

# This is America

## Key Aspect - Society



# Key Aspect - Society

- When studying media we have to think about how the society in which the text was produced has influenced what we are shown.
- We can think about this in two ways:
  - Influence of TIME
  - Influence of PLACE
- How do you think This is America is influenced by its setting in **time**?
- How do you think This is America is influenced by its setting in **place**?

Jim Crow



# Jim Crow

- The **Jim Crow** persona was a theatre character by Thomas D. Rice and an ethnic depiction in accordance with contemporary white ideas of African-Americans and their culture.
- The character was based on a folk trickster named Jim Crow that had long been popular among black slaves.
- The "Jim Crow" character as portrayed by Rice popularized the perception of African-Americans as lazy, untrustworthy, dumb, and unworthy of integration.

# Jim Crow

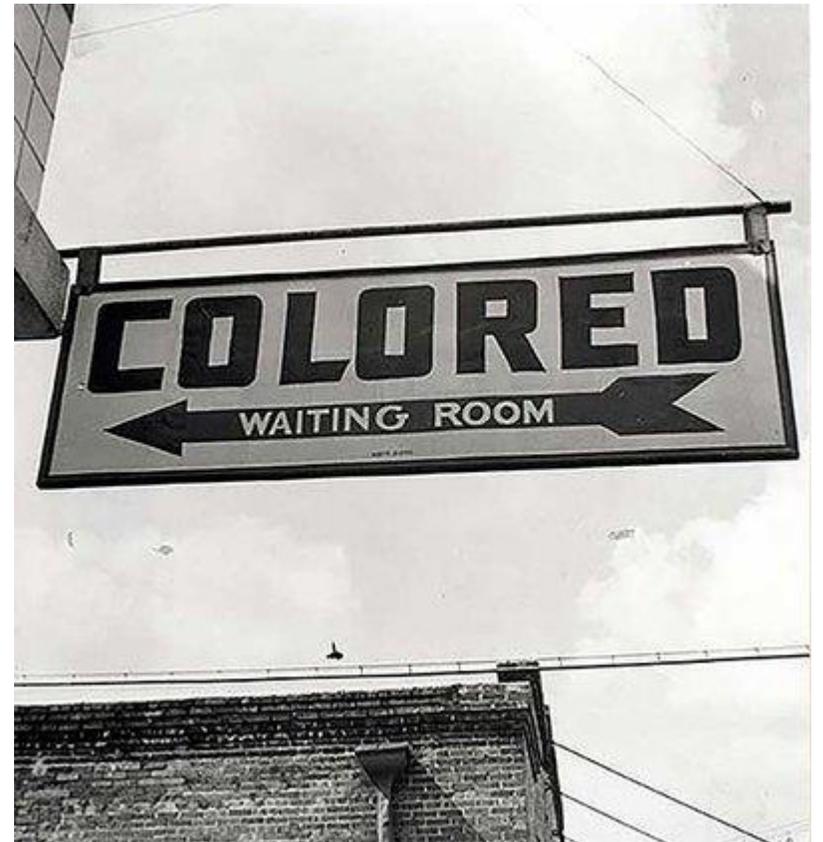
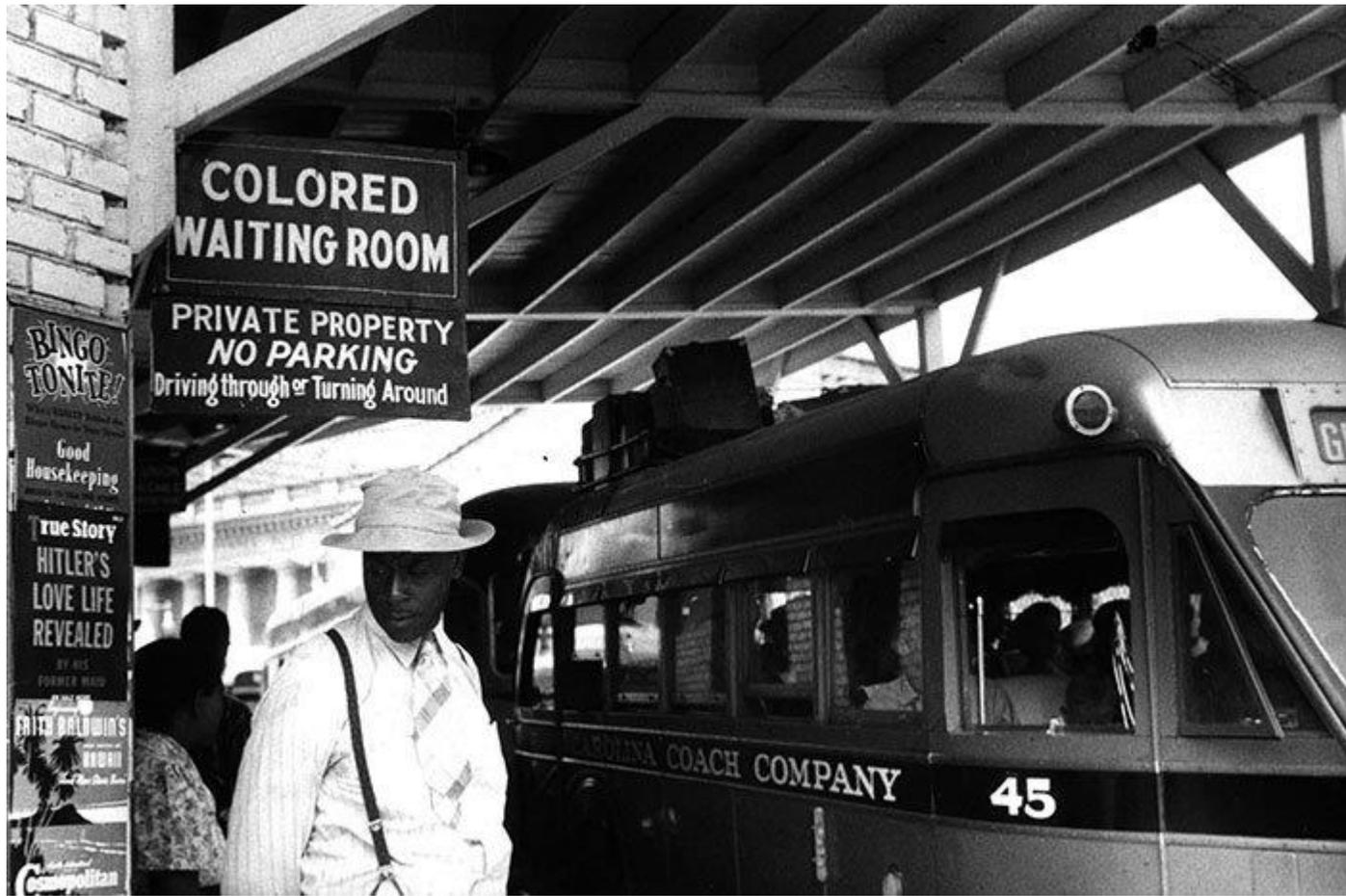
- As a result of Rice's fame, "Jim Crow" by 1838 had become a pejorative expression meaning "Negro".
- When southern legislatures passed laws of racial segregation directed against blacks at the end of the 19th century, these statutes became known as Jim Crow laws.

