

U.S. Race Timeline

(http://www.pbs.org/race/003_RaceTimeline/003_01-timeline.htm)

1676 Social identities fluid - In early colonial America, social identities are fluid and class distinctions trump physical ones. On Virginia plantations, European indentured servants and African slaves mix freely - they work, play, and make love together. In 1676, Bacon's Rebellion unites poor Africans and Europeans against Indians and wealthy planters. Although the rebellion is short lived, the alliance alarms the colonial elite, who realize the labor system based on indentured servitude is unstable. Coincidentally, captured Africans, perceived as stronger workers by Europeans, become more available at this time. Planters turn increasingly to African slavery for labor, while granting increased freedoms to Europeans.

1680 White appears in colonial laws - Early colonial laws refer to Christians or Englishmen, rather than whites. Around the time of Bacon's Rebellion in 1676, new laws begin to appear, separating Black slaves from European indentured servants. Slavery becomes permanent and heritable for Negroes, and Black people are punished more harshly for crimes. Poor whites are given new rights and opportunities, including as overseers to police slaves. As the importance of slavery grows, white is used almost exclusively, not only in law but other social arenas, and slavery becomes associated exclusively with Blackness.

1705 Virginia slave codes passed - As wealthy planters turn from indentured servitude towards slavery (Black slaves were easier to identify in the case of runaways), they begin to write laws making slavery permanent for Africans and dividing Blacks from whites and slaves from free men. Blacks are punished more harshly for crimes and their rights are increasingly curtailed. Poor whites are given new entitlements and opportunities, including as overseers who police the slave population. Over time poor whites identify more with wealthy whites and the degradation of slavery is identified with Blackness.

1765 Slaves lobby for freedom in American Revolution - Free and enslaved Africans are aware of the moral contradiction between slavery and natural rights. Like their fellow patriots, they are inspired to press for their own equality. In Charleston, South Carolina, they march through the streets carrying signs reading "Liberty, Liberty." One Massachusetts slave petition reads: "Every principle from which America has acted in the course of her unhappy difficulties with Great Britain pleads stronger than a thousand arguments in favor of your petitioners." Although their emancipation is not gained for another century, their cries are not unnoticed. In a letter to her husband, future president John Adams, Abigail Adams writes: "How is it we are denying people that which we are fighting for ourselves?"

1776 Freedom creates contradiction - Wealthy planter and slaveholder Thomas Jefferson pens the Declaration of Independence establishing a radical new principle: equality and the natural rights of man. Although this document lays the foundation for American democracy, it also creates a moral contradiction: How can a nation built on freedom hold slaves? Previously, slavery has been unquestioned. Rather than abolish slavery, some founding fathers seek justification in the "nature" of slaves. Contempt for slaves begins to harden into an ideology of racial difference and white supremacy.

1776 Birth of "Caucasian" - Johann Blumenbach, one of many 18th-century naturalists, lays out the scientific template for race *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind*. Although he opposes slavery, he maps a hierarchical pyramid of five human types, placing Caucasians at the top because he believes a skull

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found in the Caucasus Mountains is the "most beautiful form ... from which ... the other diverge." This model is widely embraced and Blumenbach inadvertently paves the way for scientific claims about white superiority.

1781 Jefferson suggests Black inferiority - With Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson becomes the first prominent American to suggest that Africans are innately inferior: "I advance it therefore, as a suspicion only, that blacks...are inferior to the whites in the endowments of body and mind." His writings help rationalize slavery in a nation otherwise dedicated to equality, and he calls on science to find proof.

1790 Naturalization reserved for whites – The 1790 Naturalization Act reserves adopted citizenship for whites only. African Americans are not guaranteed citizenship until 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution is ratified during Reconstruction. Native Americans become citizens through individual treaties or intermarriage and finally, through the 1924 Indian Citizenship Act. Asian immigrants are ineligible for citizenship until the 1954 McCarran-Walter Act removes all racial barriers to naturalization. Without citizenship, nonwhites can't vote, own property, bring suit, or testify in court - all the basic protections and privileges that whites take for granted.

