

The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi

Stephen A. Berrey

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The South's system of Jim Crow racial oppression is usually understood in terms of legal segregation that mandated the separation of white and black Americans. Yet, as Stephen A. Berrey shows, it was also a highstakes drama that played out in the routines of everyday life, where blacks and whites regularly interacted on sidewalks and buses and in businesses and homes. Every day, individuals made, unmade, and remade Jim Crow in how they played their racial roles--how they moved, talked, even gestured. The highly visible but often subtle nature of these interactions constituted the Jim Crow routine.

In this study of Mississippi race relations in the final decades of the Jim Crow era, Berrey argues that daily interactions between blacks and whites are central to understanding segregation and the racial system that followed it. Berrey shows how civil rights activism, African Americans' refusal to follow the Jim Crow script, and national perceptions of southern race relations led Mississippi segregationists to change tactics. No longer able to rely on the earlier routines, whites turned instead to less visible but equally insidious practices of violence, surveillance, and policing, rooted in a racially coded language of law and order. Reflecting broader national transformations, these practices laid the groundwork for a new era marked by black criminalization, mass incarceration, and a growing police presence in everyday life.



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