

## The Institutionalization of “Race” in U.S. Society: Selected Defining Historical Events

Dr. Elizabeth Y. Sung (2020) Principal Source: Dr. Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993)

- 1492 Columbus's diary lists "Indians" as "slaves" among the many goods of the lands he claims for Spain.
- 1607 120 English colonists settle in Jamestown, VA. 38 survive the winter (the Powhatans rescue them from starvation). The next year, they extract food by attacking tribal villages; hostilities ensue. Gov Thomas Gates arrives w/ orders (brutally enforced) that the Indians should serve the colonists and pay them corn and animal skins. **1618-23**: a 10-fold influx of English colonists drawn by profitability of tobacco-growing.
- 1619 Efforts to enslave Native Americans fail; 20 Africans purchased as bond-servants from Dutch ship (Jamestown). '37: New England Puritans hold that captives from a "just war" can be enslaved, ship Pequots to West Indies, traded for African slaves. Laws increasingly favor rights of white vs black servants, pit free/poor whites vs blacks. '61: VA decrees lifelong-labor for black "servants"; '69: defines them as property; denies them freedom of assembly & movement ('80). '91: free blacks lose right to testify in court, vote. **1700-50**: many Northern ministers are slaveowners (Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards).
- 1776 **Declaration of Independence**: "All men are created equal ... endowed by their Creator w/ certain unalienable rights ... Life, Liberty, & the pursuit of happiness." Enslaved blacks 20% of population.
- 1787-89 **US Constitution** ratified via compromises permitting slavery; enslaved males reckoned 3/5 of a man for taxation & representation.
- 1790 1 year later, the **Naturalization Act** restricts US citizenship to "free white persons" (in effect 162 years, till 1952).
- 1793 **Fugitive Slave Act** makes it a crime to shelter escapees or interfere w/ their arrest. **1808**: Britain & US abolish transatlantic slave-trade.
- 1827-40s '27: a gold rush begins in Cherokee lands. '29: GA claims sovereignty over coveted areas of "Five Civilized Tribes." '30: Pres Jackson signs **Indian Removal Act**; ignores '32 Supreme Ct ruling upholding Indian sovereignty. '35: Unofficial chief of Cherokee faction accepts payment/relocation. Most stay; many killed by armed settlers claiming "ceded" lands; '38: 16,000 driven from farms by federal troops & GA militia on winter march to "Indian lands" west of Mississippi. On this "Trail of Tears," 4000+ (1/4) die of cold, disease, starvation. "With the exception of a small number of Seminoles & by the 1840s, from the Atlantic to the Mississippi, no Indian tribes resided in the American South. Through a combination of coerced treaties and the contravention of treaties and determination, the US Government succeeded in paving the way for the westward expansion and the incorporation of new territories as part of the United States."<sup>1</sup>
- 1845 US annexes TX, declares war when Mexico rejects its offer of \$25 million for CA & NM. '46: 30 armed settlers "arrest" Gen. Vallejo, annex CA, found Bear Flag Republic. '48: Mexican-American War ends; Mexico cedes territory (CA, NM, NV, parts of CO, UT, AZ) for \$15 million, losing (w/ TX) 1/2 its holdings. 100,000 Mexicans change citizenship; w/o deeds US courts require, many lose property; endure abuse, lynchings; outnumbered by white settlers. '98: US troops invade newly-independent Puerto Rico/becomes a US Territory; **1917 Jones Act**: citizens but no voting rights.
- 1845-54 1 million Irish flee potato famine. As despised, exploited immigrants, they unionize; try to ally w/ Chinese workers brought in as strike-breakers by factory owners; attack them when unsuccessful. Pre-immigration ('41), 60,000 signed a pro-abolition petition, but "earlier sympathy for slaves & disappear[ed] with the Atlantic Crossing. In America, many became anti-black, & promoting their own whiteness & white supremacy."<sup>3</sup> "In a country of the whites where [we] find it difficult to earn a subsistence, what right has the negro either to preference or to equality or to admission?" A powerful way to transform their own identity was to attack blacks."<sup>4</sup> Many opposed abolitionism. **1855-1920**: 3 million more Irish immigrate to US.
