



A History of Racism in the United States

SESSION 2

| 1790–1954: U.S. Apartheid, Colonialism, and Neocolonialism

Introduction

The previous session focused on European colonialism as the primary shaping force in the territory that became the United States. In the earliest years of the U.S., and as its identity became more solidified, major legislation, territory expansion, and many wars helped shape the physical, political, and racial landscape of the country. This session will focus on just a few examples of U.S. apartheid, colonialism, and neocolonialism, beginning in 1790, when the Naturalization Act was passed, determining who could be a naturalized citizen of the U.S. This period ends in 1954, when *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* symbolized the beginning of the end of one form of U.S. apartheid enforced by Jim Crow laws.

Citizenship

The U.S. government's first major legislation regarding immigration and citizenship in 1790 stated that only "free white persons" could be naturalized as citizens after a two-year residency and if it was determined that they were of "good character." This was amended in 1870 to include "persons of African nativity or African descent."¹ The long journey for persons of African descent who were slaves had been complicated by the Constitution's definition of slaves as three-fifths of a person. The three-fifths compromise between southern and northern states was included in Article 1 of the U.S. Constitution, which includes this statement:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by



Two Cuties: © Linorka—Fotolia.com

The black girls chose the white doll as the pretty and good doll, and the black doll as the bad doll.

adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.²

This compromise between those who favored and those who objected to slavery prohibited southern states, where slaves were ineligible to vote, from fully counting slaves in their numbers. They could only count each slave as three-fifths of a person. This was an advantage to northern states, which were more populous with free white persons. Since states were required to pay taxes based on population, the South had to pay taxes on three-fifths of the enslaved population. This left out vast swaths of the population who were neither white nor enslaved blacks already in the country in 1790 and those who arrived throughout the nineteenth century.

This finally changed in 1870. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, ratified in July of 1868, states, "All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside."³ However, even after the ratification of the

The Resistance: Native Americans Protesting Forced Migration

The Seminoles, before they were forcibly resettled, said this to the U.S. government: "We are not willing to [say we will go]. If suddenly we tear our hearts from the homes around which they are twined, our heart-strings will snap."⁴

The Cherokee said,

We wish to remain on the land of our fathers. We have a perfect and original right to remain without interruption or molestation. The treaties with us, and the laws of the United States made in pursuance of treaties, guarantee our residence and our privileges, and secure us against intruders. Our only request is, that these treaties may be fulfilled, and these laws executed. We entreat those to whom the foregoing paragraphs are addressed, to remember the great law of love: "Do unto others as ye would that others would do to you."⁵

Fourteenth Amendment, and the 1870 Naturalization Act that included "persons of African nativity or African descent" as eligible for citizenship, other people of color were left in quite a bind. Many Asians approached naturalization by arguing they were either "free white persons" or of "African descent." In 1922–1923, the Supreme Court heard two cases from a Japanese immigrant and an Indian immigrant, both of whom argued they were "free white persons." Takao Ozawa, a Japanese citizen, wrote a brief outlining the ways in which he was American (his marriage, his disaffiliation with anything Japanese, his Christian faith), and also argued that his skin was white. The Supreme Court ruled against him, citing "Caucasian" and "white" were the same, and since Ozawa was not Caucasian, he could not be white.⁶ Deciding to use this ruling of "Caucasian" as a qualifying factor, regardless of skin color, Bhagat Singh Thind referred to the science of the day. Social scientists placed Asian Indians within the Caucasoid region, and also stated they were Aryan. Despite the Supreme Court's ruling of a few months before, the Court decided to ignore its own equation of Caucasian and white and stated "the words 'free white person' are words of common speech, to be interpreted in accordance with the understanding of the

common man."⁷ The decision went on to say that Thind could not be considered white according to the understanding of what was the common man.

Forced Migration and Apartheid in the United States

Most of us like to believe we move due to factors within our control. We move to be near family, or for a new job. We move so our children can go to better schools, or be exposed to rich diversity. However, throughout our history, many groups of people of color and poor people have been forced to move. Apartheid is frequently a dimension of forced migration, keeping people legally separated from one another. In the U.S., it has been based on race.

From Jim Crow to *Brown v. Board of Education*

Apartheid has taken two major forms in this period of U.S. history. The first is perhaps most familiar to us: Jim Crow. Jim Crow laws were put into place throughout the colonial era, increasing in the North after most slavery there was abolished. These laws were firmly established in the South after Reconstruction.⁸ Jim Crow segregation was accepted in the North, and in the South was clearly labeled, thanks to "whites only" signs posted over separate entrances, drinking fountains, and restrooms. Segregation continued in the North after World War II through the practice of restrictive covenants, agreements put in place by homeowners pledging never to sell their property to particular groups (typically Jews and nonwhite racial groups).

