

# History of Racism and Immigration Time Line

## *Key Events in the Struggle for Racial Equality in the United States*

**1790:** Naturalization Act of 1790; Citizenship restricted to free Whites.

**1819:** Congress passes Civilization Act of 1819 to assimilate Native Americans. This law provided U.S. government funds to subsidize Protestant missionary educators in order to convert Native Americans to Christianity.

**1827:** *Freedom's Journal*, first African American newspaper appears.

Cherokee Republic formed in attempt to avoid forced removal.

**1830:** Congress passes Indian Removal Act, legalized removal of all Indians east of Mississippi to lands west of the river.

**1831–1838:** Indian tribes forcibly resettled to West in Trail of Tears. As part of Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policy, the Cherokee nation was forced to give up its lands east of the Mississippi River and to migrate to an area in present-day Oklahoma. The Cherokee people called this journey the "Trail of Tears," because of its devastating effects. The migrants faced hunger, disease, and exhaustion on the forced march. Over 4,000 out of 15,000 of the Cherokee died.

**1835–1842:** Seminoles resist removal in Second Seminole War.

**1845:** U.S. government annexes Texas.

**1846:** U.S. government declares war on Mexico.

**1848:** U.S. defeats Mexico and "purchases" for \$15 million over one-third of the Mexican nation. The land includes the future states of California, Texas, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, and parts of Colorado and Wyoming.

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo cedes Mexican territory in Southwest to the U.S. The treaty promises to protect the land, language, and culture of Mexicans living in the ceded territory. Mexicans are given the right to become U.S. citi-

zens if they decide to stay. However, Congress refuses to pass Article X, which stipulated the protection of the ancestral lands of Mexican people. Instead, Congress requires them to prove, in U.S. courts, speaking English, with U.S. lawyers, that they have legitimate titles to their lands.

Arrival of large numbers of Chinese laborers to the West Coast to work in the mining and agricultural industry. Many of these laborers also help build the Transcontinental Railroad.

**1849:** The Hounds, a white vigilante group in San Francisco, attacks a Chilean mining community, raping women, burning houses, and lynching two men.

**1850:** The California legislature passes the Foreign Miners Tax, which requires Chinese and Latin American gold miners to pay a special tax on their holdings, a tax not required of European American miners.

Congress passes the Fugitive Slave Law allowing federal marshals to capture runaway slaves and enlist the assistance of other Whites; also makes it possible for a black person to be captured as a slave solely on the sworn statement of a white person with no right to challenge the claim in court.

**1855:** California requires all instruction to be conducted in English.

**1857:** *Dred Scott v. Sandford* endorses southern views on race in the territories when Dred Scott, a slave who followed his owner to a free state, sued for his freedom. The Supreme Court ruled that Scott was still a slave.

**1859:** White abolitionist John Brown leads raid on Harper's Ferry arsenal to get weapons for arming slaves to resist slavery. Most of his men were killed, and he was tried for treason and hanged.

**1862:** President Lincoln signs Homestead Act allotting 160 acres of western land — Native American land — to "anyone" who could pay \$1.25 and cultivate it for five years. European immigrants and land speculators bought 50 million acres. Congress gave another 100 million acres of Indian land free to the railroads. Since the Homestead Act applied only to U.S. citizens, Native Americans, Blacks and non-European immigrants were excluded.

**1863:** President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation as the nation approaches the third year of bloody civil war declaring "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free." It applied only to states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in loyal border states; and also exempted parts of the Confederacy that had already come under Northern control. Thus the freedom it promised depended upon Union military victory.

**1864:** Ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery.

The U.S. army massacres 300 Cheyenne Indians in the Sand Creek Massacre.

**1866–1877:** Reconstruction tried to bring Southern states back into the union and build a non-slave society with full civil rights for former slaves. Black and white teachers from the north traveled south to build schools and teach former slaves eager to become literate. With the protection of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, African Americans participated in politics, voted, used public accommodations. The former confederates fought against reconstruction and eventually eroded newly gained rights of freedman.

