

## 7 Ways that Studying US History 1877 to Modern Times History Shapes the Way You Think About Racial Inequality

1. The practice of lynching was celebrated by whites, particularly in the South.

(Week Two, Topic One: The New South and Lynching)



Beitler, Lawrence. *Lawrence Beitler Lynching..* 1930. Indiana Collection.

<https://theseamericans.com/lynching/southern-collection-american-lynching-1930/>

This photo depicts the August 7, 1930 lynchings of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana, demonstrating its vast popularity. Lynching was a highly popular passtime throughout the United States, particularly in the American South in the time from the Reconstruction Movement until the 1930's and beyond. Many northern citizens were unaffected by the consequences of lynching and did not vote to end it ([Primary Sources on Lynching](#)). Its popularity can be attributed to the need of white Southerners to regain the sense of control they had lost following the Civil War. The need for white southern men to prove their masculinity and ability to protect their female relatives coupled with the belief that black citizens were harmful and deviant created the practice of lynching, which lasted for generations. The brutality of the lynching was celebrated and drew large crowds of spectators, often including concession sales and souvenirs like the picture seen above ([The New South and Lynching, Jan. 22, 2020](#)). Lynching also served as an intimidation tactic, as black men lived in constant fear of being taken by a mob and killed for no reason ([America Divided, Season 2 Episode 4](#)). Rights recently acquired by black citizens following the end of slavery were stripped from them when the United States ran out of money to fund the movement and retreated, allowing the antebellum attitudes of the South to persist. Thousands of young men died brutal deaths as a result of lynching, which happened regularly for decades.

## 2. Native American children were sent to boarding schools to become westernized.

(Week Three, Topic One: Native Americans and the West)



*Young School Girls Attending Sewing Class at Albuquerque Indian School. Date Unknown. Photographs from Indian Boarding Schools. <http://www.hanksville.org/sand/intellect/AISSewingClass.html>*

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, thousands of Native American children were taken from their families and tribes and raised in strict boarding schools, as the above image depicts. The focus of the boarding schools was on teaching young children the ways of white settlers, as the ways of their ancestors were considered barbaric by the U.S. government. Students were taught about agriculture and household practices, like sewing as the photo above demonstrates ([Rules for Indian Boarding Schools, 1890](#)). The slogan “Kill the Indian, save the man” was widely used to explain the philosophy of the boarding schools, as their primary focus was to eliminate Native American culture ([Native Americans and the West, Jan. 27, 2020](#)). Native American children were taught Christian ideology and punished severely for doing things associated with their ancestors, like speaking their native language. Under the guise of compassion, Native American children were separated from their families and sent to these schools, oftentimes not seeing their relatives for years. These boarding schools existed well into the twentieth centuries and ruined many relationships between children and their parents ([Backstory: The Melting Pot “Kill the Indian Save the Man”](#)). The decision by the United States government to fund these schools was a result of nearly three hundred years of conflict between white settlers and various Native American groups and stemmed from their desire to eliminate their way of life. Boarding schools like Albuquerque Indian School pictured above lasted for over one hundred years, beginning in around 1869. The increase in the number of boarding schools for Native American children can be attributed

to the continual western settlement of whites and their need to eliminate the tribal ways of life that had been in place for thousands of years, long before Europeans stepped foot on American shores.

### 3. Chinese immigrants were treated as sub-human

(Week Three, Topic Two: Immigration)



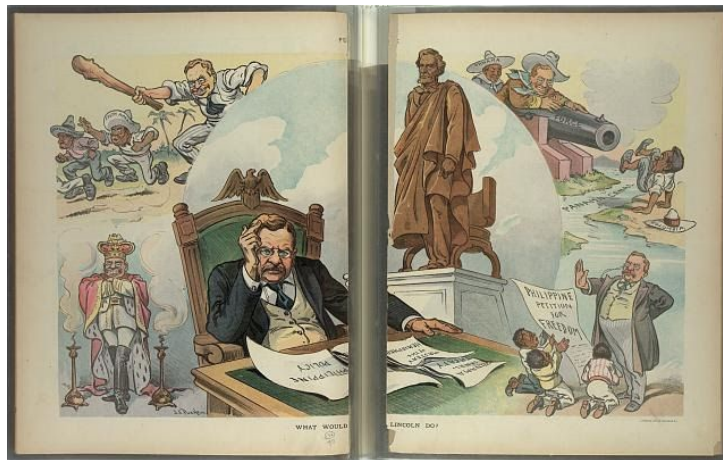
Unknown Artist. *The great fear of the period that Uncle Sam may be swallowed by foreigners.* 1860-1869. Library of Congress. <https://www.lookandlearn.com/history-images/XC98502829/The-great-fear-of-the-period-That-Uncle-Sam-may-be-swallowed-by-foreigners-The-problem-solved>