1790 Race categories on first census - The U.S. Constitution mandates that "an actual enumeration" be conducted every 10 years. From the beginning, race categories are included, but in 1790, who is Black or white is less important than who is free or enslaved. The question of how to count slaves sparks an intense debate in Congress, leading to the infamous *3/5ths compromise to determine taxation and representation. At this time, Enlightenment thinkers have a view of common humanity. Although many regard Africans as different from and inferior to the English, the difference is seen as environmental - temporary rather than natural or inevitable. *(The Constitutional compromise, in which each slave was counted as three-fifths of a person.)

1810 Indians take on racial idea - Lumped together as the enemy by encroaching settlers, some Native Americans begin to see themselves as sharing a unified identity - or at least a common fate. Delaware, Miami, Sauk, Mesquakie, Potawatmi, and Kickapoo join the Shawnee warrior Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa (the Prophet) to forge a pan-Indian movement and drive white Americans off their lands. But many tribes divide or refuse to join them, and in October 1811, the alliance is attacked and defeated in the Battle of Tippecanoe. Tecumseh is later killed during the War of 1812. "Where today are the Pequot, Narraganset, Mohican, Pokanet and many other such powerful tribes? They have vanished before the avarice and oppression of the white man....The only way to stop this evil is for all the red men to unite and claim an equal and common right to the land." –Tecumseh

1833 Abolition strengthens race idea - The American Anti-Slavery Society forms in Philadelphia. By 1835, hundreds of branches exist throughout the free states, and anti-slavery sentiment is on the rise. But as attacks on slavery grow, so do arguments defending it. Slavery advocates turn to scientific and biblical arguments to "prove" that Negroes are distinct and inferior to whites. Slavery is no longer described as a necessary evil but as a positive good. The rationale is so strong that when slavery is finally abolished in 1865, the racial idea lives on.

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1839 Skulls measured to prove racial hierarchy - Samuel Morton, the first famous American scientist, possesses the largest skull collection in the world. He claims to measure brain capacity through skull size, but makes systematic errors in favor of his biases, concluding: "[Their larger skulls gives Caucasians] decided and unquestioned superiority over all the nations of the earth." Morton's findings are later seized upon and popularized by pro-slavery scientists like Josiah Nott and Louis Agassiz. In just 60-70 years, Jefferson's suggestion of racial difference becomes scientific fact: "Nations and races, like individuals, have each an especial destiny: some are born to rule, and others to be ruled....No two distinctly-marked races can dwell together on equal terms." -Josiah Nott (1854)

1854 Nonwhites barred from testifying - In *The People v. Hall*, the California Supreme Court reverses the conviction of a white man in a murder trial, ruling that the testimony of key Chinese witnesses is inadmissible because "no Black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be allowed to give evidence in favor of, or against a white man." Chief Justice Charles J. Murray remarks that "the Chinese are a race of people whom nature has marked as inferior....The same rule which would admit them to testify, would admit them to all the equal rights of citizenship, and we might soon see them at the polls, in the jury box, upon the bench, and in our legislative halls. This is not a speculation...but an actual and present danger."

1857 African Americans denied citizenship - In the *Dred Scott* decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declares that "Negroes," whether free or enslaved, are not citizens. As Chief Justice Taney puts it, they have "no rights which any white man is bound to respect." Free Black people are taxed like whites, but they do not enjoy the same protection and entitlements. African Americans are not granted citizenship until 1868. Meanwhile, centuries of slavery generate wealth for whites only. When slaves in Washington, D.C., are freed in 1862, reparation is paid not to slaves but to slaveowners for their loss of property.

1887 Jim Crow segregation begins - Beginning in the late 19th century, southern states codify a system of laws and practices to subordinate African Americans to whites. The "new" social order, reinforced through violence and intimidation, affects schools, public transportation, jobs, housing, private life and voting rights. Cutting across class boundaries, Jim Crow unites poor and wealthy whites, while denying African Americans equality in the courts, freedom of assembly and movement, and full participation as citizens. The federal government adopts segregation under President Wilson in 1913, and is not integrated until the 1960s.