**1866:** Congress passes Civil Rights Act of 1866.

- 1868:** Treaty of Fort Laramie agrees that Whites will not enter Black Hills without Indian permission, but when gold is found there, the terms of treaty are changed by Congress without Indian consent.
- 1870:** Texas law requires English as the language of school instruction.  
Naturalization Act of 1870 revises the Naturalization Act of 1790 and the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment so that naturalization is limited to white persons and persons of African descent, effectively excluding Chinese and other Asian immigrants from naturalization.
- 1871:** A white mob in Los Angeles attacks a Chinese community, killing 19 and destroying the community.  
Congress passes Indian Appropriations Act, dissolving the status of Indian tribes as nations.
- 1872–1874:** U.S. government permits white traders to slaughter buffalo in order to rid the Plains of Indians. By 1874, Plain Indians — Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Comanche — have lost control of their territory.
- 1875:** Page Law. Congress bars entry of Chinese, Japanese, and “Mongolian” prostitute, felons, and contract laborers.
- 1876:** Battle of Little Big Horn; Sioux annihilate white troops led by General Custer.  
Reciprocity treaty between Kingdom of Hawaii and the United States that allowed for duty-free importation of Hawaiian grown cane sugar into the U.S. This act permanently altered the Hawaiian landscape by promoting sugar plantation agriculture.
- 1878:** U.S. Supreme Court rules Chinese individuals are ineligible for naturalized citizenship.
- 1880–1881:** Helen Hunt Jackson's *A Century of Dishonor* influences public conscience about poor government treatment of Indians.
- 1882:** Chinese Exclusion Act. Congress prohibits Chinese immigration for 10 years, bowing to pressure from nativists on the West Coast, (renewed 1892, made permanent 1902, repealed 1943).
- 1882–1990:** 3,011 recorded lynchings of African Americans primarily, but not exclusively, in the South.
- 1883:** Supreme Court strikes down 1875 Civil Rights Act and reinforces claim that the federal government cannot regulate behavior of private individuals in matters of race relations.
- 1886:** Apache warrior, Geronimo, surrenders to the U.S. army. His surrender marks the defeat of Southwest Indian nations.
- 1887:** Dawes Act dissolves tribal lands, granting land allotments to individual families leading to division of Indian territory and encroachment by Whites on Indian land. This act explicitly prohibits communal land ownership.  
The Supreme Court decides in favor of the Maxwell Company, a division of the Santa Fe Ring, allocating millions of acres of Mexican and Indian land in New Mexico to the Anglo corporation.
- 1890:** The Wounded Knee massacre by the U.S. Army marks the end of 19<sup>th</sup>-century struggle of the Plain Indians to keep their land free from Whites.  
The Bennett Law (Wisconsin) forbids recognition of schools teaching in languages other than English, an attack on the German-teaching Lutheran and Catholic parochial schools, removing their eligibility to satisfy the state's compulsory school attendance law.

- 1895:** Booker T. Washington gives Atlanta Compromise speech to an all-white audience claiming that his race would content itself by living with the production of their hands.
- 1896:** *Plessy v. Ferguson* upholds doctrine of “separate but equal” among Blacks and Whites in public facilities.
- 1897:** In *Re Ricardo Rodriguez*, a federal district court in Texas narrowly upholds the right of Mexicans to naturalized citizenship under the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, holding Mexicans to be white for purposes of naturalization.
- 1898:** The U.S. defeats Spain and acquires Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines. The U.S. annexes Hawaii.
- 1900:** Congress passes the Foraker Act, establishing a colonial government in Puerto Rico and stipulating both the governor and executive council be appointed by the U.S.
- 1901:** U.S. citizenship granted to the Five Civilized Tribes — Cherokee, Chickasaw, Seminole, Creek, Chickasaw.
- 1902:** Chinese immigration made permanently illegal; Chinese population sharply declines.
- 1905:** W.E.B. DuBois, William Trotter, and others found the Niagara Movement, renouncing the accommodationist policies of Booker T. Washington in his Atlanta Compromise speech and demanding full suffrage. The Niagara Movement is the forerunner to the NAACP.
- 1908:** Israel Zangwill’s play, “The Melting Pot,” popularizes the term.
- 1909:** Founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), dedicated to ending segregation and discrimination against African Americans.
- 1910:** Angel Island opens, billed as the “Ellis Island of the West,” but used primarily as a detention center to control the flow of Asian immigrants (primarily Chinese) into the U.S.
- 1913:** Leo Frank, a Jewish merchant accused of raping and murdering a 12-year-old girl, is lynched by a mob of leading citizens in Marietta, Georgia. Leads to founding of the Anti-Defamation League but also to a renewal of the Ku Klux Klan.
- 1914:** During Mexican Revolution, U.S. troops invade Mexico.
- 1915:** D. W. Griffith directs *Birth of a Nation*, sympathetically depicting the lynching of a black man by a white mob and supporting the rise of the Klan. One of the most popular films of the silent movie era among white people, it is widely protested against by the NAACP.
- 1917:** Whites attack African Americans in race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois. Immigration Act of 1917, also known as the Asian Barred Zone Act, imposes a literacy test and establishes an Asiatic Barred Zone restricting immigration from southern and eastern Asia and the Pacific islands, but excluding Japan and American territories of Guam and the Philippines. Because these geographic regions were then home to many of the world’s Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, these religious groups were effectively shut out of the United States.
- The Jones Act makes Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens, eligible to serve in the military but not eligible to vote in national elections.
- 1918:** Texas makes it a criminal offense to use any language but English in school instruction.