- 1857 **Dred Scott v Sanford** rules blacks aren't citizens: no Constitutional rights. '60: Charles Hodge's defense of biblical & Southern slavery published.
- 1862 **Homestead Act** is passed: federal policy incentivizes and rewards whites' westward migration/settlement, fulfilling nation's "Manifest Destiny."
- 1863-70 **Emancipation Proclamation** abolishes slavery: 3,953,760 freed but not compensated. Reconstruction Amendments abolish slavery (#13: '65); grant birthright citizenship, "due process of law," "equal protection under the laws" to all (#14: '68); bar disfranchisement "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude" (#15: '70). '70-71: Congress passes 3 "Ku Klux Klan Acts": Jim Crow era of white Southern backlash "rolling-back black citizens' civil rights via state and local laws, backed by violent repression" begins.
- 1870 **Naturalization Act** bars Chinese from citizenship (1<sup>st</sup> excluded by law) & forbids wives' entry, creating "bachelor colonies." First recruited in 1848 as indentured laborers for gold mining, then the transcontinental railroad, they are persecuted for their work ethic by other groups. **1882: Chinese Exclusion Act**; business turns to Mexico, Japan for cheap labor. (Ban lifted 61 years later "1943" for WWII alliance; annual cap: 105.)
- 1893-98 Annexationist non-Hawaiian businessmen and native elites, conspiring w/ US Minister, break national treaty w/ sovereign Kingdom of Hawaii, conduct Navy-backed *coup d'état*. '04: Queen appeals/abdicates; '98: Hawaii a US Territory. **1993**: Pres Clinton apologizes for "illegal overthrow"
- 1896 **Plessy v Ferguson**: racial segregation legalized. Poll taxes, literacy tests block blacks' voting. **1889-1950**: 4400+ lynched;<sup>5</sup> **1920s**: Great Migration.
- 1924 Native Americans citizens. **Immigration Act** sets quotas: **86.5% (W. Europe; Scandinavia)**; **11.2% (S. & E. Europe)**; **2.3% (all others)**.<sup>6</sup> Asians barred.
- 1942 FDR orders immediate relocation of 110,000 Japanese-Americans to internment camps, violating Constitutional rights of 2/3 (cf. German- & Italian-Americans). Many volunteer/serve w/ valor in WWII. On release: \$20+ bus fare. '88: Reagan apology; \$20,000 reparations to surviving internees.
- 1954 **Brown v Bd of Education** orders school integration. '55: Rosa Parks arrested. '63: March on Washington for Jobs & Freedom. '64: **Civil Rights Act** bars segregated public facilities & employment discrimination. '65: Selma; "Freedom Summer": black voters brave violent retaliation, defy bans to register; **Voting Rights Act**. '68: MLK assassinated; **Fair Housing Act** passed soon after.<sup>7</sup>
- 1965 **National Origin Act** phases out '24 **Immigration Act**'s white-racial preference policy/quotas. New criteria: desirable job skills; family reunification.
- 1967 Interracial marriage prosecutable from colonial era (**1880** CA law forbade whites marrying a "negro, mulatto, or Mongolian"). **Loving v VA**: anti-"miscegenation" laws ruled unconstitutional; remain on the books in 16 states. 1998: SC repeals its ban; **2000**: AL its (1901 ban).

<sup>1</sup>"Indian Treaties and the Removal Act of 1830." [history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/indian-treaties](http://history.state.gov/milestones/1830-1860/indian-treaties)

<sup>2</sup>Ronald Takaki, *A Different Mirror*, 151.

<sup>3</sup>David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1971), 137, cf. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>4</sup>Takaki, *Different Mirror*, 151.

<sup>5</sup>"Lynching in America: Confronting the Legacy of Racial Terror." [eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/](http://eji.org/reports/lynching-in-america/)

<sup>6</sup>American Social History Project: Center for Media & Learning (CUNY) and Center for History & New Media (George Mason Univ). <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5078>

<sup>7</sup>"Major Civil Rights Acts of Congress." [history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Constitutional-Amendments-and-Legislation/](http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-Publications/BAIC/Historical-Data/Constitutional-Amendments-and-Legislation/)