



US systematically racist

The history of the United States is teeming with a disturbing legacy of racism, one that stretches back through the ages. A mere glimpse is enough to reveal to the viewer a vast expanse of time marred by the insidiousness of racial prejudice in the continent. From the unjust killings and dispossession of Native Americans — where their ancestral lands were forcibly taken — to the alarmingly recent instances of police violence against African Americans, no era in the annals of American history remains untainted by the pervasive stain of racism.

In early colonial times, racism played a principal role in shaping the social and economic structures of America. European colonizers arrived on their ships with a deeply ingrained belief that their race was superior to that of others. This groundless, barbaric belief laid the foundation for the oppression of Indigenous peoples and the later enslavement of Africans. The rightful owners of America, Indigenous communities, had rich cultural histories and diverse societies. Yet, they were savagely dispossessed of their lands and subjected to violence, forced displacement, and marginalization. The colonizers justified these actions through the concept of “manifest destiny,” claiming that they were destined to dominate and civilize the land.

Simultaneously, the barbaric Europeans enslaved peoples in Africa, bringing millions of them to the Americas through an inhumane slave market. There, these poor souls were ruthlessly exploited as a

source of labor for plantations and other industries. They endured unimaginable suffering, forced labor, and brutal punishments. They were essentially treated as property. This dehumanizing system stripped enslaved individuals of their freedom, dignity, and basic human rights.

The institution of slavery, deeply rooted in racial prejudices, created a racial hierarchy that continued to shape American society for generations to come.

“Slavery was not merely an unfortunate thing that happened to black people,” writes Isabel Wilkerson in her scholarly book, ‘Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,’ which describes racism in the United States. She calls slavery “an American innovation, an American institution,” whose objective was to benefit “the elites of the dominant caste.” Understanding the historical context of slavery is indeed crucial for comprehending how deeply entrenched racism became in the fabric of American society and why the fight against it still rages on. The slave trade and the forced removal of the Indigenous peoples from their lands gave way to a social hierarchy based on race. Wilkerson compares this hierarchy to a caste system similar to that of India and Nazi Germany, with white Europeans at the top and marginalized groups at the bottom.

Little by little, however, the abolitionist movement gained ground in the US, which led to the Civil War and, subsequently, the end of slavery in 1865. After the Civil War, the brief period of Reconstruction began, which spanned

from 1865 to 1877. It was a pivotal era, during which the aftermath of slavery, emancipation, and the reintegration of the Confederate states into the Union were addressed. Nevertheless, racism persisted during this time, blockading the progress of African Americans towards true equality.

Even though a few amendments to the Constitution were passed that abolished slavery, granted citizenship rights, and ensured voting rights for African Americans, both systemic racism and violence toward minorities remained intact. Southern states enacted Black Codes — discriminatory laws with the purpose of restricting the rights and freedoms of the newly freed slaves. These codes imposed harsh labor contracts, limited access to education, and denied African Americans the right to vote.

At this stage, the rise of white supremacist groups, such as the Ku Klux Klan, further fueled racial tensions during Reconstruction. These groups employed intimidation, violence, and terror tactics to suppress African Americans and reestablish white supremacy. Lynching, mob violence, and political assassinations became harsh realities for many African Americans seeking to exercise their newfound rights.

In 1877, with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South, Reconstruction effectively came to an end. The withdrawal allowed Southern states to enact Jim Crow laws, which enforced racial segregation and perpetuated racial inequalities for many more decades.

The unrealized dream

“I have a dream,” declared Martin Luther King Jr. on August 28, 1963, to more than 250,000 people, a fifth of them white. They had gathered near the Lincoln Memorial in Washington to rally for “jobs and freedom.”

Luther King’s dream was to see that one day America “will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed.” He drove his vision home by reaffirming an unshakable belief in the self-evident truth “that all men are created equal.”

His speech came at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, which fought for racial equality. During this time, inspirational leaders such as Luther King, Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X pushed for desegregation, voting rights, and an end to discrimination. Important events like the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the March on Washington led to significant advancements in racial equality, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Despite some gains, however, racial

disparities persist in the US and King’s dream remains unrealized. Systemic racism, economic inequality, housing discrimination, and biases in the criminal justice system disproportionately affect African Americans and other minority groups to this day. Testament to this is the Black Lives Matter movement, which aims to put an end to racism. The popular movement came as a means to counter the police killings of unarmed African Americans.

● 2019
Atatiana Jefferson

● 2015
Walter Lamar Scott

● 2015
Sandra Bland

● 2016
Philando Castille

“

“Slavery was not merely an unfortunate thing that happened to black people,” writes Isabel Wilkerson in her scholarly book, ‘Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents,’ which describes racism in the United States. She calls slavery “an American innovation, an American institution,” whose objective was to benefit “the elites of the dominant caste.”

● 2020
Breonna Taylor

● 2015
Freddie Gray

● 2016
Sean Bell