**1923:** Japanese businessman Takao Ozawa petitions the Supreme Court for naturalization, arguing that his skin is as white, if not whiter than any so-called Caucasian. The Court rules that Ozawa cannot be a citizen because he is not “white” within the meaning of the statute, asserting that the best known science of the time defined Ozawa as of the Mongolian race.

In *U.S. v Bhagat Singh Thind*, the U.S. Supreme Court recognizes that Indians are “scientifically” classified as Caucasians but concludes that they are not white in popular (white) understanding, thus reversing the logic used in the Ozawa case. The lawyers for the United States attacked Thind’s “meltability” by defining Hinduism as an alien and barbaric system and not fit for membership in the “civilization of white men.”

Ku Klux Klan activity peaks.

**1924:** Indian Citizenship Act — Native Americans granted U.S. citizenship.

Immigration Act of 1924 (also known as the National Origins Act) virtually closes the door on immigration to the U.S. The Act set a percentage for immigrants entering the U.S. at 2% of the total of any nation’s residents in the U.S. as reported in the 1890 census. Eventually the 2% rule is replaced by a limit of 150,000 immigrants annually and quotas determined by “national origins” as reported in the 1920 census. The intent of the law is to restrict the entry of immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, while welcoming relatively large numbers of newcomers from Britain, Ireland, and Northern Europe. It also resulted in severely restricting non-Protestant immigration. Initially immigration from the other Americas was allowed, but measures were quickly developed to deny legal entry to Mexican laborers.

**1930–1940:** U.S. deports 600,000 Mexicans, many of whom are U.S. citizens.

130,000 Arabs present in the United States.

**1930:** Mexican parents in Texas, in *Independent School District v. Salvatierra*, prove that the school district illegally segregated their children based on race.

**1931:** Mexican parents in California overturn school segregation through *Alvarez v. Lemon Grove*. The court ruled in favor of the Mexican community on the grounds that separate facilities for Mexican American students were not conducive to their “Americanization” and prevented them from learning English. *Alvarez vs. Lemon Grove* was the first successful desegregation case in the U.S.

Nine African American men falsely accused of rape by two white women in what became known as the “Scottsboro Affair.” Judged and sentenced by an all-white jury, their case resulted in a landmark victory for civil rights when the Supreme Court ruled that the defendants were denied due process because they did not have a lawyer and were denied a jury of their peers by the barring of Blacks from serving on the jury.

**1934:** Wheeler Howard (Indian Reorganization) Act restores over 2 million acres of land to tribal ownership, and restores Indian management of their assets. Termination and relocation phases of the Act, implemented in 1954, led to legal dismantling of 61 tribal nations within the U.S.

The Tydings-McDuffie Act grants independence to the Philippines and limits Filipino immigration to 50 persons per year. The act specifies that in 1946, when independence is complete, all Filipinos will be excluded under the provisions of the Oriental Exclusion Act.

**1935:** California law declares Mexican Americans are foreign-born Indians.

Filipino Repatriation Act offered free transportation to Filipinos who would return to their homeland and restricted future immigration to the U.S.

The National Labor Relations Act (the Wagner Act) legalizes the right to organize and create unions but excludes farm workers and domestic workers, most of whom are Chicano/a, Asian, and African American.

**1941:** African Americans threaten to march on Washington to protest unequal access to defense jobs; Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC) prohibits discrimination in war industries and government.

**1942:** FDR signs Executive Order 9066, ordering the evacuation and mass incarceration of 120,000 persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast, most of whom are U.S. citizens or documented immigrants.

