the whole anti-slavery piece. Quite frankly, a lot of the abolitionists would be racists by today's standards. They also thought blacks were inferior intellectually and morally. So I think the end of Reconstruction wasn't just because of Rutherford B. Hayes. The North was tired of dealing with it. I think many white people in North recognized that they, too, had benefited from slavery. The nation, as a whole, turned its back on black people.

"After Reconstruction ended in 1877, the next two decades were a downward spiral," he continues. "You had all the Southern states rewriting their constitutions to return to segregation. You had the creation of a number white vigilante and racist groups. Lynchings became a tool to keep blacks in line. A historian named Rayford Logan called the time between 1877 and 1901 'the nadir of American race relations.' It was absolutely the worst for black people, because it was almost as if their entire nation hated them."

A new kind of variety show known as vaudeville emerged 1881. More tame than the bawdy burlesque that came before, vaudeville was designed to appeal to the tastes of the middle class. Each show would include at least one song-and-dance blackface routine known as a "coon song." While minstrels largely depicted black men as jolly, dim-witted fools, coon songs portrayed them as more sinister characters, lazy, razor-wielding petty criminals, given to drinking and fighting. Thanks to the explosion of the sheet-music industry, white Victorians could purchase copies of their favorite coon songs to play at home, which became a trendy thing to have on the piano stand.



The sheet music for a 1901 song that helped establish the derogatory term "coon" in the American vocabulary. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"This form of entertainment did as much to defame black people as the minstrel shows had," Pilgrim says. "At first, coon songs, like with the minstrel performances, were done by whites only, but later by blacks, too. These songs were all about black people as coons who stole chickens and watermelons, fought one another constantly, carried razor blades, and got drunk all day—pretty

much every nasty stereotype that you can think of. By the 1900s, those songs weren't just a national fad; they were shaping future conceptions of black people."

The second Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1890 was the first federal law that legitimized segregation, allowing states to build separate but equitable educational facilities for blacks and whites, which led to the establishment of what are now known as historically black colleges. Some states even passed local laws banning whites and blacks from being educated together. That same year, the state of Louisiana passed the Separate Car Act, which required railroad companies to provide different train cars for blacks and whites.

In 1892, an activist group made up of African American, white, and Creole New Orleans residents came together with the East Louisiana Railroad, which didn't want to purchase more cars. They asked a free-born mixed-race man Homer Adolph Plessy, who was seven-eighths European and one-eighth African descent, to buy a "whites only" ticket and had him arrested as soon as he sat down in the car. In his court case, Plessy's defendants argued that the law violated his rights under the 13th and 14th Amendments of the Constitution, which abolished slavery and offered African Americans citizenship and equal protection of the law. State judge John Howard Ferguson struck down that argument. The case went to the nation's all-white Supreme Court in 1896, which upheld the legality of "separate but equal" services, public facilities, housing, health care, education, jobs, and transit.

Segregation signs like this one were widespread in the Jim Crow South. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

The "separate but equal" doctrine "was a smirk-in-your-face lie," Pilgrim writes in *Understanding Jim Crow*. "In most instances, the black facilities were grossly inferior—generally older, less well-kept. In other cases, there were no black facilities—no colored public restroom, no public beach, no place to sit or eat. [The Plessy vs. Ferguson ruling] gave Jim Crow states a legal way to ignore their constitutional obligations to their black citizens."

"The caricatures, and the stereotypes which accompanied them, became rationalizations for keeping blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy."

In his June 2014 "Atlantic" cover article, "The Case for Reparations," Ta-Nehisi Coates lays out how, in the South, former slaves and their families were often trapped in a system of debt peonage to the cotton planters, who served as the landlords, employers, and merchants. Their white employers took most of the money for their work, saddling them with debt and taxes, and usually ended up reclaiming their land and other property, too. In a state like Mississippi, where a majority of the population was poor and black, their tax money went to fund white schools and libraries that African Americans were not allowed to use. And there was no recourse since they were regularly denied the right to vote.

In addition to living under this anti-black economic system and anti-black laws, African Americans were deluged by messages from white Christian pastors, phrenologists, eugenicists, Darwinists, and politicians, who all preached that black people belonged to a lower race than white people. In particular, white people believed that if African Americans and whites had sexual relationships, it would create an "impure" race that would lead to the downfall of America. Jim Crow social etiquette demanded that blacks not shake hands with whites; eat, sit, or socialize with whites; or publicly show affection toward other black people.


ORIG.
1928
POLL TAX RECEIPT
STATE OF TEXAS
COUNTY OF
ZAPATA
R P L
No 91
DATE 1/30 1929
RECEIVED OF Erna C. Shacklett
PRECINCT 1
WARD
ADDRESS Zapata
R. F. D. BOX
AGE 25
LENGTH OF RESIDENCE STATE 25 COUNTY 2 CITY 2
SEX MALE FEMALE
RACE WHITE COLORED
OCCUPATION School Teacher
THE SUM OF ONE AND 75/100 DOLLARS IN PAYMENT OF POLL TAX FOR THE YEAR SHOWN ABOVE. THE SAID TAXPAYER BEING DULY SWORN BY ME SAYS THAT THE ABOVE IS CORRECT. ALL OF WHICH I CERTIFY
BY DEPUTY Ygnacio Garcia
TAX COLLECTOR OF ABOVE SAID COUNTY

A 1928 poll-tax receipt from the state of Texas. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

While blacks were being politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised in the Jim Crow South in the late 1800s, coon songs were at the height of their popularity, and public lynchings were regular events. At the same time, American industry was making significant developments in tin-stamping and lithography processes, which gave birth to a wide range of novelty advertisements and product packaging. Advertisers printed promotions for their products on everything from horse blankets and shoe horns to pencils and yard sticks. As novelty advertising and printing exploded, so did images showing black people as wide-eyed, big-lipped subservient idiots, lazy "coons," shameless seductresses, and cannibalistic savages.