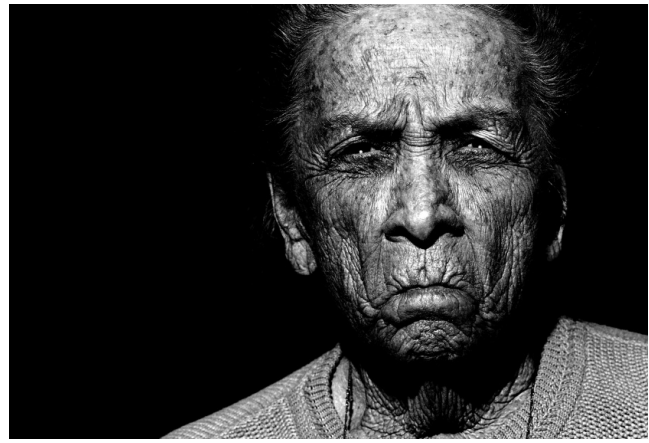
The U.S. Supreme Court decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 established the legality of "separate but equal" places of transportation, and thereby education and other social institutions. This left Jim Crow in place, under the obviously false premise that resources were distributed equally between white and black segments of the population. While this set the groundwork for historic black colleges and universities to thrive, inequities between the two groups continued to deepen. The Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 struck down *Plessy v. Ferguson*, establishing that separate is not equal. A key piece of evidence was a study done observing the impact of segregation on the self-image of black girls. They were presented with a white doll and a black doll, and asked

which was pretty, which was good, and which was bad. The black girls chose the white doll as the pretty and good doll, and the black doll as the bad doll. *Brown v. Board* ended an era of legal segregation by race, and laid the groundwork for the slow work of integrating a firmly segregated population.

Indian Reservations

The second form of apartheid as a by-product of colonial expansion is Indian reservations. Andrew Jackson, already experienced as a military man in killing thousands of southern Native Americans by the time he was elected president in 1829, said in his first message to Congress, "I suggest the propriety of setting apart an ample district west of the Mississippi . . . to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes, as long as they shall occupy it."⁹ This sounds generous, but it was a promise broken, and the decision was made without the consent of the people being moved. The dividing line for the district was moved from the Mississippi to the 95th meridian because this law was not put into place before white settlers moved into Iowa and Wisconsin.

The Cherokee were supposed to be moved slowly over time, but when gold was discovered in Appalachia in 1838, five tribes, including the Cherokee, were rounded up and placed into camps, then moved along the Trail of Tears, where 25 percent of the Cherokee died. Other Indians, particularly Northern Indians, were also moved against their will to this area, the territory of the Plains Indians. Many tribes who were placed on reservations were not consulted about the boundaries or locations of



American Indian Woman: © Laurin Kinder—Fotolia.com

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these reservations. Many of the tribes were historically nomadic based on the season but the establishment of the reservations restricted their movement. What grew in their homeland did not necessarily grow in their new homes. The dividing line also was not kept; as white settlers, the U.S.-Mexico War, the U.S. Civil War, and other forces encroached on the 95th meridian, the lands set aside for refugee Indians shrank further. Only 30,000 Indians lived east of the Mississippi in 1844, a dramatic decrease from the 120,000 who lived there in 1820.¹²

Japanese Concentration Camps

The bombing of Pearl Harbor by Japanese war planes shocked and outraged the American people, and led to another shameful period of forced migration and segregation. Anti-Japanese hysteria led a number of organizations—such as the American Legions of California, Oregon, and Washington; the *Los Angeles Times*; and the Grower-Shipper Vegetable Association—to call for removal of all those Japanese descent.¹³

Attorney General Francis Biddle stated in a memo to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that evacuation of American citizens based on their racial categorization was determined to be unconstitutional.¹⁴ In February of 1942, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover determined Japanese and Japanese Americans in the U.S. posed no real espionage threat. Despite this counsel, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942. General DeWitt was authorized to remove all Americans of Japanese descent from the western states to be processed and relocated to inland concentration

The Resistance: The Harlem Renaissance

In 1920s Harlem, a political movement was afoot. Black migration brought together artists who created a cultural movement of writing, music, poetry, painting, and other artistic media that dared to define itself, rather than let dominant society define it. Included in this creative and liberatory movement were many artists and writers who were bisexual, gay, and lesbian.¹⁰ Alain Locke wrote, "Harlem . . . promises at least to be a race capital. . . . Negro life is not only founding new centers, but finding a new soul."¹¹

The Resistance: John Brown

In 1854, the decision over whether Kansas would be pro-slavery was left to the majority rule of the future settlers. Pro-slavery activists attacked the pro-free town of Lawrence, Kansas, in 1956. John Brown, a radical white abolitionist, led a retaliatory attack against pro-slavery Pottawatomie, along with other acts for freedom. He was sentenced to death, and stated, "Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say, let it be done."¹⁵ He became an example to Union soldiers going to fight in the Civil War, singing a song about John Brown. Sadly, for years, Brown was accused of insanity by racist whites unwilling to understand his commitment to justice.

