

# **AN INCOMPLETE HISTORY OF RACISM AND RESISTANCE TO RACISM IN THE UNITED STATES**

## **History of Racism in the United States**

- 1492 Christopher Columbus arrives in the Americas. Columbus makes four trips altogether in his life. Spanish settlement develops on the island of Hispaniola as a result of his second trip. It is said that Columbus set in motion a pattern of colonization involving destruction of tribal cultures and deaths of indigenous people that continued throughout the next two hundred years.
- 1503 Queen Isabella of Spain establishes labor policy for forcing Native Americans to both work the land for settlers and convert to Christianity.
- 1600s Colony of Virginia, House of Burgesses declares that a “white person is someone who has no trace whatsoever of any blood other than Caucasian.”
- 1624 Africans are imported as slaves to the Hudson River Valley in New York.
- 1664 Maryland enacts first law to prevent intermarriage of English women to black men. Other colonies pass similar laws.
- 1763 Items taken from a smallpox infirmary are distributed among Native American populations as “gifts” during a peace parley with Pontiac’s Confederacy. About 100,000 Native Americans die of smallpox in the ensuing epidemic.
- 1776 Declaration of Independence adopted in U.S.. A section denouncing the slave trade was deleted.
- 1776 The U.S. promises that Native Americans’ “land and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress.”

- 1787 During the Constitutional Convention, southern delegates threaten to pull out on several occasions when it appears that the institution of slavery might be threatened. The 3/5 Compromise is adopted; slaves are to be counted as 3/5 of a person for the purpose of strengthening Southern representation in Congress and the electoral college. Alexander Hamilton admits that the 3/5 Compromise is the “sine qua non” of ratification; without it, no Union could be formed. Of the first 12 U.S. presidents, all except John Adams and John Quincy Adams owned slaves.
- 1793 First fugitive slave law enacted by U.S. Congress. The measure makes it a criminal offense to harbor a fugitive slave or prevent his or her arrest.
- 1803 The U.S. buys from France a large portion of land west of the Mississippi River. President Thomas Jefferson proposes that many of the Native American nations living east of the Mississippi River be removed west of the river to lands where they would be out of the way of U.S. settlers.
- 1830 Congress votes in favor of the Indian Removal Act, and this becomes an integral element of national Native American policy. During the 1830s and 1840s the U.S. Army forces thousands of Native American families to leave their belongings and move to lands west of present-day Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Arkansas and Oklahoma. The U.S. forces the Cherokee onto “The Trail of Tears,” which directly results in the death of 4,000 to 8,000 people.
- 1853-56 Many Native American nations are induced to sell most of their remaining land and accept small parcels of land commonly called “reservations.” In this period, more than 52 treaties are made with Native American groups, and the U.S. acquires 174 million acres of Native American land. Driven to poverty, Native Americans are forced to trade land for goods.

- 1804 The arrival of 13,000 Chinese marks the beginning of large-scale immigration from China; Chinese workers are primarily employed in building the transcontinental railroad.
- 1880 Boarding schools for Native American children are established in the U.S. Children are taken from their homes and communities to be taught “American” traditions and Christianity.
- 1882 The Chinese Exclusion Act bans immigration of Chinese laborers for 10 years and prohibits naturalization. This marks the first time the US has restricted immigration on the basis of race or national origin.
- 1915 Klux Klan receives charter from Fulton County, Georgia. By 1924, the organization is strong in Oklahoma, Indiana, California, Oregon and Ohio.
- 1918 Members of the Ku Klux Klan are angered by the sight of African American soldiers returning from WWI in military uniform. Race riots occur in 26 cities. One of the worst is in Greenwood, the black section of Tulsa, where over 300 black citizens are killed in one day, many by Klansmen deputized for the occasion.
- 1930 Great Depression shuts down Mexican immigration and the first repatriation programs begin; between 300,000 to 500,000 Mexicans, many of whom are American citizens, are returned to Mexico over the next five years.
- 1932-72 At the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, 400 Black men with syphilis are purposely not treated for the disease and allowed to sicken and die so doctors from the U.S. Public Health Service could study the disease. The men were never told they had syphilis and were denied treatment even after penicillin was known to be a cure.
- 1930s In order to spur construction and create jobs during the Depression, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) is created. The FHA underwrites private housing loans, making

it possible for the first time to buy a home with only a 10% down payment. The FHA's Underwriting Manual explicitly encourages developers to include "whites only" covenants in their deeds.