"The proliferation of these racist items after the Civil War had to do with advances in technology like printing, specifically printing on tin," Pilgrim says. "New manufacturing techniques also made it easier to mass-produce objects, whether they were ceramics, postcards, or tins. I've always said that if you show me the things that a society produces, I can tell you a lot about their attitudes, tastes, and values—which may also shape attitudes, tastes, and values in the future.

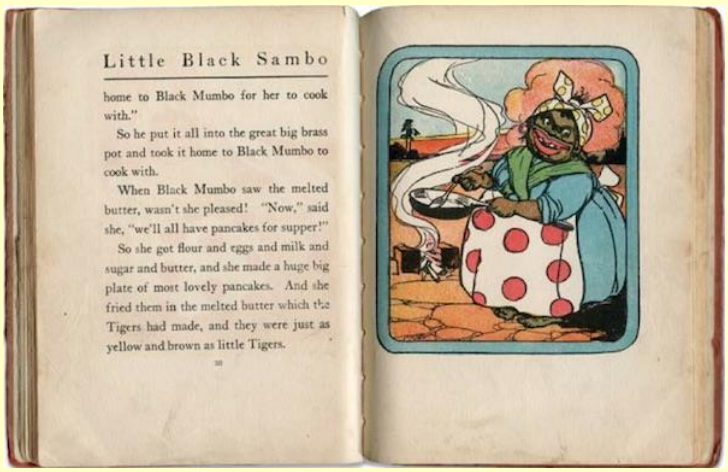
"If you hate a people, it's going to show up in the images that you have of that race or ethnic group," he continues. "When you draw a picture of a person of that race, you're going to draw them a certain way. When you put the images on a can of Niggerhead Oysters, that makes sense. The stereotypes and all the other stuff just become expressions of that hatred."

This "nigger milk" joke was a popular gag in 1920s cartoons. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

The invention of Kinetoscope films in the 1890s offered another medium for whites to reinforce black caricatures and support white supremacy. For example, in the 1900s, film pioneer Thomas Edison produced racist short films such as "Watermelon Contest" and "Ten Pickaninnies."

"As with color lithography, some of the early usages of the Kinetoscope to spread racism," Pilgrim says. "I don't think Edison set out in some way to defame African Americans. That's just the world he knew and what he believed. Every time there is a new technological advancement, it increased our ability to share our ideas, whether those ideas were good or bad. It's like YouTube today. You can share both good things and bad things, so now we have more racist videos than we've had at any other time in America's history."

Racist objects and packaging latched onto a standard set of characters, each meant to justify a particular aspect of discrimination. In *Understanding Jim Crow*, Pilgrim breaks down these caricatures—where they come from, how they developed and evolved, where they showed up in advertising and film, and where we still see them today.


Little Black Sambo

home to Black Mumbo for her to cook with."

So he put it all into the great big brass pot and took it home to Black Mumbo to cook with.

When Black Mumbo saw the melted butter, wasn't she pleased! "Now," said she, "we'll all have pancakes for supper!"

So she got flour and eggs and milk and sugar and butter, and she made a huge big plate of most lovely pancakes. And she fried them in the melted butter which the Tigers had made, and they were just as yellow and brown as little Tigers.

A Mammy in a 1910 edition of *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, published by Reilly & Britton, one of many knockoffs of Helen Bannerman's 1899 book. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

One subset promoted the idea of black people as natural servants who were most happy and productive as slaves. To white collectors, antiques with these portraits might seem cute or affectionate because the characters are docile, loyal to the point of being self-sacrificing, and nearly members of the white family. The not-so-cute reality is these caricatures were used to defend and romanticize slavery, and the characters were never shown as particularly smart or able to function well outside their role as domestic servants, as they neglected their own rowdy families. After slavery, these stereotypes encouraged employers to restrict African Americans to low-income drudgery work.

"During enslavement, the most popular caricatures would've been ones that were viewed as not being a threat to the dominant society—Mammy, Tom, Sambo, and pickaninny," Pilgrim continues. "These characters would be mostly loyal, not a threat to the social order at all. After enslavement ended, there were great fears. I mean, there were always fears among whites that blacks would attack them, rebel, or create a black nation. But after Reconstruction began, those fears grew, and caricatures that were seen as dangerous, like the coon and the brute, became more popular."

Mammies, like this Aunt Dinah on a 1905 postcard, were depicted nurturing white people. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

A Mammy is an obese, do-rag-wearing, smiling, motherly figure who cooks and cleans for a white family, but doesn't care for her own family, as Pilgrim details in *Understanding Jim Crow*. Her portrayal is dark-skinned,

middle-aged or elderly, intentionally ugly, and lacking sex appeal and desire so she's never a threat to the white wife. She originated in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as Aunt Chloe, but she was quickly adopted by slavery apologists. And she was a stark contrast to the reality: Only the wealthiest planters could afford to keep slaves in the house and not working in the field. The women put in charge of the kitchen were usually young and mixed-race, and not very well-fed. Plus, all female slaves, attractive or not, lived with the risk of being raped by their owners.

With names like Aunt Delilah and Aunt Dinah, the inarticulate and superstitious Mammy grew in popularity during the Jim Crow era, when middle-class white women could afford to pay for black servants. Depicted as content to perform menial labor, Mammies appeared on household products like cleaners and baking ingredients. In 1893, the R.T. Davis Company took its patented self-rising flour—which it named "Aunt Jemima's flour" after a popular vaudeville Mammy—to the world's fair in Chicago. They hired a black actress named Nancy Green to play Jemima at the fair, cooking pancakes, singing, and telling stories that described the slavery era as a pleasurable time for the enslaved and their masters alike. While Mammies also appeared in the movies "The Birth of a Nation" and "Gone With the Wind," Aunt Jemima remains one of the most enduring.