# Jim Crow laws

- **Jim Crow laws** were state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the Southern United States.
- The segregation and disenfranchisement laws known as "Jim Crow" represented a formal, codified system of racial apartheid that dominated the American South for three quarters of a century beginning in the 1890s.
- The laws affected almost every aspect of daily life, mandating segregation of schools, parks, libraries, drinking fountains, restrooms, buses, trains, and restaurants. "Whites Only" and "Colored" signs were constant reminders of the enforced racial order.

# Jim Crow laws

- In legal theory, blacks received "separate but equal" treatment under the law — in actuality, public facilities for blacks were nearly always inferior to those for whites, when they existed at all.
- In addition, blacks were systematically denied the right to vote in most of the rural South through the selective application of literacy tests and other racially motivated criteria



# Twitter Reaction

- Justin Simien, the filmmaker behind “Dear White People,” tweeted a “love letter” to the video, breaking down its use of Jim Crow imagery.



# Twitter Reaction

- “Jim Crow began as one of the first fits of white American culture to address it’s former African slaves (and their descendants) at all,” Simien wrote. “A minstrelsy mainstay played by white men in black face, and sometimes by black men in black face.”
- “Jim Crow began as mere pop culture entertainment at the expense of America’s freed slaves and became the means of their oppression,”

# America's Gun Obsession



vevo

# America's Gun Obsession

- Each time Childish Gambino fires a gun in “This Is America,” he hands it off to someone who whisks it away in a red cloth.
- These actions could be interpreted as a reference to Americans’ willingness to protect gun rights over people, despite the country’s alarmingly high rates of gun violence.
- The red cloth could represent ‘Red America’ which is Republican, conservative voters who are more likely to want to uphold the Second Amendment right to bear arms.

# Charleston massacre



# Charleston massacre



# Charleston massacre

- One of the most disturbing scenes in “This Is America” features an all-black church choir getting shot up with an assault-style rifle.
- The massacre appears to be a reference to the 2015 mass shooting at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, in which a white gunman killed nine black churchgoers.



**Viral videos of police brutality and  
racism**



# Viral videos

- In one scene, black teenagers use their phones to record the chaos unfolding below, as their mouths appear to be covered by a white material.
- This could be seen as a reference to the rise of viral videos of police brutality and racist encounters to overcome the metaphorical muzzling of black people in a white supremacist system.

**Traffic stop killings**



vevo

# Traffic stop killings

- Toward the end of the video, Childish Gambino dances atop a red car surrounded by other decades-old cars with their hazard lights flashing and doors open.
- Viewers drew connections to the black men routinely killed by police during traffic stops.

# Exam Style Question

- Media content cannot be separated from its context in society. Explain in detail how media content you have studied has been affected by the society in which it was made and/or set.
- 8 marks

# Exam Style Question

- Media content reflects ideas from the time/place in which it was made and/or set.

(a) Describe relevant ideas from the time and/or place of the media content you have studied. 4 marks

(b) Explain in detail how this content reflects these ideas. 6 marks