1899 Europeans not quite white - After 1889, immigration to the U.S. from southern and eastern Europe swells dramatically. Many new arrivals are "ethnics" employed in undesirable low-wage jobs and living in the urban ghetto. They are deemed inferior, seen as not fully white. Reflecting this view, anthropologist William V. Ripley publishes *The Races of Europe*, dividing whites into a hierarchy of subraces and sub-subraces. Yet even the degraded Hebrew, Celt and Italian are still legally "white" - they are not denied citizenship or prevented from participating in American society. After WWII, they melt into whiteness as they move into government-subsidized white suburbs and up the economic ladder.

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1905 African Americans demand equal rights - Founded under the leadership of W.E.B. DuBois, the Niagara Movement marks an important turning point in the African American struggle for equality. The group sets an aggressive agenda demanding equal rights and an end to racial discrimination: "We claim for ourselves every single right that belongs to a freeborn American, political, civil and social; and until we get these rights we will never cease to protest and assail the ears of America. The battle we wage is not for ourselves alone but for all true Americans." The Niagara group gives rise to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in 1909, whose legal efforts culminate in the watershed Supreme Court decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, marking the beginning of the end of Jim Crow and legal segregation.

1911 Universal Race Congress held - A thousand people from 50 nations convene at the University of London to counter the budding eugenics movement. Among the prominent scientists and scholars who attend are W.E.B. DuBois and anthropologist Franz Boas. The group issues a statement, declaring: "An impartial investigator would be inclined to look upon the various important peoples of the world as, to all intents and purposes, essentially equal in intellect, enterprise, morality and physique." However, their work falls on deaf ears and has little impact.

1913 Land laws discriminate against Asians - California passes the first alien land law, prohibiting "aliens ineligible to citizenship" from owning or leasing land. Although the law isn't explicitly racial, it applies only to Asian immigrants and gives white farmers an unfair advantage by keeping Japanese and other competitors out. Legal loopholes allow Japanese to continue farming until a 1920 ballot initiative bars them altogether. Arizona passes a similar law in 1917, followed by Washington and Louisiana in 1921, and nine other states by 1950. California's alien land laws are rescinded in 1956. Wyoming and Kansas finally repeal their statutes in 2001 and 2002, while two states, Florida and New Mexico, still have the laws written into their state constitution.

1922 Courts decide who is white - The 1790 Naturalization Act restricts adopted American citizenship to whites. In the early 20th century, many immigrants petition the courts to be legally designated white to gain citizenship. Armenians, known as "Asiatic Turks," succeed with the help of anthropologist Franz Boas, who testifies as an expert scientific witness. Others are not so fortunate. In 1922, the Supreme Court concludes that Japanese are not legally white because science classifies them as Mongoloid rather than Caucasian. Less than a year later, the court contradicts itself by concluding that Asian Indians are not legally white, even though science classifies them as Caucasian, declaring that whiteness should be based on "the common understanding of the white man." Racial restrictions on naturalization are not removed until 1954.

1924 Immigration quotas favor "Nordics" - The 1924 Johnson-Reed Act overhauls U.S. immigration and creates the first quota system based upon national origin. The act favors immigrants from northern and western Europe over "the inferior races" of Asia and southern and eastern Europe. Following the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the 1917 Asiatic Barred Zone Act, the 1921 National Quota Act, and other exclusionary measures, the act captures several decades of racialized, anti-immigration sentiment and policy. This explicit preference system continues to shape American demographics and immigration policy until the 1960s.

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1924 - Changing definitions of who is Black - In 1705, Virginia defines any child, grandchild, or great grandchild of a Negro as a mulatto. In 1866, the state decrees that every person having one-fourth or more Negro blood shall be deemed a colored person. In 1910, the percentage is changed to 1/16th. Finally in 1924, the Virginia Racial Purity Act defines Black persons as having any trace of African ancestry - the infamous "one-drop" rule. Practically speaking, most people cannot prove their ancestry and the rule is applied inconsistently. Other states also define Blackness differently. As historian James Horton notes, one could cross a state line and literally, legally change race.