A ceramic piece, possibly a creamer, from the 1940s shows Uncle Tom as a dutiful servant. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Mammy's male equivalent, of course, was Uncle Tom. In Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom is a perfect Christian, a hard-working "broad-chested, strong-armed fellow," who stays loyal to his masters, but refuses to betray his fellow slaves. Because of this, his master has another slave beat him to death, making him the wide-eyed innocent and Christ-like figure in the book. When *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was adapted for the stage (49 theater companies toured with their version of the book in 1879), Tom became a physically weak, elderly, passive character, a "happy darkie," who always bends to his master's will, instead of Stowe's noble Christian who puts his commitment to God first.

"I remember purchasing a ceramic Mammy salt-and-pepper shaker, and I broke it in front of the seller. I would like to think it was an act of philosophical integrity, but I probably just hated the thing."

In the 1890s, Pilgrim writes, nonthreatening, acquiescent Toms appeared as on products as cooks, butlers, waiters, porters, and fieldworkers. Smiling, eager-to-serve, and dependent on whites for their self-esteem, Toms have appeared in ads for products ranging from stove polish and Listerine to Uncle Ben's Rice and vitamin drinks. Probably the most well-known commercial Tom is Rastus, the Cream of Wheat cook, created in 1893 by Emery Mapes. In early ads, Rastus is depicted as an ignorant, grammatically challenged servant who only has a wholesome breakfast to offer the world. A particularly offensive 1921 Cream of Wheat ad shows an elderly Rastus pulling a white boy in a rickshaw. The subservient Tom and Mammy caricatures undermine the fact that, from enslavement through the Jim Crow era, there were plenty of black people who fought back and resisted subjugation at great personal risk.

Tom and Mammy's neglected children are known as "pickaninny" or "picaninny"—they're unruly, dirty, and dressed in rags with wild, kinky, and matted hair, bulbous eyes, and exaggerated mouths. Like their parents,

they take great liberties with the English language. Thought of as unambitious future coons and left on their own with no caretaker, they're shown as good-for-little, grubby, untamed animals stealing watermelons and fried chicken. In many images of pickaninny children, Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*, they're often in clothes so worn out that they're nearly naked with large, sexualized genitals or butts. They're sometimes shown being stalked or consumed by alligators. Topsy, an enslaved girl first described in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* is the first well-known pickaninny. While Stowe intended Topsy to be a sad, heart-rending character, she was quickly adopted for minstrel shows where she became a devil-may-care fool who delighted in her low status. In the 20th century, Hal Roach's "Our Gang" and "Little Rascals" film series featured multiple pickaninnies, including Sunshine Sammy, Pineapple, Farina, Stymie, and Buckwheat.

This 1906 postcard expresses nostalgia for the days of slavery, when little black girls would be put to work babysitting their masters' children. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Outside of Mammy, caricatures of black women show them as either Jezebels—sexually predatory or promiscuous women who birth many children—or Sapphires—also known as "angry black women." In *Understanding Jim Crow*, Pilgrim explains that the idea that black people are hypersexual goes back to the days of early European explorers, who didn't know what to make of the scantily clad Africans they encountered and the tribes' polygamous lifestyles. In America before the Civil War, enslaved black women were considered property and thus, legally, the concept of rape didn't apply to them, but the Jezebel was used to rationalize the planter's dalliances. She was depicted as so irresistibly animalistic, lascivious, and sexually available that she didn't even have to be raped—she was "asking for it."

Many of the stereotypes about black women's promiscuity came from the nature of the slavery institution itself, Pilgrim writes. Enslaved women who rejected the sexual come-ons of their owners would be flogged, raped, or sold away from her family, so some would consent to avoid these dire consequences. When men and women were sold, they were often stripped and scrutinized by potential buyers, a practice that sometimes took a tone of sexual abuse. Working in the hot sun, slaves often wore minimal clothes that were so ragged that their bodies were exposed, while Victorian fashion dictated that "morally upright" white women cover up as much as possible. Enslaved women, called "breeders," were pushed to have sex with enslaved men at an early age and then incentivized to have as many children as possible so that the plantation owner's slave holdings would increase. When it came to their own preferences, historical record shows that most slaves sought marriage-like monogamous relationships and condemned cheating.

A ceramic depiction of a Jezebel sold in the 1950s. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Starting in the late 1800s, Jezebels appeared on drinking glasses, figurines, ashtrays, postcards, swizzle sticks, sheet music, fishing lures, and even a metal nutcracker shaped like a woman's body, where the nut is cracked between her legs. In these objects, the Jezebels are sometimes depicted as ugly, pitiable, and desperate for the white male attention they can't get. Other times, they're shown as exotic, beautiful temptresses with loose morals. Even images of little black girls from the period describe them as sexually experienced and depict them naked, even pregnant.

A Sapphire is a shrill, rude, emasculating, and overbearing version of Mammy. In the beginning, only her weak, "morally defective" black husband and children would be subjected to her derision. During the Jim Crow period, fictional "sassy Mammies" would be portrayed as almost impertinent to their white families, in the same manner a blood relative might be, to make the case that slavery wasn't so bad. In real life at the time, a black servant would be assaulted, arrested, or murdered for talking back. This negative caricature of assertive and opinionated black women has been—and is still—used to silence and undermine African Americans who stand up for themselves or speak their minds.

