**A Brief History of African-Americans – 1600s-1900s**

**1660s-1700s:** Africans brought to America from West Africa and the Caribbean to work as slaves for Northern families, businesses, and farms and Southern cotton and tobacco plantations. Many colonies pass laws saying that the children of slave parents will be slaves if the mother is one. Thus slave masters could rape their female slaves, and the children would *also* be slaves.

**1776:** The 13 British-American colonies declare independence from Great Britain. Thomas Jefferson, a slave-owner, writes “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence, but he only means white men.

**1781:** The United States becomes a nation, and most Northern states decide that slavery should be abolished. The Northern states slowly end slavery by 1820, and instead, they use wage-labor in new mills and factories.

**1793:** Eli Whitney invents the cotton gin, a machine that makes cleaning the seeds out of cotton so quick and fast that growing cotton can make more money (because it takes less time to process it and make cloth from it). Slave masters begin buying more land, more slaves, and slavery expands.

**1820:** Compromise of 1820 – all the **new** states in the South will have slavery, all the **new** states in the North will be free. They are divided by the Mason Dixon line.

**1800s** **(before 1860**): **Slaves rebel** by escaping to the Northern states or Canada, going to live with Native American tribes, working slowly, killing their masters, or destroying the plantations. Many former slaves, free blacks, and white Americans start the **Abolitionist Movement** – the goal was to abolish (end) slavery. Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, and William Lloyd Garrison were some of these people.

**1846:** US fights the Mexican War against Mexico to gain territory in the South. After winning and annexing land, the US government sells land to slave owners, who to create more slave plantations.

**1857**: US Supreme Court votes in the *Dred Scott v. Sanford* case that no black American, free or slave, was or could ever be an American citizen, and so they were not allowed to sue anyone in court.

**1861:** Abraham Lincoln is elected President, the Southern states are afraid he will abolish slavery, so they declare independence from the USA and for the Confederate States of America.

**1861-65:** The North and the South fight a **Civil War** – the North wins because they have more soldiers (like all the slaves that rebel join the Northern Union army) and more money, weapons, and factories

**1865 – 1877:** Reconstruction of the South – after the war, the North tries to make the South safer for African-Americans and freed slaves by starting the Freedman’s Bureau and passing the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. The 13th Amendment outlaws slavery (except if you are in jail), the 14th Amendment guarantees equal protection of the law to all citizens, and the 15th Amendment gives every race the right to vote.

**1877: Reconstruction ends** – Southern states pass Jim Crow laws to limit black rights like grandfather clauses (if your grandfather was a slave, you can’t vote), literacy tests (you can’t vote unless you pass a test), poll taxes (you can’t vote unless you pay a high tax), and segregation (separate schools, water fountains, sections of busses and restaurants for blacks and whites). African-Americans in the South are often trapped because they are tenant farmers on their former masters’ plantations, in debt, and can’t afford to leave.

**1895:** Booker T. Washington is an African-American, educated in an all Black College, who gives the “Atlanta Compromise” Speech about how blacks should only focus on working hard and getting economic power.

**1896**: *Plessy v. Fergusson* – Supreme Court case that allowed for segregated facilities if they were “separate, but equal”. Segregation expands in the South.

**1900:** Ida. B. Wells is an African-American female journalist who documents and writes articles about how many lynchings were happening in the South.

**1903:** W.E.B. Dubois, an African-American activist, writes *The Souls of Black Folk*, which argues against Booker T. Washington’s theory and says that only working will actually hurt the black man’s freedom.

**1915:** Black and white activists (including W.E.B. Dubois) form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to fight for black rights using law suits, protests, strikes, and writing.

**1920s-1930s:** Great Northern Migration and Harlem Renaissance – due to discrimination in the South, millions of African-Americans leave rural areas and move to cities (mostly Northern like New York, Boston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.). African-American musicians, artists, writers, actors, dancers, and poets can earn a living making art for these urban, black communities.

**1940s:** During WWII, black soldiers join the US Army to fight Nazi Germany. When they return, many feel that they fought against discrimination in Europe, but are still being discriminated in the US and want change.

**1950s**: **The Civil Rights Movement** - Masses of African-Americans protest against discrimination (led by activists like Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, Jesse Jackson, and more) through marches, rallies, sit-ins, and speeches.

**1954:** *Brown v. Board of Education* – Supreme Court decision that overturns *Plessy v. Fergusson* because the Justices vote that “separate but equal” is actually never equal. Schools are ordered to desegregate.

**1963**: The NAACP and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) organize a March on Washington to demand more rights.

**1964:** The **Civil Rights Act** is passed, which made segregation in any public places illegal and made discrimination in hiring illegal (so a business can’t deny someone a job because of their race, religion, gender, or nationality).

**1965: The Voting Rights Act** makes poll taxes and literacy tests illegal, African-Americans can now vote much more easier than before

**1965**: Malcolm X is shot and killed by black members of the Nation of Islam. One year later, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale start the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense in Oakland, California.

**1968**: Martin Luther King Jr. is shot and killed – riots break out in Washington D.C., Baltimore, Louisville, Kansas City, Chicago, Wilmington.

**1970s:** Black activists are arrested for being “terrorists”, especially anyone in the Black Panthers. The American economy goes into a recession due to high oil prices. Businesses close down in cities, and middle class white families move out of cities, so there’s fewer businesses and taxes paid in city governments. These governments cut their funding for citizens, and African-Americans suffer.

**1980s**: Many factories that employed middle class workers move to other nations for cheaper labor, and middle-income African-Americans lose their jobs. Crack cocaine becomes popular in cities and many poor African-Americans develop an addiction, which causes gangs to increase selling crack and fighting over territory using gun violence, so hundreds of thousands of African-Americans are arrested for drug crimes and violent crimes.

**1990s**: African Americans had slowly been getting more jobs that were traditionally seen as white jobs (government workers, police officers, firemen) and with increases in education spending and Affirmative Action policies in higher education – more African-Americans began going to college. The number of black-owned businesses increased, and more African-Americans voted in elections.