1930 Mexicans added to census - Mexicans, like other minority groups, are defined differently at various times. In the 19th century, they are classified as white and allowed to naturalize, based upon an 1848 treaty. In 1930, nativists lobby to classify them separately on the census, to limit their immigration and reinforce their distinctness from whites. During World War II, as demand for Mexican labor grows, Mexicans are again classified as whites. In the 1970s, they are reclassified as "Hispanics." As census historian Hyman Alterman notes, the definition depends on political climate: "It was not an accident that in the census of 1930, persons of Mexican birth or ancestry were classified as 'nonwhite'. This was a policy decision, not a mistake."

1934 U.S. housing programs benefit whites only - In the 1930s and 1940s, the federal government creates programs that subsidize low-cost loans, opening up home ownership to millions of Americans for the first time. Government underwriters also introduce a national appraisal system that effectively locks nonwhites out of home-buying just as many white Americans are getting in. In post-WWII restricted suburbs, European "ethnics" blend together as whites, while minorities are "marked" by urban poverty. Two legacies of this discrimination are still with us today: segregated communities and a substantial wealth gap between whites and nonwhites.

1935 Minorities denied Social Security/excluded from unions - In 1935, Congress passes two laws that protect American workers and exclude nonwhites. The Social Security Act exempts agricultural workers and domestic servants (predominantly African American, Mexican, and Asian) from receiving old-age insurance, while the Wagner Act, guaranteeing workers' rights, does not prohibit unions from racial discrimination. Nonwhites are locked out of higher-paying jobs and union benefits such as medical care, job security, and pensions. As low-income workers, minorities have the greatest need for these provisions, yet they are systematically denied what most Americans take for granted.

1950 UNESCO publishes Statement on Race - Only when Nazism takes the idea of racial inferiority to a horrifying extreme is race science finally discredited. After the Holocaust, the United Nations issues an official statement declaring that race has no scientific basis and calling for an end to racial thinking in scientific and political thought. Its principal author is Ashley Montagu, a student of Franz Boas. Although important, this shift in scientific thinking has little impact on social policy and ingrained public attitudes about race.

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1954 Legal segregation ends - In the wake of the Brown v. Board of Education decision, civil rights advocates led by Martin Luther King, Jr. organize a yearlong boycott of city buses in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest the state's resistance to school integration. What begins as a struggle over schools spreads to public transportation, voting, and all areas of social life. Despite the violent opposition of some white groups, especially in the Deep South, integration and the freedom struggle continue through the work of whites and nonwhites alike. Students, church groups, workers, and volunteers participate in massive nonviolent protest, civil disobedience, and public education campaigns. Their efforts culminate in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

1967 Laws against mixed marriage invalidated - In the 19th century, 38 states have anti-miscegenation laws prohibiting interracial marriage. By 1924, 29 states, including Virginia, still ban mixed marriages. The statutes are not outlawed until 1967, when a Virginia couple is tried and convicted, and files a suit challenging the law. Although the state Supreme Court of Appeals upholds their conviction, the U.S. Supreme Court rules unanimously against it, declaring that a person's individual right to marry cannot be restricted by race. The Loving decision finally reverses the racist policies of Virginia's 1924 Racial Purity Act and invalidates the laws remaining in 16 other states.

1977 Government defines race/ethnic categories - In response to civil rights legislation, the federal Office of Management and Budget issues Directive 15, creating standard government race and ethnic categories for the first time. The categories are meant to aid agencies, but they are arbitrary, inconsistent, and based on varying assumptions. For example, "Black" is defined as a "racial group" but "white" is not. "Hispanic" reflects Spanish colonization and excludes non-Spanish parts of Central and South America; while "American Indian or Alaskan Native" requires "cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition" - a condition of no other category. The categories are amended in 1996, and "Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander" is added.