A 1910 postcard shows an immodest Sapphire beating and berating her husband. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

Another caricature was inflicted upon mixed-race women: the "tragic mulatto," which is based on the "one-drop rule" that says any African American blood in your lineage makes you a black person. In this story, the mixed-race woman grows up living as a privileged white person. When her white father dies, her black heritage is revealed, and she's enslaved and subjected to violence by white men. Rejected by both racial groups, she's often suicidal and alcoholic, and she in particular loathes her black side.

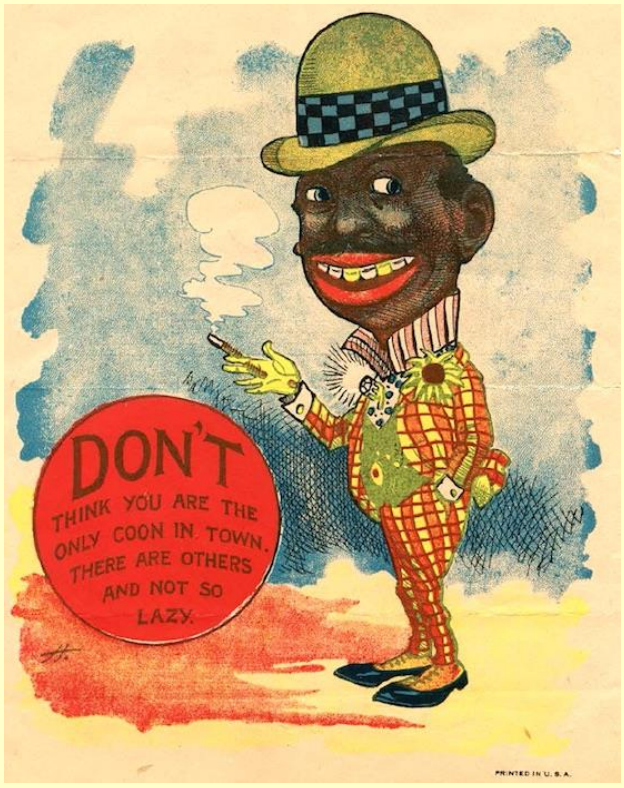
Reality, of course, tells a different story. In *Understanding Jim Crow*, Pilgrim says it's true that in the days of slavery, mixed-race slaves (usually the illegitimate sons and daughters of their owners), sometimes sold for higher prices, and masters saw these women as particularly sexually desirable, claiming their beauty drove them to rape. Enslaved mixed-race women were also frequently sold into prostitution, and freeborn mixed-race women sometimes became the mistresses of white men under the "plaçage system." Some people with "Negro blood" worked to "pass" as

whites, which helped them get better education, pay, and homes. But throughout history, mixed-race people—who had the slur "mongrels" hurled at them by whites—have been well accepted in the black community: Take for example, W.E.B. Du Bois, Booker T. Washington, Mary Church Terrell, Thurgood Marshall, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan, Langston Hughes, and Billie Holiday.

Puerto Rican actress Rita Moreno played the "tragic mulatto" in the 1960 film "This Rebel Breed."(From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

While some caricatures of black men are subservient like the hard-working Tom and the idle, simple-minded Sambo, two other caricatures played on whites' worst fears about freed African Americans. The coon was similar to Sambo, except he was not contented to be a servant. While he was also a slow buffoon, the coon—usually a hedonistic young, urban man—disrespected whites, fought with other blacks, and was prone to criminal behavior.

The belief that African Americans are naturally lazy comes from enslavement, as Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*. The planters wanted their slaves to produce as much as possible. If enslaved people were not able to run away, they protested quietly by moving slowly, doing low-quality work, sabotaging their tools, or playing sick. Slave masters decided this meant all African Americans must be naturally dumb, incompetent, and shiftless—in other words, coons. Historical records show slaves generally worked hard, from dusk to dawn, and if they got time off on Saturday or Sunday evening, they spent it tending their own gardens, washing their garments, cleaning their quarters, and cooking. Describing slaves as childlike and helpless was another way to push against abolitionists calling for their freedom.

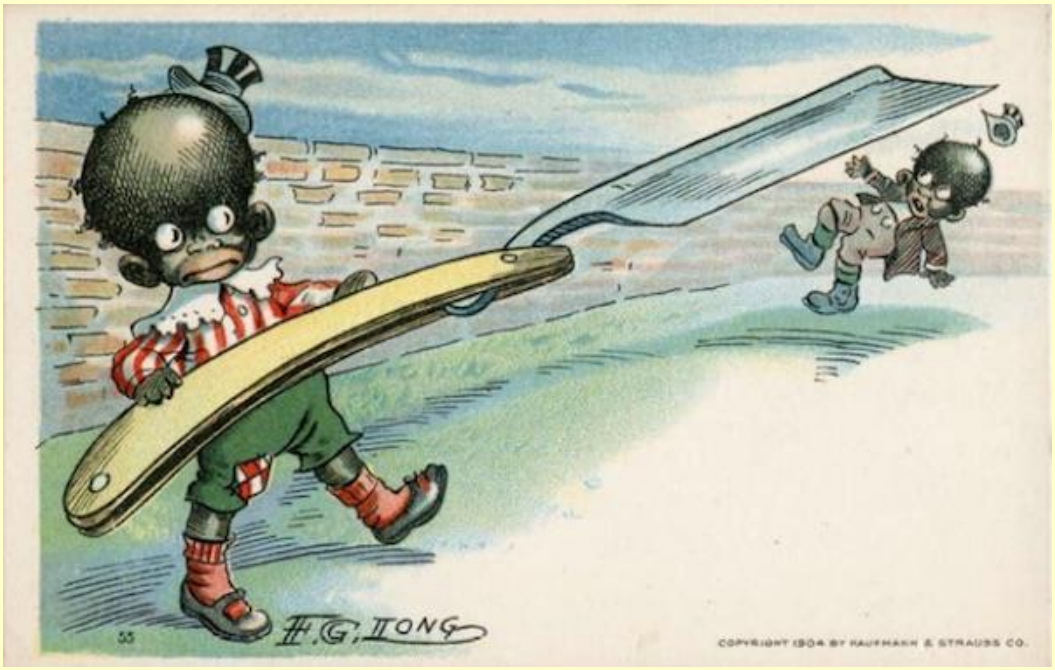


This 1907 vinegar-valentine postcard characterizes the coon caricature. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