Chinese immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were treated cruelly by whites and often faced harsh nativism (Chew, *Life of a Chinese of Immigrant*, 1903). Cartoons, like the one shown above, depicted Chinese-Americans as cannibalistic and sub-human. Chinese-Americans were often used as scapegoats for whites to blame their problems on and were met with constant suspicion (One the “Evils” of Chinese Immigration, 1878). The cultural practices of Chinese immigrants combined with their general disinterest in current events caused many white Americans to treat them unfairly, leading to tight restrictions on Asian immigration (Immigration, Jan. 29, 2020). The above cartoon depicts a Chinese man swallowing Uncle Sam to represent the negative feelings of white Americans at the time in regards to Chinese immigration. Chinese immigrants, like other immigrants of their time, were widely believed to be criminal by American-born whites and targeted by mobs due to their living habits. The American-born children of Chinese immigrants were not considered U.S. citizens until 1898, thirty years after the passing of the fourteenth amendment (Crash Course #25: Growth, Cities, and Immigration). The cartoon seen above depicts some of the bias faced by the thousands of Chinese immigrants that came to the U.S. in the latter half of the nineteenth century and urges native-born Americans to eliminate them through the passing of stricter immigration laws and physical violence. White men resented the Chinese for working for lower wages than themselves and their strong work ethic. As a relatively small amount of immigrants were from Asia, the Chinese were treated particularly

harshly for their physical appearance, often causing whites to view them as creature-like. Though the U.S. Supreme Court often ruled in favor of Chinese groups, many local governments did not treat the Chinese as equal to whites under the law.

#### 4. The American government and military viewed the peoples of imperialized nations as racially inferior to whites.

(Week Four, Topic Two: Imperialism and WWI)



Pughe, J.S. *What Would Lincoln Do?* 28 Sep 1904. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2011645572/>

The cartoon depicts Theodore Roosevelt, a leading force behind American imperialism, asking himself what President Abraham Lincoln would do in regards to achieving dominance in North American trade. This image depicts the series of events that took place during the age of imperialism in the United States, including violence of imperialized nations, who are seen as much smaller than the president and struggling to outrun him, their facial features and skin color exaggerated. A leading force behind American imperialism around the turn of the twentieth century was the perceived mental and physical superiority of caucasians by white American. Americans believed that the peoples of imperialized nations were savage-like and unable to take care of themselves. The desire by the United States to control all of North America led to the harsh mistreatment of the people of imperialized nations (Imperialism and WWI, Feb. 5, 2020). Political cartoons often depicted the people of the imperialized nations of Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, Philippines, and Hawaii as animal-like, with racially charged enlargements of features (Cartoons on American Imperialism, 1920's). Civilians in the Philippines in the final years of the twentieth century were often killed by American soldiers for no other reason than their physical appearance (Soldiers in the Philippines Documents). Since the Convention of Kanagawa, the U.S. was heavily involved in foreign affairs for trade purposes and economic power, often caring little about the people of the nations they imperialized citing the "White Man's Burden" when describing them (Crash Course #28: American Imperialism). The U.S. government often refused to grant freedom to the people of Cuba, the Philippines and other nations they had imperialized, despite using the lack of autonomy of these nations as a motive for intervening. The fight for U.S. economic

dominance attributed to the spread of racism and resulted in many civilian deaths throughout the world.

