

Racism Then v. Now

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Many people believe racism is no longer a problem in America. During colonial times many European settlers took Africans from their homes, and shipped them to America in order to enslave them. Since the abolishment of slavery, racism has still been prevalent in America. Laws and political systems have been put in place to discriminate against people of color and make them feel less than human. Not only has racism been a part of America's history, but racism is also a part of today's world. A question we must ask ourselves; "Is racism then any different from racism now?"

What is racism? Racism is "the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another." Racism has been in America since the colonial era. When European settlers first arrived in America, they began to colonize the land. After America established their colonies they began using indentured servants (people that came to America and were placed under contract to work for a certain amount of years in exchange for the payment of travel expenses and maintenance), these people were usually poor Europeans that needed a way to get to America. Over time indentured servants were no longer practical seeing as though they were freed from their contract and were no longer subject to work. Plantation owners needed cheap workers that could maintain their plantation. In the 17th and 18th century people were kidnapped from the continent of Africa and were unwillingly enslaved by white settlers.

What is slavery? Slavery is the system in which the principle of property is applied to humans, allowing people to buy and sell humans as a form of property. Slaves weren't able to free themselves of bondage, and usually stayed in enslavement for the rest of their lives.

Slavery first started in 1619 when a privateer, The White Lion, brought 20 enslaved Africans to the British colony Jamestown. European settlers used slaves as a cheaper labor source. Slaves were used in the Southern region of the United States. These slaves mostly worked on rice, tobacco, cotton or indigo plantations. In the late 18th century, an economic crisis arose, and the future of slavery was unknown. During the same time, the textile industry in England was in high demand for American cotton.

In 1793, a schoolteacher named Eli Whitney invented the cotton gin. This device removed seeds from the cotton. His devices were copied and soon the South transitioned from widely producing tobacco to producing cotton. This switch reinforced the regions need for slavery. Slavery was never widespread in the North, even though some businessmen benefitted from it. Some Northerners believed the oppression of enslaved Africans was similar to the oppression they faced from Britain. Between 1744 and 1804, all Northern states abolished slavery, but slavery was still vital to the South. Even though the U.S Congress outlawed the African slave trade in 1804, the domestic trade of slaves expanded, and the enslaved population in America tripled over the course of fifty years. By 1860 the slave population reached nearly four million, with half of them living in the south.

Slaves in the South contributed to one third of the Southern population. Most worked and lived on large plantations or small farms; some masters owned fewer than fifty enslaved people while some owned several hundred. Slave owners made their slaves completely dependent on them by using restrictive codes called slave codes. Slave codes were a set of rules based on the idea that slaves were property and not human. Slave owners used these laws as ways to protect their

“property” but also to protect them from potential slave violence. Slaves were usually restricted from learning how to read or write. Many slave owners sexually assaulted the enslaved women, and handed out harsh punishments to those who disobeyed their orders. Some punishments slaves faced included: whipping, shackling, hanging, burning, beating, mutilation, branding, rape, and imprisonment. Slaves would be punished for resisting slavery, not being hard working, talking too much or talking in their native language, stealing from their master, murdering a white man, or running away.

A strict hierarchy was enforced to keep slaves divided to ensure they wouldn't conspire against their masters. The hierarchy consisted of keeping slaves with lighter skin in the house as maids and keeping slaves with darker skin working in the field. Marriages between enslaved individuals weren't legally binded, but many married and raised large families. Many slave owners encouraged marriage, but wouldn't hesitate to separate and divide families by removing the children or wives or by auctioning them off.

During the enslavement of African American people there were some individuals who wanted to free their people from the shackles of slavery. One of the most notable figures was Harriet Tubman. Harriet Tubman was a bondswoman who escaped from her plantation in the South. After escaping to Philadelphia, she went back to her plantation to help her family escape. Not only did Tubman help her family but she also helped many slaves escape from bondage by using the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad was a network of safe houses organized for runaway slaves to escape to the North. During that time the North was considered to be a safe haven for those running away from the harsh treatments of slavery. Many slaves

would travel many miles on foot to places in the North where they were able to live freely. Some slaves escaped to Canada, South America, the Carribean Islands, Mexico, and other places. Fugitives would hide in swamps, lakes, and trenches during the day and walk miles at night.

