African-American Life in the South in the 1960s

In the 1960s, African-Americans in the southern United States lived in sharp contrast to white citizens in the region. African-Americans' limited access to jobs and healthcare diminished their quality of life, while Jim Crow laws and segregation forced African-Americans to experience daily discrimination and racism.

Across the United States in the 1960s, African-Americans experienced a lower standard of living than white Americans. Unemployment rates for blacks were twice as high as unemployment rates of whites, and African-Americans with jobs still earned half as much as white Americans with similar jobs. A lack of income forced individuals and families to cut expenses, including healthcare, which meant that African-Americans lived an average of seven years less than whites.

Due to limited financial resources and opportunities available to them, African-Americans also had less education than whites. Only fifty percent of African-American students graduated from high school, and only one-third completed college. These factors led to a repeating cycle of low income, diminished education, and decreased quality of life for African-Americans.

While African-Americans throughout the United States suffered, individuals and families in the South endured the greatest indignities due to the Jim Crow laws that legalized segregation across in the region. Instituted in the 1870s after the Civil War, Jim Crow laws, named after an older, black man in a popular song, enforced a “separate, but equal” mentality across the South. This “separate, but equal” approach legalized specific restaurants, water fountains, schools, restrooms, and public transportation where African-Americans were allowed. Thus, African-Americans were not welcomed in numerous neighborhoods, public gathering places, and religious or social organizations across the South.

This legalized segregation thus led to inferior living and educational conditions for African-Americans. While white students enjoyed high-quality school buildings with new supplies, black students frequently attended poorly maintained schools with minimal books and resources. Even when they were allowed to intermingle on venues such as public transportation, blacks were forced to sit or stand in the back of the bus even if there were seats available in the white section. Thus, whites were always allowed a seat, while even elderly African-Americans were forced to stand if a white person needed a seat on a bus. While this discrimination persisted and was ingrained throughout the South, many African-Americans, supported by groups of white Americans, grew increasingly intolerant of this situation and began to demand equality during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s.

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Questions

1. How was the quality of life of African-Americans different from that of

white Americans?

a. African-Americans and white Americans lived the same.

b. African-Americans had less access to healthcare, lower incomes, and

less education than white Americans.

c. African-Americans had better healthcare and more education than

white Americans.

2. blacks and whites were treated differently on public transportation in the

south.

a. True

b. False

3. Infer what the word “segregation” means in the following sentence.

‘This legalized segregation thus led to inferior living and educational

conditions for African-Americans.’

a. pointing out the specific qualities of a race, class, or group of people

b. showing prejudice against a specific race, class, or group of people

c. separating a race, class, or group of people through discriminatory

means

d. singling out a race, class, or group of people for special treatment

4. What were “Jim Crow” laws? How did they effect African-Americans in the

south?