The Bracero Program invites Mexican workers to work temporarily in the U.S. during the war period where they develop the U.S. agricultural industry. Later they are sent home without the promised pay due to them.

**1943:** Congress lifts the ban on Chinese immigration and Chinese people are permitted to become naturalized citizens.

White mobs in Detroit murder 34 African Americans.

White mobs in Los Angeles attack young Mexicans leading to the famous Zoot Suit riots. The police arrest only Mexican youth, not Anglos.

**1944:** *Korematsu v. United States*, a landmark case, rules that the exclusion order leading to Japanese American internment was not unconstitutional.

**1946:** Court ends *de jure* segregation in California in *Mendez v. Westminster*, finding that Mexican American children were segregated based on their “Latinized” appearance and district boundaries manipulated to insure that Mexican American children attended separate schools.

**1948:** Truman appoints Presidential Committee on Equality of Treatment and opportunity in the Armed Services.

**1951:** Spanish is restored as a language of instruction in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

**1952:** Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act, relaxes some immigration restrictions, abolishing the Asiatic Barred Zone and imposing a minimum quota for each nation of 100 persons per year.

**1953:** Congress passed the Refugee Relief Act, the first American immigration law to specifically mention refugees as a type of immigrant. Under this law, 2000 Palestinian refugees are admitted to the U.S. Muslim Arabs begin arriving in larger numbers than Arab Christians.

**1954:** The Supreme Court unanimously decides in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregation in education is inherently unequal.

U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service sets up Operation Wetback to round up and deport “illegal” Mexicans living in the U.S.

**1955:** (Aug.) Fourteen-year-old Emmett Till is kidnapped, brutally beaten, shot and killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman. Two white men arrested for the murder are acquitted by an all-white jury and boast about the murder in a *Look* magazine interview.

(Dec.) Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat at the front of the “colored” section to a white passenger and is arrested. In response the Montgomery bus boycott begins and lasts over a year until the busses are desegregated.

**1957:** When nine black students attempt to desegregate all-white Central High School in Little Rock, Governor Orville Faubus orders that they be blocked from

attending. President Eisenhower sends federal troops to intervene on behalf of the students.

**1960:** Four black students begin a sit-in at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Six months later the same four students are served. Student sit-ins continue throughout the South and succeed in desegregating swimming pools, parks, theatres, libraries, and other public facilities.

Founding of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) providing young black people with a place in the Civil Rights Movement.

John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic, elected to President of the United States.

**1961:** Freedom Rides organized by the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) brought black and white protesters to the South to protest segregation in public facilities.

National Indian Youth Council formed by Native Americans to advocate for native rights.

**1962:** James Meredith is the first black student to enter University of Mississippi, under federal guard. President Kennedy sends in 5,000 troops to quell white violence.

**1963:** Martin Luther King jailed during anti-segregation protests; writes his famous "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," arguing that individuals have a moral duty to disobey unjust laws.

Two hundred thousand people attend the March on Washington where Martin Luther King delivers his "I Have a Dream" speech.

A Baptist Church in Birmingham is bombed, killing four young girls in Sunday school.

**1964:** Economic Opportunity Act allocates funds to fight poverty.

President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1964, outlawing discrimination in jobs and public accommodations based on race, color, religion, or national origin and providing the federal government with the power to enforce desegregation.

Three civil rights workers, Michael Schwerner, James Chaney, and Andrew Goodman, are murdered by Klansmen in Mississippi.

**1965:** Civil rights workers marching for voting rights are stopped at the Pettus Bridge by police who use tear gas, clubs, and whips against them. Dubbed "Bloody Sunday."

Immigration and Naturalization Act — Immigration reform law repeals national origins quotas, impacting peoples of Asia, Latin America, and Africa. It allows for annual admission of 170,000 from the Eastern hemisphere and 120,000 from the Western Hemisphere. Immediate family members of U.S. citizens are exempt from quotas. This immigration act contributed to the changing demographics of the immigrant population and, also to the increasing racial, ethnic, and religious diversity of the U.S.

Mexican American labor leader, Cesar Chavez, organizes the United Farm Workers to strike to change the terrible working conditions of migrant workers.

**1966:** King begins Chicago campaign to organize against landlords who discriminate.

The Black Panther Party is founded in Oakland, California.

Muhammed Ali refuses to fight in "white man's war" and his boxing title is taken away.

SNCC calls for U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.

