

A Select Timeline of African-American History

1777 – By this time in American history, there are enslaved people in every one of the thirteen American colonies.

1793 – Eli Whitney’s cotton gin increases both cotton production and the demand for slave labor in the American South.

1808 – Congress bans further importation of enslaved people.

1831–1861 – Approximately 75,000 slaves escape to the North using the Underground Railroad.

1846 – Ex-slave Frederick Douglass publishes the anti-slavery newspaper *The North Star*.

1849 – Harriet Tubman escapes from slavery and becomes an instrumental leader of the Underground Railroad.

1857 – The *Dred Scot v. Sanford* case arrives at the conclusion that Congress does not have the right to ban slavery in the states because slaves are not citizens.

1861 – The Civil War begins. Slavery is one issue dividing the nation.



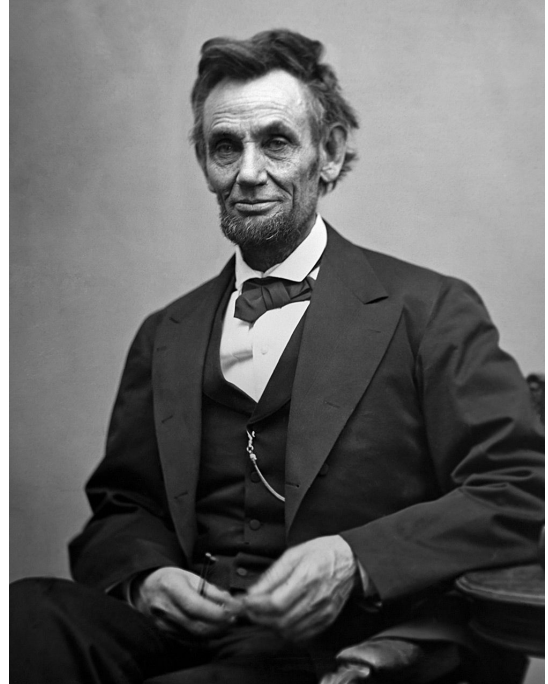
Harriet Tubman

1863 – Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation proclaims that all enslaved people in the Confederate states are forever free.

1864 – The 13th Amendment to the Constitution is ratified, prohibiting slavery.

1868 – The 14th Amendment is ratified, defining citizenship in terms that overturn the Dred Scot decision.

1870 – The 15th Amendment is ratified, giving African Americans the right to vote.