After Radical Reconstruction, white Americans started to pine for "good ol' darkies," who, according to slavery advocates, adored their enslavers and had no interest in freedom, Pilgrim writes. At that point, coon went from describing all black people to specifically insulting "uppity" young black men who didn't disguise their scorn of white people.

Dressed like a dandy, a coon would misuse words and employ logical fallacies as he evaded honest labor and pursued pleasure from women and watermelons. In 1920s Hollywood, the coon character was embodied by black actor Stepin Fetchit, a superstitious, strutting,

work-averse fool who spoke and moved in a ridiculously slow manner, unless he was frightened. Fetchit's coon felt comforting to white audiences because he was deferential and never resorted to violence. However, the coon songs from vaudeville had depicted a more menacing character, a blade-carrying nitwit with no honor.

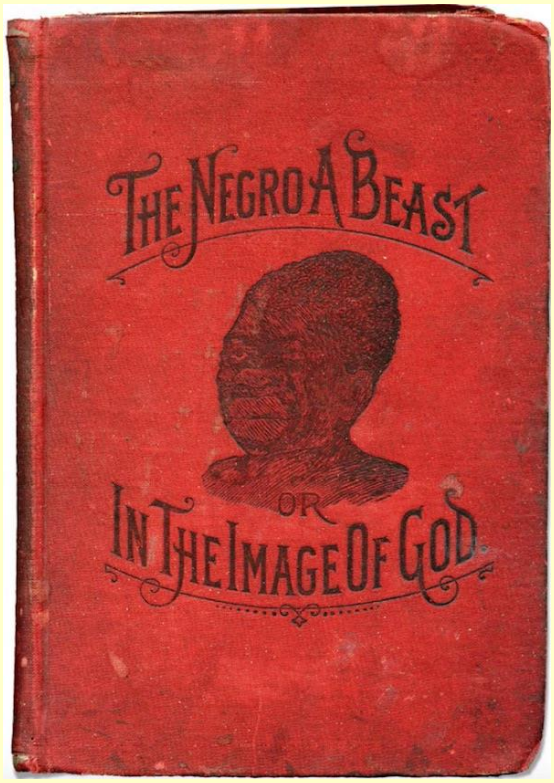


This 1904 postcard suggests that even little black children are inclined toward violent behavior. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

While the coon had the potential to become violent, the black brute caricature is inherently violent, Pilgrim explains. Like Jezebel, the brute goes back to the reports of European explorers who described Africans as overly sexual heathens. Perceived as an animal unable to control his sexual urges, the black brute is constantly threatening to rape white women. The brute is also a homicidal, sociopathic fiend, bent on destruction.

At the beginning of the 20th century, anti-black propaganda spread through newspapers, magazines, books, and scientific papers, claiming that black brutes were raping white women in alarming numbers. According to *Understanding Jim Crow*, this fixation on rape came from an obsession with keeping white women, and the white race, "pure," and it was used as a justification for lynching blacks, a practice similar to ritualistic torture. However, only a fraction of those lynched were even accused of rape. Still the myth lived on in portrayals like the 1915 racist propaganda film "The Birth of a Nation," which was based on a 1905 novel about a "black beast" viciously raping a white virgin.

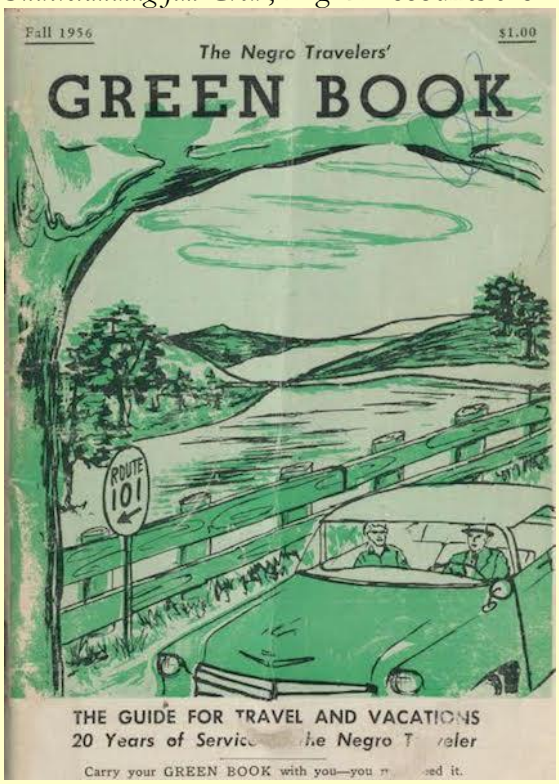
"There were black rapists with white victims, but they were relatively rare; most white rape victims were raped by white men," Pilgrim writes. "A black man would be risking his life even having a consensual sexual relationship with a white woman. In fact, it was far more common for white men to rape black women."