There are many outrageous ways fugitives escaped. One known story was the escape of Henry “Box” Brown. Henry’s wife and children had been sold to another state in 1848. Henry decide he would escape slavery by any means necessary. With the help of a white shopkeeper and a free black man, he concocted a dangerous plan. He was put into a three by two foot box labeled dry goods and was shipped to freedom. At one point in his journey his box was placed on a steamship upside down. He had to sit on his head for ninety minutes straight, until two unsuspecting passengers flipped his box right side up and used it as a seat. Brown arrived safely in Philadelphia after a twenty seven hour trip. He soon moved to New England where he was deemed a minor celebrity. Another story is the story of William and Ellen craft. The couple married in 1846 but lived on different plantations. Determined to stay together they decided to make their escape. Ellen who had light skin, cut her hair, dressed up in men’s clothing, and wrapped her head with bandages, in order to disguise herself as an injured white man with William as her black manservant. They were able to safely escape to the North after several days.

During the time of slavery, rebellions did occur. Some well known rebellions were led by Gabriel Prosser in Richmond in 1800 and by Denmark Vesey in Charleston in 1822, but not many were successful. The one rebellion that frightened white slave owners was the rebellion led by the religious leader Nat Turner. Nat Turner’s rebellion, which was also referred to as the Southampton Insurrection, which was a slave revolt that occurred in Southampton, Virginia. The

rebellion started on August 21, 1831 and was stopped in forty eight hours. Sixty five white people were killed and the state executed 55 slaves including Nat Turner who was caught on October 30, 1831. Two hundred slaves were additionally murdered by angry white mobs. Nat Turner's revolt further ignited Southerner's fear of a general slave rebellion. Those who supported slavery used Turner's rebellion as an example that African Americans were an inferior race to white people, acted in barbaric ways, and needed slavery to discipline them. The fear of similar rebellions caused many slave owners to strengthen their slave codes and ultimately stop the educating, assembly, and movement of slaves.

The suppression of Southern African Americans further grew the abolitionist movement. The movement to abolish slavery gained momentum between the 1830's to 1860's. These movements were led by African American abolitionists like Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth and David Walker. The movement also had white supporters like William Lloyd Garrison, who was the founder of the radical newspaper *The Liberator*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe who published the bestselling anti slavery novel *Uncle Toms Cabin*. Many abolitionist positioned their argument based on the fact that slavery was considered a sin, but some used a non religious approach and believed that slavery was inefficient, and made no sense economically.

America's expansion westward in the first half of the nineteenth century would cause more issues when it came to slavery in America and its future limitation. In 1820, a harsh dispute over the federal government's right to decrease slavery, over Missouri's application of statehood ended in a compromise. Missouri was admitted into the Union as a slave state, Maine was admitted as a free state, and all western territories North of Missouri's Southern border were

to be free soil. Even though the Missouri Compromise was meant to keep an even balance between slave states and free states, it was able to extinguish the forces of sectionalism temporarily.

In 1850, another nebulous compromise was negotiated in regard to the new territories won during the Mexican-American War. However, four years later the Kansas-Nebraska Act opened all new parts of slavery by causing pro and anti slavery forces to battle it out with a considerable amount of bloodshed, in the new state of Kansas. Outrage over the Kansas-Nebraska Act caused the downfall of the Whig party. In 1857 the Dred Scott Decision by the Supreme Court, which involved an enslaved man (Dred Scott) suing for his freedom while living in a free state. In the end the Supreme Court ruled against him and denied him his freedom. The decision repealed the Missouri Compromise by ruling that all territories were free to practice slavery. Two years after the Dred Scott decision, an event occurred which would further stir up people's passions all over America when it came to slavery.

In 1859 John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry, Virginia would shook up people's opinion on slavery. John Brown was an abolitionist who led a small raid against a federal armory in Harpers Ferry, Virginia (now West Virginia), in an attempt to start a slave revolt in order to stop the institution of Slavery. In the 1850's, Brown traveled to Kansas with his five sons to fight against proslavery advocates. On May 25, John and his sons attacked three cabins in Pottawatomie Creek. They killed five men with enormous swords and triggered guerilla warfare in the territory. One of Brown's sons was killed during the fighting. In 1857, Brown eventually traveled back to the East and began raising money in order to bring an uprising of slaves. He

ensured the backing of six important abolitionists he called the “secure six” and assembled an “army”. His army grew to twenty two men, which include five black men and three of his sons. The group rented a farm in Maryland, which was close to Harpers Ferry and prepared for the raid. On October 16, 1859, Brown and his men overwhelmed the arsenal. Some of his army collected a few hostages, which included some slaves. Word of the raid spread around, and Brown and his men were surrounded by morning. A group of U.S. Marine soldiers arrived on the scene on October 17th, led by Colonel Robert E. Lee and Lieutenant J.E.B Stuart. On October 19th, Brown and his army were defeated and the raid was put to an end. Ten of Brown’s men were killed, including two of his sons.