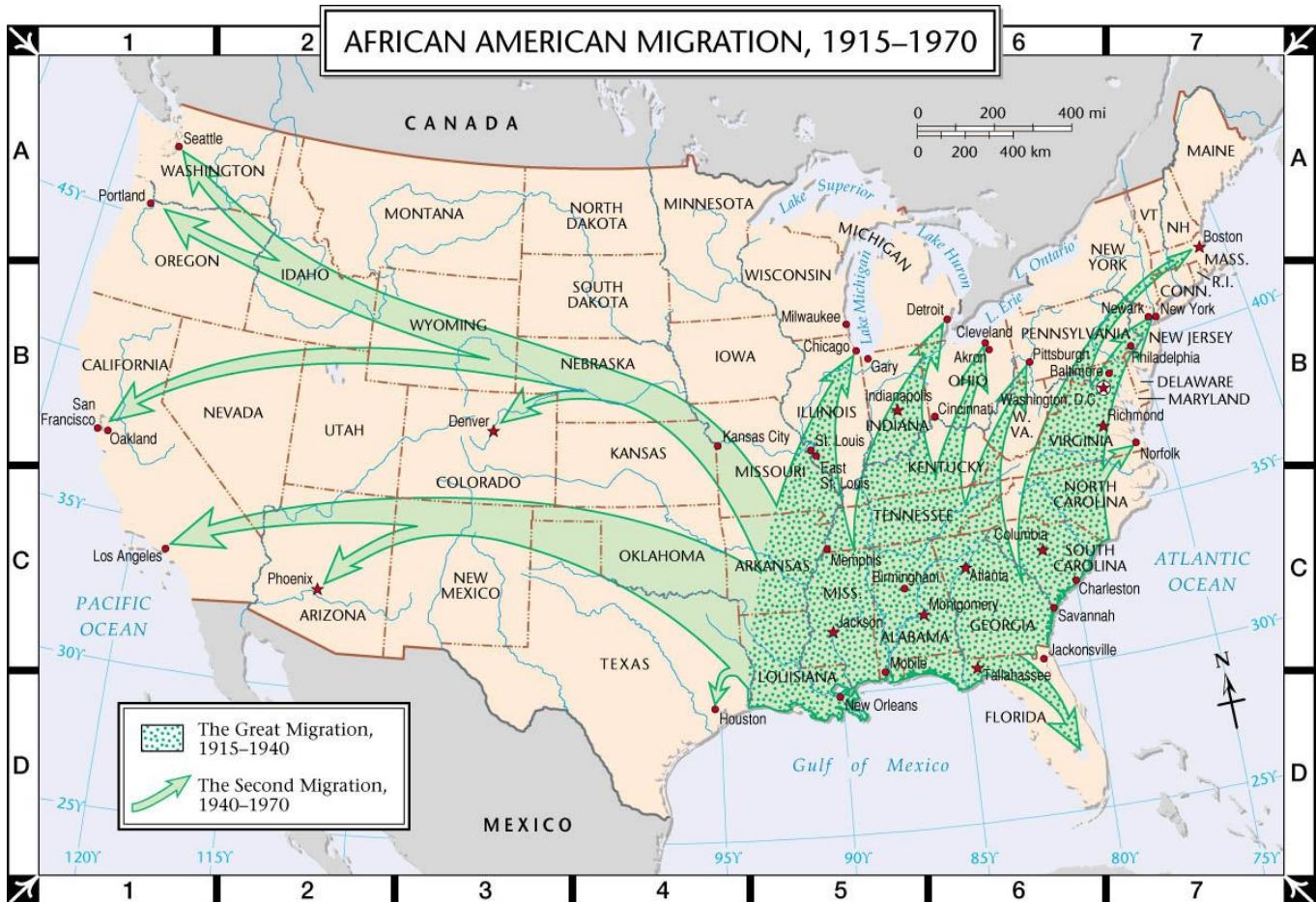


Abraham Lincoln, 1863

1896 – In the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, racial segregation is ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court. “Separate but equal” laws prohibit African Americans from gaining equal access to many public facilities.

1909 – The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) is formed by W.E.B. Du Bois and others.

1910 – The Great Migration begins in this time period, extending through the 1970s and becoming the largest internal migration in U.S. history.

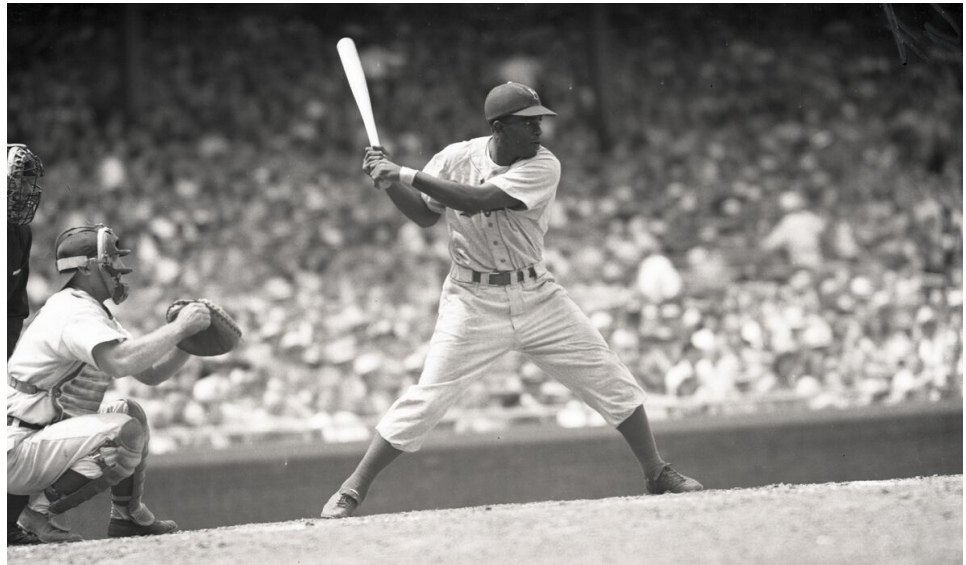


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Map showing the distribution of African-American migration from 1915 to 1970

1943 – The Tuskegee Airmen, all African Americans trained at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, enter World War II, engaging in combat against German and Italian troops. Many African Americans would see World War II as a symbol of hypocrisy. They were angry that Black soldiers could risk their lives fighting for their country, only to return home to racially divided America.

1947 – Jackie Robinson enters Major League Baseball as first baseman for the Brooklyn Dodgers. He is the first African American in MLB history to cross the color line.



Jackie Robinson's first Major League at bat, April 15, 1947

1954 – *Brown v. Board of Education* case strikes down segregation in the schools as unconstitutional.

1955 – In Montgomery, Alabama, Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a public bus. This leads to the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

1957 – Martin Luther King, Jr. and others set up the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), a leading organization in the Civil Rights Movement.

1964 – The Civil Rights Act is signed, prohibiting discrimination of all kinds.



Martin Luther King's March on Washington, 1963

1965 – The Voting Rights Act is passed, outlawing practices used in the South to disenfranchise African American voters.

1967 – Edward W. Brooke (1919–) becomes the first African-American U.S. Senator since the abolition of slavery. He serves two terms as a Senator from Massachusetts.

1968 – Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee.

1972 – Shirley Chisholm is the first African-American major party candidate to run for President of the United States.

1992 – The Los Angeles riots take place in the wake of the Rodney King hearing.

2008 – Barack Obama (1961–) becomes the first African American to win the U.S. presidential race.



Barack Obama's Presidential Inauguration, 2009

Questions:

1. Based on the handout, roughly how many years passed between the first challenges to the institution of slavery and the ruling of slavery as unconstitutional?
2. What factors kept slavery in place for such a long period?
3. Why was *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, which spoke of a “separate but equal” standing between the races, a setback for Black Americans?
4. In what ways did World War II bring the disparities of American racism into sharper focus?
5. Based on the chronology of events associated with the Civil Rights Movement (the Bus Boycott, formation of the SCLC, the Civil Rights Act itself), why is it striking that Jackie Robinson crossed baseball’s “color line” in 1947?
6. What do you think happened in American life after the passing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964? Was racist thought, belief and action significantly diminished?
7. Why do you think Barack Obama’s election as the President of the United States was of symbolic importance? How would you relate this development to Jackie Robinson’s entrance into Major League Baseball?
8. In the quote at the top of the handout, Martin Luther King, Jr. says, “Jackie Robinson made my success possible. Without him, I would never have been able to do what I did.” How would you explain what Dr. King meant?