In 1900, Charles Carroll published *The Negro a Beast; or, In the Image of God*. Carroll claimed that white people were made in God's likeness, and black people were soulless, immoral beasts. He asserted race-mixing would wreck God's plan. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"During enslavement, you had groups like the Patrollers and others who regularly went out and raped black women," he tells me. "After Reconstruction, you had a number of black women who were raped by vigilante groups. If you look at a lot of the race riots of the 20th century, black women were raped then, too. Oftentimes, black men fought even to the death to try to keep the women from being hurt. But there was no legal recourse for these women because all of the major societal institutions supported white supremacy."

One unintended consequence of Jim Crow segregation was that African Americans had to found their own separate businesses and institutions—and therefore, establish their own professional class, including doctors, merchants, barbers, professors, and pastors. Some of these professionals did reasonably well for themselves, so they could afford cars, but they had to be extremely carefully where they drove. In *Understanding Jim Crow*, Pilgrim recounts the story of having a black professor at Jarvis walk into class wearing a chauffeur's cap and explaining how black professionals had to wear these hats while driving to avoid white rage. A black man was expected to look like a servant and not someone ostentatious enough to own his own car. The *Green Book*, published regularly between 1936 and 1966, gave black motorists further tips on how to stay alive while traveling.



The fall 1956 *Negro Travelers' Green Book* lists hotels, motels, and restaurants that were safe for black families on the road. The cover warns, "Carry your GREEN BOOK with you—you may need it." (Via Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library)

"Having a car has always been a big deal in the U.S.," Pilgrim says. "If you were a black person with a beautiful new car, you didn't know your place. 'Social equality' were considered dirty words. Especially in the Deep South, you could not imply that blacks and whites were equal, because it was considered a threat to the Jim Crow system."

"By the 1900s, coon songs weren't just a national fad; they were shaping future conceptions of black people."

Jim Crow started to break down, very slowly, during World War II. Desperate for workers, shipbuilders in the San Francisco Bay Area began to employ African Americans in 1943, albeit at a much lower pay rate than their white counterparts. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, a long-time civil-rights activist, pushed for the U.S. military to remove its restrictions on how African Americans could serve—most were limited to lowly labor like driving delivery trucks and serving in mess halls. As American forces were ravaged overseas, in 1944, General Dwight Eisenhower agreed to allow black soldiers to fight in combat for the United States, a first step toward desegregating the military. Segregated black units were among the troops sent to Normandy Beach on D-Day on June 6, 1944. After the war, in 1948, President Harry S. Truman ordered the military to integrate. In 1954, a lawsuit in Topeka, Kansas, that became known as Brown vs. Board of Education exposed the drastic inequities between black and white schools, prompting the Supreme Court to overturn "separate but equal" segregation.

While slow progress toward racial integration was being made in the 1940s and 1950s, city and state governments around the country were redlining districts to divide cities up into race-based neighborhoods, as Coates explains in "The Case for Reparations." Irrational fear of an imagined black menace, the black brute, had a real affect on home prices in neighborhoods, while predatory lending practices kept black people impoverished, constantly on the brink of losing their homes.

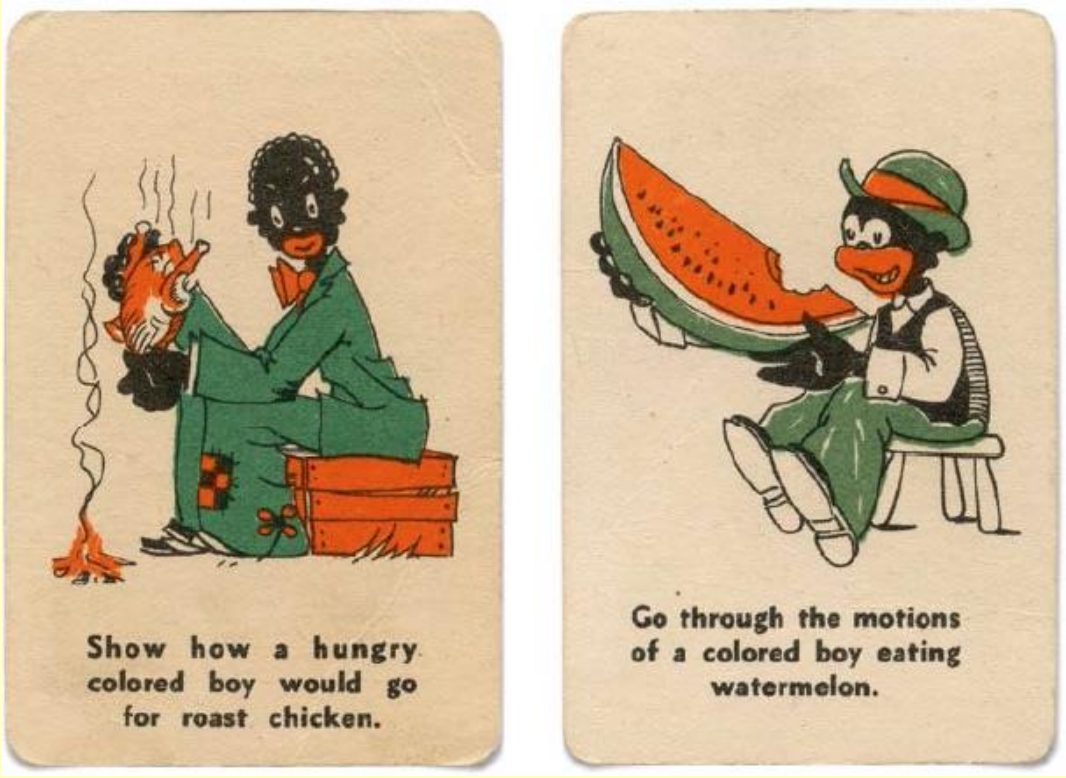
The hand-written message on the back of this postcard, dated 1924, says "This picture shows what they do to the bad people of Del." (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

The idea of the black rapist stalking and threatening to defile white women was alive and well. In 1955, Emmett Till, a black 14-year-old boy from Chicago was visiting Mississippi and may have called a white female store clerk, "baby." For that, her husband and brother dragged the kid out of his uncle's house, attacking and pummeling him until they crushed his head. Then they dumped his limp body into a river. When the men were tried, the all-white jury found them innocent. This case—and the lack of justice for this murdered boy—became a defining moment the new Civil Rights Movement rallied around.