The injured John Brown was tried in Virginia for murder and treason. He was found guilty on November 2, 1859. The fifty nine year old abolitionist was sentenced to the gallows on December 2, 1859 where he was hung. Before he was hung, Brown gave a scrap of paper to his guard that read “I John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away but with blood.” Although the raid failed, it started tensions and raised the stakes for the upcoming presidential election in 1860. John Brown was considered a martyr hero to Northern abolitionists, but was disparaged as a mass murder to the South. Brown's raid ensured there wasn't a possibility of peace between the North and South and thus became the momentum needed to start the Civil War.

The South would eventually reach their breaking point in the next year, when Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln was elected as President. Within three months, several Southern

states removed themselves from the union and formed the Confederate States of America; four more states would follow suit after the Civil War began.

The Civil war began on April 12, 1861 although Lincolns anti-slavery views were clearly established. The central union war goal at first wasn't to abolish slavery, but to preserve the United States of America as a nation. The decision to free the enslaved would slowly come from many different sides. According to the census of 1860, four million slaves inhabited fifteen states and territories. Along with the four million there were four hundred thousand free African Americans. Freeing millions in bondage was not an easy process. Many government officials weren't serious when it came to the process of freeing enslaved individuals.

During the Civil War, African Americans, free or enslaved, were prohibited from fighting in the Civil War. In 1861, General Benjamin Franklin Butler, while in Command at Fort Monroe, did not want to return three runaway slaves that presented themselves at the Union fort. Butler, who was an attorney before the war, claimed the slaves were “contraband to the war” and refused to return them to bondage. All over the battlefield, runaway slaves were presenting themselves to Union forces in hopes of not being returned to slavery. Eventually the Union put in place a policy of hiring and using slaves during the war. In August, the US Congress passed the Confiscation Act of 1861 making the state of runaway slaves legal. It declared any property used by the Confederate Military, including slaves, could be confiscated by Union Forces. Congress also passed a law in March 1862 prohibiting the return of slaves. By time the war ended, the Union had set up over one hundred contraband camps in the South. Union officers were the ones taking the initiative to actually free slaves.

In August 1862, General John C. Fremont declared that any slaves that the Confederate Military owned in his conquered territory in Missouri were free. The order was negated by President Lincoln, and General Fremont was fired. Fremont was replaced with General David Hunter. In May 1862, Hunter, who by now was in charge of a larger Southern territory, abolished slavery in the area he was in charge of, Lincoln negated that order as well. However, in June 1862, five days after the battle of Antietam, President Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, by using an executive order. It announced that if Southern states did not stifle their rebellion by January 1, 1863, then slaves in those states would be free. When the Confederacy didn't yield, Lincoln issued the final Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The proclamation only freed slaves held in the states that were part of the rebellion, it did not free slaves that were in Union states. At the end of the Civil War on December 6, 1865 the United States passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which abolished slavery through the United States.

During the Civil War, America would eventually have to come to terms with the abolition of slavery. By the time the war ended it was clear that the reconstruction to America would bring major changes to Southern States and societies and the redefinition of African Americans' place in America.

The Reconstruction Era refers to the period of time in the United States, which occurred directly after the Civil War, in which the federal government set the conditions that would permit Southern states back into the Union. Reconstruction was an era filled with unparalleled political conflicts, and far fetched adjustments in the nature of America's government.

After the Civil War, a debate with what to do with the former Confederate states arose in Washington. In 1863, Lincoln announced a proposal called the “ten percent plan”. Under this plan, former states would be readmitted into the Union under the condition that ten percent of white voters took an oath, pledging their loyalty to the Union. Aware Lincoln’s plan omitted any provision for social or economic reconstruction, or African American civil rights, anti-slavery Congressmen in the Republican Party, called Radicals, castigated Lincoln’s leniency. The objective of the Reconstruction was to readmit the Southern States on terms that were acceptable to the North, which included full political and civil equality for African Americans and the denial of rights to white Americans that were leaders of the secession movement. The Radicals wanted to insure that newly freed African Americans were protected and given their rights as Americans.

After President Lincoln was assassinated, Andrew Jackson was elected into office. In 1865, he conducted his own reconstruction plan, which gave the white South a role in establishing new governments. Many people in the North were convinced that Johnson’s new policy and the actions of the governments he established, threatened to put African Americans in positions similar to slavery, while allowing former “rebels” to reclaim political power in the South. Southerners, with President Johnson's help, attempted to return old ways to the South.

In 1866, Congress and President Johnson fought over control of the Reconstruction. The Radical Republican Congress were victorious, with the radical republicans winning over 2/3 of the seats in congress. They declared the Southern states “unreconstructed,” refused to seat the newly elected congressmen and senators, and proceeded to begin the impeachment process on

Andrew Jackson. The Radicals also founded the Freedmen's Bureau, which was a federal agency designed specifically to address the problems and rights of the newly freed people. The Radical Republicans also passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendment into the constitution. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment established the citizenship of African Americans, and stated that the right to vote could not be based on race.

