

JH Griffin – An experiment in race

1/10	3/10	5/10	8/10	10/10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation between blacks and whites in the United States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two people talking • 1959 • Black people didn't have access to the same schools and hospitals as whites • A white man decides to change the color of his skin and become black 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentary on John Howard Griffin • A man and a woman present his life • November 1959 • Griffin is a journalist • He decided to live as a black man because he was blind • As a blind man, he couldn't tell if people were black or white • He wrote a book about his experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African-Americans are second-class citizens • They don't have access to the same facilities • Griffin became blind after being injured during WW2 • As a blind man, he thought that people talking had the same accent • When he asked to black people what it was to be black, they always answered that you have to be black • He was determined to make this experience • His book is called <i>Black Like Me</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Segregation is part of the very fabric of society • He remained blind for a decade • He was afraid his thin lips and straight nose might give him away, but it was not a real problem • People assumed that black people all looked alike • His effigy was burnt before his book was published • His book is still taught in schools and universities today

Transcript :

“It’s November 1959 and in the Southern States of USA, segregation between blacks and whites is part of the very fabric of society. African-Americans are second-class citizens without access to school, hospitals, housing and other facilities used by whites; lynching’s not uncommon. It’s in this tense atmosphere that a white journalist; John Howard Griffin, decides to change the color of his skin and live as black man. One of the influences behind his radical decision was his loss of sight: after being injured as a soldier in the 2nd world war he remained blind for almost a decade.”

“In the most obvious way if you’re blind, you’re not perceiving the color of one’s skin. He couldn’t tell whether he was listening to white or black people, they all had the same accent.”

“He often asked African-Americans about their experiences living on the segregation, but he always got the same response.”

“If you want to know what it’s like to be black, you have to be black and you can’t otherwise know – so bingo, he thought.”

“Griffin was determined to go ahead with his experiment.”

“He had thin lips, and he had a straight nose and he thought that all these things would give him away. But they were not a real problem. All they saw was the color, they just assumed that they all looked alike.”

“Griffin wrote a book about his experiences, but before it was even published, his effigy was being burnt in his hometown in Texas. Griffin’s book *Black Like Me* is still taught in schools and universities across the US.”