- 1944 The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the relocation and detention of all people of Japanese ancestry in "War relocation centers" regardless of "loyalty" to the U.S. or U.S. citizenship.
- 1945 The U.S. drops the only two atomic bombs ever used on civilian populations on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, immediately killing over 100,000 people.
- 1950s The U.S. begins "Operation Wetback," deporting approximately 3.8 million persons of Mexican descent over the next five years, including political activist Luisa Moreno and other Mexican American leaders.
- 1954 Emmet Till, aged 14, on summer vacation from Chicago, is kidnapped and lynched in Money, Mississippi.
- 1975 American Indian Movement Leader Leonard Peiter, 32, is found guilty of two charges of first-degree murder in the shooting deaths of two FBI agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation and is sentenced to two consecutive life terms. Many consider him to be a political prisoner.
- 1979 The Greensboro Massacre occurs. The Communist Party, in their efforts to organize industrial workers, most of whom are black, hold an anti-Klan rally. The police issue a permit only if they agree to be unarmed. An informant to the police organizes a Klan caravan to the event, and maintains radio contact with police while the caravan travels to the event. After police go on a lunch break, the caravan of Klansmen arrive and open fire on the marchers, killing five. The two criminal trials in the case resulted in acquittals of all defendants, despite the fact that the shootings were caught on at least four video cameras.

- 1982 Vincent Chin, a Chinese American draftsman who had lived all his life in the U.S. is clubbed to death in a Detroit bar by two white, unemployed autoworkers who believed he was Japanese American. Citizens for Justice organizes to protest the light sentences of three years probation and a fine of \$3,780 each.
- 1994 California passes proposition 187 declaring undocumented immigrants ineligible for public social services, public health services and public education.
- 2001 In the wake of 9/11, hundreds of hate crimes were directed at Arab Americans, Muslims and Sikhs throughout the country, crimes ranging from vandalism to verbal assaults to the murder of a Sikh restaurant owner in Arizona. He was mistaken for an Arab.
- 2002 The U.S. enacts the National Security Entry-Exit Registration System (NSEERS), or “Special Registration,” requiring men from 25 countries (24 of which are either Arab, Muslim or both) to report for mandatory “interviews.”
- 2005 A group calling itself the Civil Rights Initiative, supported by Ward Connerly from California, obtained signatures to put the repeal of Affirmative Action on the ballot in Michigan during the 2006 mid-term elections. Voters passed the initiative in 2006.
- 2007 A professor at Columbia University’s Teachers College in New York found 4 feet of twine fashioned into a noose hanging on the door of the office of Madonna Constantine, a professor of psychology and education who had written extensively on racism. Nooses were found on other campuses that year including Reed College in Oregon, the University of Maryland and Central Michigan University.

## History of Resistance to Racism in the United States

- 1676 In Virginia, scores of blacks joined with a group of white indentured servants and unemployed workers to stage what became known as Bacon's Rebellion—a multiracial class-based insurrection.
- 1688 Four Quakers drew up the "Germantown Protest." They listed five reasons why slavery should be abolished: 1) It violated the Golden rule; 2) It was wicked, for it traded in human beings with immortal souls and separated families and encouraged adultery; 3) It was based on thievery; 4) It besmirched the name of Pennsylvania; and 5) It was dangerous.
- 1730 The captive Africans on the Massachusetts schooner William conspired together and killed almost all the crew and then made their way back to the shore.
- 1775 First abolitionist society in United States organized in Philadelphia.
- 1800 The black community in Philadelphia, under the leadership of Absolem Jones, sent a petition to Congress calling for legislative action against the African slave trade. The House voted 85-1 to offer "no encouragement or countenance" to such messages from the children of Africa in America.
- 1829 David Walker published his 75-page pamphlet entitled *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World. But in Particular and very Expressly to those of the United States of America* in which he counseled armed struggle against the white oppressors.
- 1831 The Nat Turner Rebellion in Southampton County, VA. Some sixty whites were killed. Turner eluded capture for nearly two months, but was eventually caught and hung.
- 1843 National black convention meets in Buffalo, NY with some 70 delegates from twelve states. The highlight of the

convention is a stirring address by Henry Highland Garnet who calls for a slave revolt and a general slave strike.

- 1848 Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery in Maryland. Later she returns to rescue the rest of her family. This is the first of 19 secret trips she makes to the south, guiding more than 300 slaves to freedom. Known as the Black Moses by her people, plantation owners offer a \$40,000 reward for her capture.
- 1850 In response to the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, a farmer in Middelfield, Connecticut, William Lyman, calls together other farmers in the area and they issue this public pronouncement: “The Fugitive Slave Law commands all good citizens to be slave-catchers; good citizens cannot be slave-catchers any more than light can be darkness. You tell us, the Union will be endangered if we oppose the law. We reply that greater things than the Union will be endangered if we oppose this law. We reply that greater things than the Union will be endangered if we submit to it. Conscience, Humanity, Self-Respect are greater than the Union, and these must be pursued at all hazards. This pretended law commands us to withhold food and raiment and shelter from the most needy—we cannot obey.”
- 1867 2,000 Chinese railroad workers in California strike for a week.
- 1884 Ida B. Wells leads a campaign against segregation on the local railway in Memphis. After being forcibly removed from a whites-only carriage, she successfully sues the Chesapeake, Ohio & South Western Railway Company. However, this is overturned three years later by a ruling from the Tennessee Supreme Court. Wells uses her savings to become part owner of Free Speech, a small newspaper in Memphis that investigates and reports lynchings. When Wells writes an article in 1892 condemning the lynching of three black businessmen, a white mob destroys her printing press. She continues to expose lynching for years to come and is a founding member of the NAACP.