Most leading Radicals were already active abolitionists for many years before the war. Radicals like Thaddeus Stevens imagined using economic and military force to halt the slave holding class in the South and bring genuine racial equality. Stevens argued continuously that former slaveholders should give their property to their former slaves as a piece of compensation. This would crush slave holding aristocrats and establish a solid economic base for African American citizenship.

In 1867 Congress removed the civilian governments in the South and put the former Confederacy under the rule of the U.S. Army. The army conducted new elections in which the formerly enslaved could vote while those who held leading positions under the Confederacy were denied the ability to vote and were not allowed to run for office.

In ten states, coalitions of Freedman, recent arrivals of the North who were considered “Carpetbaggers” and white Southerners that were supporters of the Reconstruction, cooperated together to form Republican state governments. The governments introduced assorted Reconstruction programs, offered massive help to railroads, built public schools, and raised

taxes. Violent opposition towards Freedman and white Americans that supported the Reconstruction emerged under the name “Klu Klux Klan” otherwise known as the “KKK”.

Founded in 1865, the Klu Klux Klan could be found in almost every Southern state in America by 1870. It became an outlet for white southern resistance toward the Republican Party’s Reconstruction era policies that wanted political and economic equality for African Americans. Its members waged a campaign of intimidation and violence towards white and black republican leaders. Even though Congress passed laws that were meant to halt the Klan’s terrorism, the organizations’ goal was to reestablish white supremacy. From 1867 onward, African American participation in public life in the South became one of the most radical perspectives of Reconstruction, as African Americans began to win elections in Southern government and in the U.S. Congress. The Ku Klux Klan began to run their underground campaign in an effort to stop the policies of Radical Reconstruction. They were joined by other organizations such as the Knights of White Camellia (launched in Louisiana in 1867) and the White Brotherhood. At least ten percent of black legislators elected between 1867-1868 during the constitutional convention were victims of violence during the Reconstruction, which included seven who were killed. White Republicans (who were considered Carpetbaggers or scalawags), and black institutions such as schools and churches were also victims of Ku Klux Klan attacks. By the 1870’s the Klan had branches in almost every Southern state. Local Klan members, that usually adorned white pointed hoods and wore long white robes, usually attacked at night. These members acted alone but with the intention of reaching the common goal of white supremacy. Klan activity flourished in the South , where African Amaericans were a minority and a small

part of the population. Among the most active zones that were victims of Klan activity was South Carolina. In January 1871, five hundred masked men attacked the Union County jail and lynched eight black men in South Carolina.

Even though democrats will later attribute the Klan's violence to the poorer white Southerners, the organization had people from different classes which included farmers, laborers, planters, lawyers, merchants, physicians, and ministers. In the regions where Klan activity mostly took place, local law enforcements either belonged to the Klan or refused to take action against them, even Klansmen who were arrested found it difficult to find witnesses to testify against them. Other leading white citizens in the South decided not to speak out against the Klan, which essentially gave them approval to keep terrorizing the black community that resided in the South. After 1870, Republican state governments in the South turned to Congress for help, resulting in the passage of three Enforcement Acts, the strongest of which was the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871. For the first time, the Ku Klux Klan act designated certain crimes committed by individuals as a federal offense, which included conspiracies to deny citizens the right to hold office, serve on juries and enjoy the equal protection of the law. The act authorized the president to suspend the writ of habeas corpus and arrest accused individuals without charge, and to send federal forces to stop Klan violence. This expansion of federal authority, which Ulysses S. Grant used in 1871 to crush Klan activity in South Carolina and other areas of the South, outraged Democrats and even alarmed many Republicans. From the early 1870's onward, white supremacy reclaimed its hold on the South as support for the reconstruction slowly wore off. By the end of 1876, the South was under Democratic power once again.

After the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives in 1874 for the first time since the Civil War, racism was still a leading force in the South as well as in the North. By the early 1870's many Northerners began to blame the problems of Reconstruction on the supposedly inferior black voters. During the same time, key decisions that were made by the Supreme Court threatened the protection granted to African Americans that were given by the Reconstruction era constitutional amendments and legislature. The courts decision in the Slaughterhouse Cases (1873), established that the Fourteenth Amendment only applied to former slaves, and protected the rights granted by the federal government and not the ones granted by the states. Three years later in the case of United States v. Cruikshank, the Supreme court overturned the convictions of three white men that were convicted in connection with the massacre of over one hundred black men in Colfax, Louisiana, as part of a political dispute. The men had been convicted of violating the 1870 Enforcement Act, which banned conspiracies to deny citizens' constitutional rights and had been intended to combat violence by the Ku Klux Klan against African Americans in the South. The Supreme Court's ruling, that the Fourteenth Amendment's promise of due process and equal protection covered violation's of citizen's rights by the states and not by individuals, would make prosecuting anti black violence difficult, even though the Klan and many other white supremacist groups suppressed black voters and reasserted white control in the South.

