

## Read All About It!: The African American Press in the Jim Crow Years

In this lesson, students explore the organizational structure of newspapers and learn about the significance of the African American Press during the Jim Crow era.

### Lesson Summary

### Overview

Journalism was an avenue through which activists such as Ida B. Wells and W.E.B. Du Bois reached hundreds of thousands of readers. Newspaper coverage could incite white supremacists to riot, rally African Americans around a cause, inform a nation, and turn a local act of violence into a national event. This media-rich unit considers the role of newspapers and journalists in the struggle for civil rights.

### Objectives

Students will:

* analyze the organizational structure of newspapers;
* recognize the significance of the African American press during the Jim Crow era;
* identify key figures in the struggle against Jim Crow.

### Grade Level:

6-12

### Suggested Time

Up to seven 45-minute class periods (portions may be completed for homework)

### Media Resources

* [Ida B. Wells: A Lifetime of Activism](file:///C%3A%5Cresource%5Cbf09.socst.us.const.antilynch%5C) Video
* [Wilmington, North Carolina,1898: Prelude to a Riot](file:///C%3A%5Cresource%5Cbf10.socst.us.indust.wilming%5C) Video
* [Wilmington: A Peaceful City Turned Violent](file:///C%3A%5Cresource%5Cbf09.socst.us.const.lossrights%5C) Video
* [Walter White v W.E.B. Du Bois](file:///C%3A%5Cresource%5Cbf10.socst.us.prosp.crisis%5C) Video

**Note:** Some of the video content in this lesson is for mature audiences only. Be sure to preview all video segments carefully.

### Materials

[Newspaper Comparison](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_newscmphnd%5C)

[Read All About It](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_readhnd%5C)

[Examining the Crisis](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_examinhnd%5C)

**Suggested Bibliography:**

Anthony Appiah, Henry Louis Gates, editors. *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experiences*. (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999).

Kenneth Estell, editor. *The African-American Almanac*. (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1994).

Jack Salzman, Greg Robinson, editors. *Encyclopedia of African-American Culture and History*. (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 1996).

Anthony Appiah, Henry Louis Gates, editors. *Encarta Africana*. (CD-ROM), (Redmond, Wash.: Microsoft Corp., 1999).

### Web Sites

[Contents Page, The Crisis IXX. (December, 1919), p. 37](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1146.htm)

[J. W. Work, "It's Great to be a Problem," The Crisis XXI. (November, 1920), p. 18.](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1138.htm)

[Albert Alex Smith, "They Have Ears But They Hear Not," The Crisis XXI. (November, 1920), p. 17](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1139.htm)

["Men of the Month," (Image), The Crisis IXX. (November, 1919), p. 341](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1144.htm)

["Madonna. Photographed by Battey," (Image), The Crisis IXX. (December, 1919), Cover](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1140.htm)

[Advertisements [Howard University, etc.], (Image), The Crisis IXX. (November, 1919), p. 351](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1145.htm)

[Advertisement [Real Estate], (Image), The Crisis IXX. (November, 1919), p. 354](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1143.htm)

[Advertisements ["Colored Dolls," etc.], (Image), The Crisis IXX. (November, 1919), p. 358](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1142.htm)

[Advertisement [Madame C.J. Walker], (Image), The Crisis IXX. (November, 1919), p. 359](http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1141.htm)

[***The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow***](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/)

[African American World](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/aaworld/index.html)

[Black Voices](http://www.blackvoices.com/)

### Before The Lesson

* Assemble a collection of local newspapers representing different constituencies for the Introductory Activity.
* Visit your school library or media center and confirm the availability of the books and resources listed on this page under "Suggested Bibliography." Your librarian or media specialist may be able to recommend similar resources.

### The Lesson

### Introductory Activity

One to two 45-minute class periods

1. This introductory activity engages students in an analysis of newspapers, including how newspapers are organized and operated, and how they represent different constituencies. Begin by collecting a variety of news publications representing different groups in your community. These might include major local daily papers, community papers, or the newspapers of local ethnic or immigrant communities. You may wish to involve students in gathering these sources (especially if some students have foreign language skills and can help to guide other students in analyzing the content of the local foreign language press.) If so, be sure to give yourself sufficient time to gather the newspapers before scheduling this activity.

2. Organize students into groups of three or four and be sure you have enough newspapers to distribute among the groups. (You may have to provide duplicate copies.)

3. Explain to students that newspapers generally distinguish between the "straight reporting" of the news and editorials or opinions. Reporting is meant to convey journalistic information--the "who, what, where, when and why" of a story. The editorial policy of the newspaper is reflected in its editorials. Opinion pieces often represent a variety of points of view solicited from sources unconnected with the newspaper (for example, syndicated or local columnists or writers.) Have students find the editorial section of the newspaper and compare a news article, an editorial piece and an opinion piece. Distribute the [Newspaper Comparison](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_newscmphnd%5C) handout to each student. Ask students to complete the handout in their groups and then discuss their answers with the entire class.

### Learning Activity – Part I

One 45-minute class period

1. Tell students they are going to watch a series of video segments from *The Rise and Fall ofJim Crow*. These videos highlight the role journalists and newspapers played in the struggle for civil rights during the Jim Crow era. Distribute the [Read All About It](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_readhnd%5C) handout to each student. Allow students to work in groups or independently. Ask them to review thequestions on the handout before watching the video segments in the order presented on the handout.

3. Following each segment, allow time for groups to discussthe questions among themselves.

### Learning Activity – Part II

One 45- minute class period

Under the editorship of W.E.B. Du Bois, the NAACP's news journal *The Crisis* gained prominence as a significant voice for African Americans. In this next activity students look at material from issues of *The Crisis* published in 1919 and 1920. Distribute the [Examining the Crisis](file:///C%3A%5Casset%5Cbf10_doc_examinhnd%5C) handout. Ask students to review all the websites listed on the handout and answer the questions individually or in groups. Discuss.

### Culminating Activity/Assessment

Two to three 45-minute class periods (this activity can also be assigned as homework)

1. In this final activity students create African American newspapers that focus on the following events:

* End of Reconstruction (1877)
* Formation of the NAACP (1909)
* Entry into World War II (1941)
* Brown v. Board of Education (1954)

2. Have students form groups of five that will act as each newspaper's editorial staff. Assign each group one of the focus events listed above. (Some focus events may be covered by more than one group.) Students should assign a journalistic role to each member of their group: Editor, Reporter, Editor for Correspondence, Lifestyles Editor, Business Editor.

3. Using the video resources listed in the Media Resources section, students should research their focus event and the era in which it took place, as well as its significance to African Americans. The student editorial staff will work on the creation of a Focus Newspaper, which should contain the following sections:

* A news story reporting on the focus event. (Reporter)
* An editorial commenting on the focus event and how it will affect African Americans. (Editor)
* Letters to the editor commenting on the focus event. (Editor for Correspondence)
* A section profiling notable African Americans of the day (e.g., sports, literary, political, educational or religious leaders). (Lifestyles Editor)
* Advertisements reflecting African American businesses, goods and services of the day. (Business Editor)

4. Have students assemble these components into a newspaper using a desktop publishing program. Post finished newspapers in the classroom.

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