Malcolm X is assassinated.

- 1967:** Congress passes the Voting Rights Act of 1965, outlawing poll taxes, literacy tests, and other measures used to prevent black people from voting, thus making it possible for Southern Blacks to register to vote.
- 1968:** In *Loving v. Virginia* the Supreme Court rules that prohibiting interracial marriage is unconstitutional, forcing 16 states that still banned interracial marriage to change their laws.  
Martin Luther King is murdered by racist James Earl Ray. African Americans riot in 168 towns and cities across the United States.
- 1970:** President Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act of 1968, outlawing discrimination in financing, sale and rental of housing.  
National Guard is sent to Jackson State and Kent State universities to quell student protests against the Viet Nam War and racial discrimination. (Students are shot at both schools.)
- 1972:** In *Lau v. Nichols* the Supreme Court rules that school programs conducted exclusively in English deny equal access to education to students who speak other languages; determines that districts have a responsibility to help students overcome their language disadvantage.
- 1975:** Indochina Migration and Refugee Act allows special entry into the United States of over 759,000 Vietnamese, 145,000 Cambodians, 186,300 Hmong, and 242,000 Laotians through 2002, many of them Buddhist, Catholic, and Confucianist.
- 1978:** In *Bakke v. University of California* the Supreme Court outlaws quotas but upholds affirmative action in university admissions.
- 1980:** President Carter signs the Refugee Act of 1980, creating the Federal Refugee Settlement Program to provide for the effective resettlement of refugees and to help them develop economic self-sufficiency.
- 1982:** Unemployed auto workers in Detroit, blaming the Japanese for the loss of their jobs, murder Vincent Chin, a Chinese American mistaken for Japanese.
- 1986:** The Immigration Reform and Control Act criminalizes the employment of undocumented workers; establishes one-year amnesty for undocumented workers living in the U.S. since 1982; and mandates intensification of the Border Patrol.
- 1988:** Congress overrides veto by President Reagan to pass the Civil Rights Restoration Act expanding anti-discrimination laws to private institutions that receive federal funds.
- 1989:** The U.S. government issues \$20,000 and a formal apology to each of the surviving 60,000 WWII internees of all the camps within the U.S.
- 1990:** Congress passes a comprehensive new immigration law that sanctions employers for knowingly hiring workers without “papers,” discouraging employers from hiring Latino and Asian American workers for fear they may not have the right papers (e.g., social security card, legal residency).
- 1991:** After two years of debate, President Bush reverses himself and signs the Civil Rights Act of 1991, strengthening existing civil rights law and providing for damages in cases of intentional employment discrimination.
- 1992:** Riots in Los Angeles, the first in decades, follow the acquittal of four white police officers following the videotaped beating African American Rodney King.
- 2001:** The U.S.A. PATRIOT Act is passed by Congress with virtually no debate, giving the federal government the power to detain suspected “terrorists” for an unlimited time period without access to legal representation. Over 1000 Arab, Muslim, and South Asian men are detained in secret locations.
- 2002:** The Supreme Court upholds the use of race as one of many factors in admissions to colleges and universities.



**2005:** Edgar J. Killen, the ringleader in the murder of the Mississippi civil rights workers (Schwerner, Chaney, and Goodman) is convicted of manslaughter on the 41<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the crime.

## Sources

---

- Cho, E.H., Arguelles Paz y Puenta, F., Louie, M. C. Y., & Khokha, S. (2004). *Bridge: Building a race and immigration dialogue in the global economy*. Oakland, CA: National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights.
- Davis, J. E. (2000). *The civil rights movement*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Donato, R. (1997). *The other struggle for equal schools: Mexican Americans during the civil rights era*. Albany: The State University of New York Press.
- Gonzalez, J. (2000). *Harvest of empire: A history of Latinos in the U.S.* New York: Penguin.
- Martinas, S. (1993). *Challenging white supremacy: A workshop for activists*. Unpublished manuscript (mimeo).
- Nies, J. (1996). *Native American history: A chronology*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Norton, M. B. et al. (1994). *A people and a nation: A history of the United States* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Pohlman, M. D. & Whisenhunt, L. V. (2000). *Students' guide to landmark Congressional laws on civil rights*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Springs, J. (2001). *Deculturalization and the struggle for equality* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Takaki, R. (1989). *Strangers from a different shore: A history of Asian Americans*. Boston: Little, Brown.