After President Rutherford B. Hayes was elected in office a conflict arose, and national party leaders met in secret to help fix the problem that would be known as The Compromise Of 1877. Hayes agreed to give control of the South to Democratic governments and stop his

attempts at federal intervention in the region and put a Southerner in his cabinet. In return the Democrats agreed to not dispute Hayes's election, and respect the civil rights of African American citizens. Soon after his inauguration, Hayes stuck to his promise, and ordered federal troops to withdraw from Louisiana and South Carolina, where they had been protecting Republican government officials. This action marked the end of the Reconstruction era, and began a period of strictly Democratic control of the South. White Southern Democrats did not honor their pledge to uphold the rights of black citizens, but moved quickly to reverse as many of Reconstruction's policies as possible. In the decades to come, the deprivation of black voters, often through intimidation and violence, helped ensure the racial segregation imposed by the Jim Crow laws, which was a system that endured for more than a half-century, until the advances of the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

Jim Crow Laws were a collection of state and local laws that legalized racial segregation. Named after a black minstrel character depicted by Thomas D. Rice, the laws were meant to marginalize African Americans by denying them the right to vote, hold jobs, get an education or other opportunities. Those who attempted to defy Jim Crow laws often faced arrest, fines, jail sentences, violence and death.

The origin of Jim Crow laws started as early as 1865, directly after the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in the United States. Black codes were strict local and state laws that dictated where, when, and how former slaves could work and for how much money. The codes appeared all over the South as a legal way to turn African Americans into indentured servants, take away their voting rights, control where they lived and how they

traveled, and to take away their children for labor purposes. The legal system was very much against African American citizens. Since Confederate soldiers were working as judges and police officers, it was very hard for African Americans to win cases in court and ensured they were subject to slave codes. Black codes coincided with labor camps for the incarcerated, where prisoners were treated like enslaved people. Black offenders typically received longer sentences than their white equals, and because of the grueling work, often did not live out their entire sentence. During the Reconstruction era, local governments, as well as the Democratic Party and President Andrew Johnson, stymied efforts to help black Americans move forward.

At the start of the 1880s, big cities in the South didn't fully enforce Jim Crow laws and black Americans found more freedom in them. This led to large amounts of the black population moving to these cities. As the decade progressed, the white population in the city demanded more laws to limit opportunities for African Americans. Jim Crow laws soon spread around the country with even more force than previously. Public parks were forbidden for African Americans to enter, and theaters and restaurants became segregated. Segregated waiting rooms in bus and train stations were required, as well as water fountains, restrooms, building entrances, elevators, and cemeteries. Segregation was also enforced for public pools, phone booths, hospitals, asylums, jails and residential homes for the elderly and handicapped. Laws forbade African Americans from living in white neighborhoods as well. Some states even required different textbooks for black and white students. New Orleans enforced the segregation of prostitutes according to race. In Atlanta, African Americans in court were given a different Bible from whites to swear on. Marriage and relationships between whites and blacks were strictly

forbidden in most Southern states. In some states it wasn't uncommon to see signs that told African Americans they were not welcomed there. As oppressive as the Jim Crow laws were, it was a time where many African Americans stepped into roles of leadership. One leader was Ida B. Wells. Wells became an activist against Jim Crow laws, after refusing to leave a first class train car that was designated for white passengers only. The conductor forcefully moved her and she successfully sued the train company, though the decision was reversed by a higher court. Angry at the injustice, Wells became a devoted fighter against Jim Crow laws. She became an avid writer and wrote her own newspaper. She began to travel all over the South in order to publicize her work and advocate for the black community. An angry mob destroyed her newspaper and sent her death threats, because of this she moved to the North where she still advocated against Jim Crow laws. As the twentieth century went on, Jim Crow laws continued to blossom within a society filled with violence and oppression. After World War I, the NAACP noted that lynchings had become so bad that it sent Walter White to the South to investigate. White had lighter skin which allowed him infiltrate white hate groups by portraying himself as a white man. As lynchings increased, so did race riots, with at least 25 across the United States over several months in 1919, a period sometimes referred to as "Red Summer." In retaliation, white authorities charged black communities with conspiring to conquer white America. With Jim Crow dominating the South, education for African Americans was always under attack, and few college opportunities were available. The Great Migration in the 1920's saw the huge migration of educated African Americans out of the South. This migration was encouraged by publications like *The Chicago Defender*, which wanted African Americans to move to the North.