During the 1960s, the Civil Rights protesters, most of whom adopted King's philosophy of nonviolence, sacrificed their bodies to the cause. Seeing black adults and children getting savagely attacked on television and in newspapers caused many white people to reconsider black people as the subjects, not perpetrators, of

violence, Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*. Lynchings stopped being popular public spectacles but rather "hate crimes" that took place in secret.

As the 1960s Civil Rights Movement marched forward and the country began to desegregate, fears about black criminality only increased, and President Richard Nixon launched his "war on crime" and "war on drugs"—which was expanded by President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Not surprisingly, the black brute caricature returned, first in 1970s blaxploitation films, B-films that supposedly portrayed a more realistic world of corrupt authorities, pimps, prostitutes, drug dealers, and tough, gun-toting criminals than the Stepin Fetchit movies had. While these films countered the decades of sexless and disempowered Toms and Mammies, featuring powerful black revolutionaries fighting racist forces, in reality, they were written, directed, and financed by whites who relied on old caricatures of blacks as overtly sexual and violent animalistic beings.



Two cards from the 1930s game 72 Pictured Party Stunts. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

"When you get to the 1970s, I think black people had grown tired of seeing Mammies, Toms, Sambos, and pickaninnys, these ignorant, one-dimensional characters, in the movies," Pilgrim says. "And so they embraced a whole new set of racial caricatures, reflected in the so-called blaxploitation movies. The black pimp, the black radical, the dope dealer, and the hustler emerged out of these films. One set of stereotypes was substituted for another."

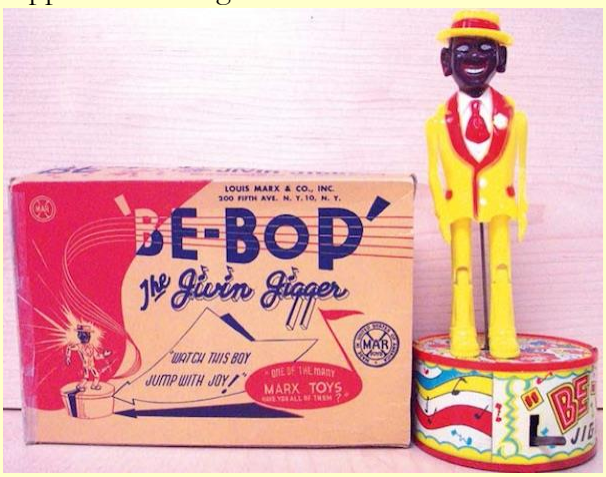
Then the lurking black menace became a staple of television cop shows, meant to embody the cruelty of city streets. Hard-hearted and remorseless brutes plundered, assaulted, raped, and murdered innocent victims on "Law and Order," "NYPD Blue," and "Homicide: Life on the Streets." New channels drummed up fear of black-on-white crime, to the point that white people who murdered their families would cover their crimes by trying to pin them on nameless black criminals. In a recent Salon article, Chauncey DeVega writes that in contrast to the exaggerated reports of "black crime," "there is no equivalent language of 'white crime' in America's dominant political discourse." In 2001, Denzel Washington won the Academy Award for playing the vile, back-stabbing cop Alonzo Harris in "Training Day," who, as Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*, is a modern version of the brute sociopath.

A postcard from the Bamforth series "Black Kids," produced in London from 1907 to 1915. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

While all these crime dramas depicted mostly white cops fighting black drug lords and homicidal monsters, in the real world off the big and little screens, black men were also more frequently arrested than white men for the same crimes and being punished more severely. In his October 2015 "Atlantic" cover story, "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration," Ta-Nehisi Coates explains, "From the mid-1970s to the mid-'80s, America's incarceration rate doubled. From the mid-'80s to the mid-'90s, it doubled again. By 2007, it had reached a historic high of 767 people per 100,000. In 2000, one in 10 black males between the ages of 20 and 40 was incarcerated—10 times the rate of their white peers. In 2010, a third of all black male high-school dropouts between the ages of 20 and 39 were imprisoned, compared with only 13 percent of their white peers."

According to the NAACP, African Americans now make up nearly 1 million of the total 2.3 million incarcerated population, and black people are imprisoned at nearly six times the rate of white people. Even though the rates of drug use are similar across all races in the United States, according to the Sentencing Project research, "African Americans serve virtually as much time in prison for a drug offense (58.7 months) as whites do for a violent offense (61.7 months)."

At the time of the Civil War, roughly 4 million African Americans were enslaved, providing labor that kept the American economy afloat. In Michelle Alexander's 2010 book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, she explores how the penal system is not unlike slavery: Federal and state prisons contract out their inmates as laborers to big corporations, while other prisons are simply owned by corporations. Prisoners make as little as $.17 per hour to minimum wage, if they're lucky. After they're released, ex-cons are stripped of their rights to vote and often have a difficult time finding jobs.