- 1895 W.E.B. DuBois becomes the first African American to receive a Ph.D. from Harvard. He teaches economics and history at Atlanta University and in 1903 publishes his ground-breaking *The Souls of Black Folks*. In 1905, he helps to form the Niagara Movement, a precursor to the NAACP, of which DuBois was also a founder.
- 1902 Lone Wolf, a Kiowa leader, files a lawsuit to prevent the Interior Department from expropriating tribal land for public use. The Supreme Court rules against him, giving Congress the authority to decide how to deal with and dispose of all Indian lands.
- 1912 The Native Sons of the Golden State is established in Los Angeles for American born Chinese who are born in California. Its purpose is to protect the civil rights of Chinese Americans.
- 1917 More than 10,000 African Americans march down Fifth Avenue in New York City in a silent parade to protest lynching and racial indignities.
- 1922 Congress passes the Indian Citizenship Act, granting U.S. citizenship to Native Americans. Several nations including the Hopi and the Iroquois, decline citizenship in favor of retaining sovereign nationhood.
- 1927 A confederation of Mexican labor unions is organized in California to help Mexican workers seek fair wages and an end to discrimination.
- 1929 The Japanese American Citizens League is formed to address discrimination against persons of Japanese ancestry residing in the U.S.
- 1943 During the internment of Japanese citizens in detention camps, the U.S. government asks Japanese males of draft age to sign a loyalty oath forswearing allegiance to the Japanese Emperor and asking if they would be willing to serve in the U.S. armed forces. Over 4,000 men refuse to answer the

questions or give negative answers. They become known as the “No No Boys.” Some are arrested and jailed.

- 1954 The League of United Latin American Citizens ends the segregation of Mexican American prisoners at the Texas State prison in Huntsville.
- 1955 NAACP member Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the bus to a white passenger, defying a southern custom of the time. In response to her arrest, Jo Ann Robinson and other black women organize the Montgomery Bus Boycotts. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. becomes president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, to direct boycott strategy. On Dec. 21, 1956, the buses are desegregated.
- 1960 After having been refused service at the lunch counter of a Woolworth’s in Greensboro, North Carolina, Joseph McNeill, a black college student, returns the next day with three classmates to sit at the counter until they are served. They are not served but they return to the lunch counter each day. More students, both black and white join them. Students across the nation are inspired to launch similar protests.
- 1962 Cesar Chavez leads the United Farm Workers to win bargaining power for Mexican American migrant workers.
- 1963 More than 250,000 people participate in the March on Washington, the largest civil rights demonstration ever held in the U.S.
- 1967 Speaking out against the War in Vietnam, Dr. Martin Luther King makes connections between the war and racism in the U.S.
- 1968 The American Indian Movement (AIM) is founded in Minneapolis to work for civil rights for Native Americans and to help Indian people organize for self-protection against governmental, police and judicial abuse.

- 1972 Shirley Chisolm, the first African American woman elected to Congress in 1968, runs for President of the United States. Her motto is “unbossed and unbought.”
- 1974 Affirmative Action Policies are implemented nation-wide.
- 1977-85 As a protest against apartheid in South Africa, 55 universities and colleges across the U.S. partially or fully divest funds from companies doing business with South Africa. 30 of those divest between April and October of 1985 due to protest actions. The United States government is also forced to act because of the magnitude of divestment and boycott campaigns.
- 1979 Two thousand Native Americans demonstrate against the development of uranium mines in the Black Hills of South Dakota. Tribal leaders whose reservations contain energy resources and the governors of western states sign an agreement to ensure that tribal concerns will be considered in any national effort to achieve energy independence.
- 1997 Million Man March in Washington, D.C., organized by the NAACP and the Nation of Islam. Conservative estimates are that at least 400,000 people attend.
- 2004 In order to bring healing and transformation to the community 25 years after the Greensboro Massacre, a multiracial coalition forms the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project. The Project elects seven commissioners to hold public hearings and to investigate the truth behind the events of November 3, 1979.