Read by many Southern African Americans, white Southerners banned these newspapers and threatened violence to any of those caught reading or distributing it. The poverty caused by the Great Depression only fueled the resentment toward the black community. Lynchings increased, and black veterans returning home from World War II faced segregation and violence.

The North was no stranger to laws similar to Jim Crow. Some states in the North required African Americans to own property before they were allowed to vote, schools and neighborhoods were segregated, and businesses had “white only” signs in their windows. States also enforced “Sundown Town” laws where white neighborhoods in the North and South practiced a form of segregation by requiring colored people to leave the town before sundown. Even when it came to traveling, African Americans were restricted. The Green Book, was a travel book that identified businesses like: hotels, restaurants, drugstores, and beauty salons that accepted black customers. This book was used during the segregation era to make it a bit easier and safer for African Americans to travel. In Ohio, segregationist Allen Grandberry Thurman ran for governor in 1867. He promised to stop African Americans citizens from voting. After he barely lost the political race, Thurman was appointed to the U.S. Senate, where he fought to cease Reconstruction-era reforms that benefited the black community. After World War II, suburban developments in the North and South built legal covenants that didn't allow black families. African Americans found it difficult or impossible to obtain mortgages for homes in certain neighborhoods. In 1896 the supreme court ruled that black and white facilities would be “separate but equal” in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Prior to WWII most African Americans were low wage farmers, factory workers, or servants. By the early 1940's war related jobs were in high

demand but most African Americans were not given higher paying jobs. They were also discouraged from joining the military. After thousands of African Americans threatened to march on Washington, President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941. This order opened National defense jobs as well as other government jobs to all Americans regardless of race, color, or national origin. Black men and women served bravely in WWII despite the discrimination and prejudice they faced. The Tuskegee Airman broke racial barriers by becoming the first black military aviators in the U.S. Army Air Corps and earned more than 150 Distinguished Flying Crosses. As the Cold War began, President Harry Truman initiated a civil rights agenda, and in 1948 issued Executive Order 9981 to end discrimination in the military. These events helped set the stage for grass-roots initiatives to enact racial equality legislation. The post-World War II era saw an increase in civil rights activities in the African American community, with a focus on ensuring that black citizens were able to vote. This provoked the civil rights movement.

The civil rights movement was a struggle for social justice that mainly took place during the 1950's and 1960's, and was used for African Americans to gain equal rights under the law in the United States. The Civil War abolished slavery but didn't end the discrimination African Americans faced. By the mid century African Americans had enough of the racism that they were forced to endure. African Americans, along with whites began a fight for equality that would span over twenty years. On December 1, 1955, a 42-year-old woman named Rosa Parks found a seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus after work. Segregation laws at the time stated blacks must sit in designated seats at the back of the bus, and Parks had complied. When a white

man got on the bus and couldn't find a seat in the white section of the bus, the conductor of the bus told Parks and three other black passengers to give up their seat for the white man. Rosa Parks refused and was arrested. Word of her arrest caused outrage and support. Black community leaders formed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) led by Baptist minister Martin Luther King Jr., a role that would place him front and center in the fight for civil rights. The MIA staged a boycott of the Montgomery Bus System. The Montgomery Bus Boycott lasted 381 days and on November 14, 1956 the Supreme Court ruled segregated seating was unconstitutional.

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court made segregation illegal in public schools in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. The first person to attend an integrated school was a young girl named Ruby Bridges. When Bridges was in kindergarten she took a test to determine if she could attend a white school. In 1960, Bridges' parents were informed by officials from the NAACP that she was one of only six African American students to pass the test. Bridges would be the only African American student to attend the William Frantz School, near her home, and the first black child to attend an all-white elementary school in the South. On the first day of school U.S. Marshalls had to take Bridges to school to protect her from the unruly white crowds that had gathered on her way to school. These malicious crowds would call her racial slurs, and threatened to poison or kill her. Many parents kept their children home from school and many teachers refused to teach her, so Ruby had to stay in the principal's office since there was no class. Eventually the school year ended, white children and Ruby were sent back to school, U.S. Marshals no longer walked Bridges to school, the racist crowd no longer littered the school yard, and Ruby was able to resume class in a normal school environment.

On September 3, 1957, nine black students, known as the Little Rock Nine arrived at Central High School in Arkansas, to attend classes but instead were met by the Arkansas National Guard and a screaming, threatening mob. The Little Rock Nine tried again a couple of weeks later and made it inside, but had to be removed for their safety when violence ensued. Finally, President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to escort the Little Rock Nine to and from classes at Central High School. The students still continued to face harassment and prejudice.

