Jim Crow Notes

Obstacles to Voting

1. Poll Tax – A fee that had to be paid in order to vote. This was commonly used throughout the South and it proved to be very successful in preventing blacks from voting.
2. Literacy Test – A test that proved a person could read, write, and had minimum knowledge of government. These tests were given in a very unfair manner as whites and blacks were often given different tests with varying degrees of difficulty. These tests proved successful in preventing blacks in the South from voting.
3. Grandfather Clause – Many southern states passed these laws which stated that if a person had already voted prior to 1867 or if they had a relative who had voted prior to 1867, then they were exempt from things such as the poll tax and literacy test. Grandfather clauses clearly targeted blacks in the South since none could vote or had an ancestor who could vote prior to 1867.

Life Under Jim Crow

1. These laws were common throughout the South and they were designed to **segregate** the races. Jim Crow/segregation laws typically forbade blacks and whites from being able to use the same public places such as schools, restaurants, and movie theaters. These laws also segregated public transportation services such as busses and trains. Additionally, many states throughout the country passed laws making it illegal to marry a person of a different race.
2. Lynching – This is an act were a mob of people take “justice” into their own hands and kidnap and murder, typically by hanging, an individual they believe is guilty of a crime. In the South, lynchings were typically used as a form of harassment and intimidation against blacks. Persons who were lynched were usually innocent of committing a crime. Lynchings are racism taken to an extreme.

Supreme Court and Legal Battles

1. Plessy v. Ferguson – 1896 landmark Supreme Court case which declared segregation legal so long as there were “separate but equal” facilities for whites and blacks. Due to this ruling, southern states and cities were now free to pass segregation laws for any aspect of public life they saw fit including public schools.
2. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) – Founded in 1909 for the purpose of abolishing segregation laws and ending discrimination in areas such as housing and employment. The NAACP hired many lawyers to challenge segregation laws through the court system. The NAACP won its first of many victories when they won a Supreme Court case that declared grandfather clauses to be unconstitutional.