5. The fear of integration among white citizens has led to the rapid growth of suburbia.

(Week Eight, Topic Two: The Postwar Boom)



Wieder, Alan. *Ruby Bridges, with new friends, a few months into her attendance at the William Frantz Elementary School in New Orleans*. 1960. Amistad Research Center. <http://www.movingimagearchivenews.org/ruby-bridges-6-symbol-of-desegregation/>

Upon the integration of American schools in the 1960's, race-restricted neighborhoods emerged in the form of suburbs. Beginning with the 1960 integration of Ruby Bridges into the all-white New Orleans school system, thousands of white Americans throughout the U.S. lived in fear that blacks would "take over" (**Crash Course #39: Civil Rights and the 1950s**). "White Flight" consisted of thousands of white parents removing their children from public school districts that were or were soon to be integrating. This led to the growth of private schools that could legally restrict their students to white-only by denying black students entry. In addition to creating disparity between public schools that now consisted of predominantly economically disadvantaged white students and blacks and private schools with wealthy white students, the integration of schools contributed to the growth of suburbia. Real estate agents would spread fear among white homeowners by telling them they blacks were moving in. The homeowners would in turn sell their homes at a loss and move to suburban neighborhoods restricted to whites only (**A Real Estate Agent Explains the Fine Art of Blockbusting, 1962**). The rapid growth of suburban in the United States among middle and upper middle class whites can be attributed to white Americans' fear of integration, believing black Americans to be unfit neighbors. Companies were able to mass-produce houses which contributed to the rapid growth of suburbs in the 1950s and 1960s (**The Postwar Boom, Mar. 11, 2020**). A lack of racial diversity is still visible today in America's suburban population, generally consisting mostly of upper and middle class white families.

6. Mexican-Americans and other impoverished groups were targeted for recruitment in the Vietnam War.

## (Week Eleven, Topic One: Vietnam)



*Soldiers in Vietnam.* c. 1972. NBC News.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/two-fronts-vietnam-war-through-latino-familys-lens-n419001>

As young, middle-class white men were often able to escape the Vietnam War draft by means of trickery or escape, U.S. army recruiting agents often targeted young men belonging to ethnic minorities (*James Fallows, James Fallows Reflects on the Draft's Inequalities, 1979*). Mexican-Americans and African-Americans were often distributed military propaganda and were more likely to be drafted in the war than their white, upper class counterparts. Unlike the upper class college students, the Mexican-American boys recruited from rural California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, whose fathers had been honored for fighting in World War II, were not taught to boycott the war or recruitment. Soldiers of ethnic minorities such as hispanic or black were given more dangerous jobs, regardless of experience level (*On Two Fronts*). Though public opinion was largely turned against the war by 1968 (*The Year the Transformed America Interactive Website*), ethnic minorities continued to fight in the war. Socioeconomic background played a major role in determining the Vietnam draft, and as minorities in the United States had almost exclusively faced economic hardship, the war took the biggest toll on black and hispanic families. Vietnam Veterans, particularly those of ethnic minority, were targeted for discrimination and retaliation upon returning from the war (*A Veteran Remembers his Bitter Homecoming, 1981*). Propaganda tactics were used to convince minority groups to join in order to elevate their racial state. The Vietnam War, which was the most integrated war to date, did not change the racial inequality of the United States that they had been promised. American soldiers could not escape racial inequality, even on the battlefield, thousands of miles from home.

## 7. Racial inequality is still a major problem today and probably always will be.

(Week Fifteen, Topic One: Mass Incarceration)



Bayer, Edu. *Groups clashing during a white nationalist rally on Saturday in Charlottesville, VA* . 12 Aug. 2017. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/16/us/politics/trump-republicans-race.html>

In the last one hundred years, the rights of minority groups have expanded greatly, but many things remain stagnant, one hundred and fifty-five years since the end of the Civil War. Legally, all citizens are equal under the law, but this principle is not enforced in many aspects of contemporary life. Racism has not ended in America, but has merely become more complicated. A large example of this is mass incarceration. Black and hispanic groups are targeted by law enforcement and the corruption of prisons has caused a dramatic surge of incarcerated African-Americans in the last thirty years alone (13th). Though outright racism is more discreet these days, the Ku Klux Klan is still in power and white supremacy rallies persist, like the deadly Charlottesville one in August 2017 pictured above. Intimidation tactics like confederate statues are still practiced and defended to this day (Amid National Debate, Farmville Quiet About Confederate Statues in its Own Backyard). The glorification of confederate officers and white figures in the antebellum South allow the legacy of the Confederacy to live on. Wealth Disparity between whites and minorities has not improved slightly, but it is still a major problem. However, many things have improved. Social programs implemented by President Barack Obama upon taking office in 2009 have improved the lives of many minorities (Crash Course #47: Obamanation). That being said, the fight for racial equality continues to this day and is far from over and is likely to never end.