During the Civil Rights Era racist encounters many times led to death. While visiting family in Money, Mississippi, the fourteen year old Emmett Till, an African American teenager from Chicago, was brutally murdered for allegedly whistling at a white woman. His attackers, the white woman's husband and brother, made Emmett carry a 75 pound cotton gin fan to the bank of the Tallahatchie River and ordered him to take off his clothes. The two men proceeded to beat him nearly to death, gouged out his eyeballs, shot him in the head, and threw his body, tied to the fan with barbed wire into the river. Three days later his disfigured corpse was found. Authorities wanted to bury his body quickly but his mother, Mamie Bradley, requested that he be shipped back to Chicago. After seeing the mutilated remains of her child, she decided to have an open casket funeral, so the world could see what the racist murderers did to her only son. Two weeks after Till's body was buried, the two murderers were put on trial in a segregated courthouse in Sumner, Mississippi. On September 23, the all white jury deliberated for less than an hour before issuing a verdict of "not guilty" explaining that they believed the state had failed to prove the identity of the body.

While African Americans were fighting for their lives they were still fighting for their rights. Even though African Americans had the right to vote some Southern states made it difficult for them. States often required African Americans to take voter literacy tests that were confusing, misleading and nearly impossible to pass. In order to show a commitment to the civil rights movement and minimize racial tensions in the South, President Dwight Eisenhower and the Eisenhower administration pressured Congress to consider new civil rights legislation. On September 9, 1957, President Eisenhower signed the Civil Rights Act of 1957 into law, the first major civil rights legislation since Reconstruction. It allowed federal prosecution of anyone who tried to prevent someone from voting and created a commission to investigate voter fraud.

Despite African Americans winning some battles that pertained to civil rights, they still faced major bigotry and prejudice. On February 1, 1960, four college students took a stand against segregation in Greensboro, North Carolina when they refused to leave a Woolworth's lunch counter without being served. Many participated in the sit-ins held at diners, after some were arrested, the owners of the diner finally allowed the four students to be served after many boycotted the diner. On May 4, 1961, thirteen "Freedom Riders" (seven African Americans and six whites) mounted a Greyhound bus in Washington, D.C., embarking on a bus tour of the South to protest segregated bus terminals. They were testing the 1960 decision by the Supreme Court in *Boynton v. Virginia* that declared the segregation of interstate transportation facilities unconstitutional. On Mother's Day 1961, the bus reached Anniston, Alabama, where the Freedom Riders were met with an angry mob. Someone in the mob threw a bomb onto the bus, the Freedom riders were able to escape the bus but they were badly beaten. On May 24, 1961, a

group of Freedom Riders reached Jackson, Mississippi. Though met with hundreds of supporters, the group was arrested for trespassing in a “whites-only” facility and sentenced to 30 days in jail. Attorneys for NAACP brought the matter to the U.S. Supreme Court, who reversed the convictions. Hundreds of new Freedom Riders were drawn to the cause, and the rides continued. In the fall of 1961, under pressure from the Kennedy administration, the Interstate Commerce Commission issued regulations prohibiting segregation in interstate transit terminals.

On August 28, 1963, the March on Washington occurred. The event was organized and attended by civil rights leaders like A. Phillip Randolph, Bayard Rustin, and Martin Luther King Jr. More than 200,000 people, black and white, met in Washington, D. C. for the peaceful march with the main purpose of forcing civil rights legislation and establishing job equality for everyone. The highlight of the march was King’s “I Have a Dream” speech. “I Have a Dream” would become an important slogan for freedom and equality. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (legislation initiated by President John F. Kennedy before his assassination) into law. King and other civil rights activists witnessed the signing. The law guaranteed equal employment for all, limited the use of voter literacy tests and allowed federal authorities to ensure public facilities were integrated. On March 7, 1965, the civil rights movement in Alabama took an especially violent turn as 600 peaceful demonstrators participated in the Selma to Montgomery march to protest the killing of black civil rights activist Jimmie Lee Jackson by a white police officer and to encourage legislation to enforce the 15th amendment. As the protestors neared the Edmund Pettus Bridge, they were blocked by Alabama state and local police sent by Alabama Governor George C. Wallace. Refusing to stand down,

protestors moved forward and were viciously beaten and tear gassed by police and dozens of protestors were hospitalized. The entire incident was televised and became known as “Bloody Sunday.” Some activists wanted to retaliate with violence, but King pushed for nonviolent protests and eventually gained federal protection for another march. When President Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act into law on August 6, 1965, he took the Civil Rights Act of 1964 several steps further. The new law banned all voter literacy tests and provided federal examiners in certain voting jurisdictions.