camp. Approximately 120,000 persons of Japanese descent—men, women, and children—were moved from their homes. The United States also cooperated with Latin American governments to deport and intern 2,264 Japanese Latin Americans from Latin America to the United States.¹⁶ Japanese Americans experienced great shame. My (Cheifetz's) grandmother recalls that when they were forced to leave their home and their belongings when she was a teenager, her father was one of the most successful tomato farmers in California. They lost everything when they were moved to the camp in Topaz, Utah. Families were told they had just a few days to sell all their belongings, or entrust them to banks, friends, or neighbors. The shame of being seen as the enemy was multiplied as white people came to buy valuables, houses, and land for far less than their actual value. Despite the Alien Land Laws, prohibiting non-citizen ownership of land in the western United States, Japanese American families owned some very lucrative farmland that was highly coveted by neighboring white farmers. Entire families left everything, bringing only what they could carry, and went first to evacuation centers, then to assembly centers. These assembly centers were in the horse and cattle stalls at such places as the Puyallup, Washington, fairgrounds and the Santa Ana racetrack in California. They then were sent to live

for three years in uninsulated barracks in various rural areas, where the family system was severely disrupted by a life without private space. People were not allowed to leave the camps unless accompanied by guards while providing labor to neighboring farms, or to serve in the military. In contrast, the only people of German and Italian descent imprisoned within the United States were also charged with specific acts of espionage.

As the U.S. spread west in its colonial expansion, white Americans began to encroach upon territory belonging to Mexicans, who had been there for generations. So many Americans were entering the territory known as Texas that the Mexican government requested an investigation into the influx.¹⁷ Mexican citizens were divided on the presence of Americans, some in support and some opposed. In 1830, Mexico made slavery illegal, while also prohibiting any more American migration. Americans continued to cross the border as undocumented migrants. Stephen Austin framed the conflict as one "between a 'mongrel Spanish-Indian and negro race' and 'civilization and the Anglo-American race.'"¹⁸ In 1836, tensions came to a head in a series of violent confrontations. American rebels barricaded themselves in the Alamo and fought an illegal war with Mexican troops. Mexican troops captured a nearby town and executed 400 Americans. In revenge for this, Americans killed 630 Mexicans. Sam Houston forced General Santa Anna to hand Texas over to him as an independent republic. In the ensuing struggle between Mexico and the U.S. over the border of Texas with Mexico (whether it was the Rio Grande or the Rio Nueces), American soldiers killed Mexican civilians with impunity. In 1848, the U.S. defeated Mexico, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ceded half of Mexico to the U.S. (including what are now California, New Mexico, Nevada, and parts of Colorado, Arizona, and Utah).¹⁹ Ashbel Smith declared that the "inferior must give way before the superior race."²⁰ Manifest destiny thrived throughout this conquest, used to prove Mexicans and their descendants were unfit for the land, and that Americans were meant to take over land previously inhabited by inferior races. This provided Americans with more land and a wealth of natural resources.

Neocolonialism

The Foraker Act in 1900 made Puerto Rican citizens into American citizens with very limited representation (a nonvoting Commissioner to the U.S. House of Representatives), and imposed a civilian government designed by

Manifest Destiny

As the “permanent Indian frontier” was crossed or encroached upon by U.S. soldiers going to fight Mexico in 1847, by white easterners looking for gold in the 1848 California gold rush, and by settlers going toward New Mexico and Oregon, U.S. law-makers sought a way to justify this laxity of the borders. They invented the concept of manifest destiny, deciding that “Europeans and their descendants were ordained by destiny to rule all of America.”²¹ They were given license to rule Native Americans, as well as all their land and material goods. In 1850, Minnesota gained statehood and along with it, one hundred miles of the so-called “permanent Indian frontier.”²²

the United States, including a governor and executive council appointed by the U.S. President.²³ This opened up Puerto Rico not to colonial expansion, but to neocolonial domination. With Puerto Rico a territory of the U.S., American companies were able to move into Puerto Rico, and given significant tax incentives to do so. However, Puerto Rican companies were not allowed to operate in the U.S. The limited representation of Puerto Rico to Washington, D.C., including ineligibility of Puerto Ricans living on the island to vote in U.S. presidential elections, allowed any opposition to policies regarding Puerto Rico by those most affected to be ignored. In the early years of the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship, the people of Puerto Rico voted against this particular arrangement, and were overruled by the U.S. Congress. This laid the groundwork for pharmaceutical companies to enter and test drugs on the population. This testing included involuntary sterilizations of many Puerto Rican women. Although American pharmaceutical companies employed Puerto Ricans, most profits did not return to the island.

Summary

This brief look at a significant period of development in the U.S. provides some context for how patterns begin and are entrenched, even though the vast majority of us as individuals do not wish to live into systems of racism and oppression. The uncomfortable words we worked to claim in the first session (genocide, slavery, land theft, conquest, systematic destruction of culture, and dehumanization) are built into the United States policies and culture. The next session moves us into a time of

organized resistance to many of the patterns we have seen here.

About the Writers

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Endnotes

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15. James W. Loewen, *Lies My Teacher Told Me* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 168.
16. Campaign for Justice, <http://www.campaignforjusticejla.org/>.
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18. Ibid., 174.
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23. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foraker_Act.