The "Be-Bop" toy from the 1950s. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

And other Jim Crow caricatures still haunt our culture, as Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*. In the 1970s, we saw them on TV: J.J. Walker on "Good Times" was an updated version of the coon, while his sister Thelma played the withering Sapphire role. Other sitcoms had their own sharp-tongued Sapphires: Aunt Esther on "Sanford and Son" and Florence Johnston in "The Jeffersons." Today, we still have women depicted as Sapphires, as Omarosa was on the reality show "The Apprentice." Like the black brute, the Jezebel re-emerged in 1970s blaxploitation films, wherein male pimps became folk heroes, but the women were demeaned. Even when the lead was a fierce woman, like Pam Grier in "Foxy Brown," Pilgrim argues, she was still portrayed as a sexual deviant. The insatiable, sex-addled Jezebel

caricature lives on today, particularly in online porn and music videos, as well as complaints about "welfare queens" who have too many children.

"I'm starting to hear more Americans saying that what we need to do as a country is look at some of the atrocities committed here and own up to them."

"Today, I would say the dominant image of young black men is probably a son of a brute, expressed as a hip-hop 'gangsta,' with sagging pants and an Uzi," Pilgrim tells me. "The Jezebel has resurfaced today as a 'hoochie mama' or 'ghetto whore.' The caricatures don't really die; they morph. The 'thug' is an updated version of the coon. You can go back and look at those coon songs from the 1890s, the depiction is not that different from what you see today."

What's unique about "Uncle Tom" as a slur is that it's most frequently invoked by blacks to describe black men, sometimes those in the unfortunate position of working for a white boss while overseeing black employees, Pilgrim explains in *Understanding Jim Crow*. Also called "race-traitors" and "white men's negroes," African Americans ranging from 1960s civil-rights leaders willing to work with white people to modern-day Republican politicians have been labeled Uncle Toms. In conservative arenas, public figures who embrace "respectability politics" like Bill Cosby and presidential candidates like Ben Carson can say things that their white colleagues believe but don't vocalize. They assert black people are to blame for their communities' problems and that the history of deeply entrenched white racism has nothing to do with it, often calling up caricatures of lazy "thugs" and "welfare queens" to make their cases.

This May 10, 1941, "Liberty" magazine cover shows a black porter as a Tom or a lazy, dumb coon. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

The "hoochie mama" Jezebel caricature is still being wrestled with in discussions about respectability politics. On one hand, in hip-hop music videos, many male artists surround themselves with beautiful, scantily clad young women, who are only there to serve as objectified props. Female pop, hip-hop, and R&B stars, however, often wear skimpy costumes and present themselves as powerful seductresses. The difference being that in the latter case, the woman is in control of her image and talking about her own desires—breaking free of the notion that black women's sexuality is something that is dangerous and must be policed.

"Maybe three weeks ago, I was watching an infomercial selling Motown CDs," Pilgrim tells me. "Middle-class and upper-class African Americans were in the audience, and these iconic musicians were on the stage. This is going to sound really corny, but just for a second, I thought to myself, 'Why not just forget about all this stuff and just dance?' And I chided myself about that a little bit, because I have heard that so much.

"Giving presentations on the road, I often will have someone say to me, 'If you didn't travel this country talking about race, racism would go away,'" he continues. "That doesn't even make stupid sense. The reality is we talk about race all the time. We talk about it in our restrooms, in our living rooms, at work. We talk about it in places where our ideas are not challenged. If I didn't build a museum, we wouldn't stop talking about race. What I hoped by building this was that we could talk about it, even the more painful things, in ways that are intelligent and sometimes difficult. But that is what a mature nation does. Race-based struggles and conflicts still occur in our country. Race still matters in the U.S., in ways that serve to limit people, that serve to shape and, forgive the pun, color interactions between people."

In this 1916 Cream of Wheat ad, a pickaninny boy who's stolen apples runs from a dog that has torn open the backside of his pants. (From *Understanding Jim Crow*)

As foreign as these Jim Crow artifacts may look to us now, we're still living in a country where white people irrationally fear a black menace will kill them, which has led to the murders of Oscar Grant in Oakland, California; Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri; Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Florida; and countless others. It's still a nation where African American children are viewed as wild, unruly animals destined for a life of crime—just look at the treatment of the teenage girl in Columbia, South Carolina; Dajerria Becton in McKinney, Texas; Tamir Rice and his sister in Cleveland, Ohio. In a recent survey by the Center for the Study of Race, Politics and Culture at the University of Chicago, more than half of African American men and women ages 18 to 34 said they or someone they knew had been harassed or brutalized by the police.

"One of the more powerful sections of the museum is a section on objects that have been made in the last 10 years," Pilgrim says. "Because our name implies we're only about another era, some people are surprised when they see two dozen objects on President Obama, where he's portrayed as a monkey, a Tom, a coon, or a Sambo. If you don't know history, then you don't know what those things are. But if you understand history, you see that even though the United States has made a tremendous amount of progress, the old stereotypes and some of the old patterns of relations between different groups still exist. That's why we should look at it, study it, talk about it. It's a history that, in some ways, has not ended."

Dr. David Pilgrim shakes hands with famed Harvard professor Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., at the Jim Crow Museum. Gates visited the museum with a PBS film crew while working on his award-winning 2013 documentary series, "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross." Gates also wrote the foreward for *Understanding Jim Crow*. (Via the Jim Crow Museum Facebook page)

(*To learn more, pick up a copy of "Understanding Jim Crow: Using Racist Memorabilia to Teach Tolerance and Promote Social Justice" or visit the Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia, 1010 Campus Drive, Ferris State University, Big Rapids, Michigan, open noon-5 p.m. Mondays-Fridays. The museum is featured in Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s PBS documentary series on the black American experience, "The African Americans: Many Rivers to Cross." The Jim Crow Museum also offers a touring exhibition "THEM: Images of Separation," which addresses objects used to stereotype and discriminate against other groups, including homosexuals, immigrants, and Arabic and Jewish people.*)

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