The civil rights movement had tragic consequences for two of its leaders in the late 1960s. On February 21, 1965, former Nation of Islam leader and Organization of Afro-American Unity founder Malcolm X was assassinated at a rally. On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated on his hotel room’s balcony. Emotionally-charged looting and riots followed, putting even more pressure on the Johnson administration to pass additional civil rights laws.

Decades after the civil rights movement, African Americans are still facing racism, bigotry, and prejudice today. Many African Americans today fear for their lives due to police brutality, white supremacy, and wrongful deaths. On March 3, 1991, a man by the name of Rodney King was caught by police during a high speed chase. The officers pulled King out of the car and brutally beat him, while a man named George Holliday filmed the incident . The four L.A.P.D. officers involved were indicted on charges of assault with a deadly weapon and excessive use of force by a police officer. However, after a three-month trial, a predominantly white jury acquitted the officers, inflaming citizens and sparking the violent 1992 Los Angeles

riots. On February 26, 2012, an African American teenager named Trayvon Martin was shot and killed. The 17 year old was seen walking home after purchasing skittles and iced tea. A white man named George Zimmerman who was a part of the neighborhood watch in that area saw Martin and called the police claiming that Martin looked suspicious. The police told him not to follow the young man but ignored their instructions and began to follow Martin in his car. Trayvon Martin was seen at a 7-Eleven where he showed no suspicious behavior. Martin and Zimmerman eventually encountered each other. The confrontation ended with Zimmerman shooting Trayvon Martin in the chest. Martin died less than one hundred yards from his home. Officers found Martin dead and Zimmerman bleeding from injuries, he claimed he shot Martin out of self defense. Zimmerman was taken into custody but was released after receiving no charges. Zimmerman was soon brought back into court after many on social media called for an investigation. On July 13, 2013, the six-member jury acquitted Zimmerman of murder, triggering a well known movement called Black Lives Matter. Many African Americans have been victims of police brutality. Many of these people were unarmed and no threat to the police. American citizens like: Michael Brown, Dontre Hamilton, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, Tanisha Anderson, Tamir Rice, Tony Robinson, Phillip White, Freddie Gray, and many others. Many of the Police who shot and killed these unarmed victims mistook objects as guns, or “accidentally” pulled out their gun, and all of the people responsible for their death have not done jail time or were deemed not guilty. Recent cases that have caused major uproar all over America are the cases of Ahmed Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd. Ahmed Arbery was a 25-year-old African-American citizen who was shot to death which was recorded by a white citizen while jogging in a

neighborhood outside Brunswick, Georgia, after being pursued by two white men in a pickup truck. The people that shot Arbery were eventually caught and charged which could be due to the outcry for justice on social media. Breonna Taylor was killed after police in Louisville, Kentucky, mistakenly raided her home. Taylor died after being shot eight times by police. George Floyd was a man in Minneapolis, Minnesota that died after a white officer named Derek Chauvin was kneeling on Floyd's neck for almost 8 minutes. A video of the incident was posted. In the video we could see Floyd on the ground near a police SUV, yelling out that he is in pain. The officer, Chauvin, can be seen with his knee pressed into the back of Floyd's head and neck. As bystanders record the incident and beg the officers to let him up and to let him breathe, Floyd cries out, "I'm about to die." Chauvin tells him to relax and proceeds to ask him what he wanted. Floyd told the police officer he couldn't breathe. Floyd then calls out for his mother as Chauvin yells at him. Floyd tells the officer that his neck, stomach, and everything else hurt, and asked for water. The video shows Floyd, who is handcuffed behind his back, motionless with his face on the pavement. When EMTs arrive, the officer lifts his knee, and Floyd's head hangs limp as the medics move him to a stretcher, while still handcuffed. He is taken to the hospital where he dies shortly after. Floyd was not armed. These deaths have caused many protests. The protests in honor of George Floyd have turned violent. Videos show that police tear gassing, and shooting the protestors with rubber bullets. Justice has not been served for any of these unarmed victims who died at the hands of white police officers. In the wake of the George Floyd murder many people all over the world have engaged in peaceful protests some of which have turned violent.

Many states have employed police officers to “tame” protesters. Many of the police used painful tactics like tear gas and tasers to keep protesters at bay.

From the founding of America to the present day black people have been subject to brutality, racism, bigotry, prejudice, and injustice. Since the time of slavery to now African Americans have always been deemed as the enemy and were never truly safe in America. Many people have sat by and watched people of color be injured, put down, and even killed just because of their skin color. The mistreatments of blacks have sparked many movements and protests have commenced but the pain still remains. Being black should not be a crime and shouldn't be the reason why so many African Americans are dying. Till this day black people have been treated as less than human and it needs to be put to a stop. Regardless of skin color we are all human and should be treated as such.

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