



Genocide Watch
The Alliance Against Genocide

Country Report: The United States of America The Continuing Oppression of Native Americans and Black Americans

Since its founding, the United States has systematically oppressed both its Native American and Black American minority populations. White Americans have subjected both groups to genocide. Since 1964 the U.S. has adopted numerous civil rights laws. But cultural practices still discriminate against these minorities, rendering both groups as underrepresented and undervalued members of the American society. After centuries of dehumanization, both Native Americans and African Americans face discrimination and fear for their own safety. They are not allowed equal opportunities to lead dignified lives in the United States.

Native Americans

Since colonization in the 1600s, the white majority in the United States has systematically oppressed Native Americans through forced assimilation, forced displacement, cultural genocide and mass killings. Between 1492 and 1900, as many as ten million Native Americans died from diseases like smallpox. Thousands more were murdered in genocidal extermination campaigns.

At the founding of the United States, there was a tacit acceptance of Native Americans living east of the Mississippi. In 1830, however, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, ordering the forced displacement of Native Americans known as the "Trail of Tears," in which 60,000 Native Americans were forced to move to reservations west of the Mississippi and in the process, over 8,000 Native Americans died.

State sponsored genocide continued until the end of the 1800's. A striking example was California Governor Peter Burnett's 1851 State of the Union speech in which he said: "a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the races until the Indian race becomes extinct." His words inspired the California genocide that killed at least 9,462 Native Americans in 370 massacres. California towns offered bounties for Indian scalps.

In the 20th century, the U.S. forced Native Americans to assimilate through forced removal of their children to "Indian schools" and sterilization. As late as 1950, mandated by laws known as the "Indian Termination Policy", thousands of Native American children were sent away from their families to attend boarding schools, where they were not allowed to speak their native languages or practice their customs. Under the stated goal to "advance the health" of Native Americans, the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs established the Indian Health Service. Indian Health Service medical professionals sterilized 3,406 Native American women between 1973 and 1976.

While the U.S. granted Native Americans citizenship rights in 1924, including the right to vote, there has been little tangible progress to ensure that this minority group is able to exercise the full human rights granted by the US Constitution. State approved high school textbooks in a majority of U.S. states currently deny that a genocide occurred against Native Americans. They label Native American victims of genocidal massacres as casualties of wars between settlers and Indians. They justify the massacres perpetrated by the US Army as defending the "manifest destiny" of whites to possess America. As of 2019, only California, under the leadership of Governor Gavin Newsom, has formally recognized this past state-sponsored genocide against Native Americans.

These past acts of genocide have had lasting impacts on Native American communities. As of 2019, there are only 6.7 million Native Americans and 574 Native American tribes, the three largest being Navajo, Cherokee, and Sioux. Native Americans have the highest rates of diabetes, alcoholism, and suicide in the US.

The U.S. continues to illegally occupy Native American land in violation of treaties between the US government and Native American groups. The government permits companies to encroach on Native American land for oil, mineral, and access rights, such as the recent construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The U.S. has systematically committed genocide against Native Americans through mass killings, forced sterilization, and the removal of Native American children from their cultures. Since the of U.S. has not acknowledged this genocide, Genocide Watch asserts that the United States is in Stage 10: Denial.

Black Americans

From 1619 until 1865, British colonial and U.S. law allowed the enslavement of African Americans. White Americans and Native Americans could own Black Americans as property. Much of the U.S. economy, especially in the southern States, relied on unpaid slave labor. By 1861, when the Civil War broke out, more than 4 million Black Americans were enslaved in the South. White slave-owners subjected Black Americans to whipping, torture, separation of families, rape of women slaves, and unpunished murders. Until 1865, in many states, it was illegal to teach enslaved people to learn how to read and write.

In 1865, the U.S. civil war ended in the abolition of slavery and the passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, which gave all Black Americans citizenship, provided equal protection for all persons under the law, and guaranteed male Black Americans the right to vote. However white former slave owners fought back against Black citizenship. Southern states passed criminal laws turning many misdemeanors into felonies and removed voting rights and civil rights from felons for life. They imprisoned felons and instituted leasing of prison labor at no wages. They thus reinstated a new form of slavery.

Southern former slave states passed Jim Crow laws requiring racial segregation in all aspects of life. Based on an ideology of white supremacy, the Jim Crow laws were upheld by the US Supreme Court in Plessy v Ferguson on the principle of “separate, but equal.” Jim Crow laws mandated racial segregation of all public spaces, including restaurants, housing, public transport, and schools; prohibited interracial marriage; and barred Black Americans from voting through literacy tests and poll taxes.

In the 19th century, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was founded by pro-slavery confederate veterans. The KKK terrorized, lynched, bombed and murdered Black Americans. From 1882 to 1968, the KKK and white racist mobs lynched at least 3,959 Black Americans. While KKK membership has dwindled since the 1980s due to FBI infiltration and Southern Poverty Law Center lawsuits, since President Donald Trump’s inauguration in 2016, there has been an alarming 55% spike in far-right white supremacist group memberships.

With the Civil Rights movement and passing of Civil Rights Acts, Jim Crow laws and their racist segregationist policies were legally abolished. But even though Black Americans gained legal status, many white Americans still view Black Americans as second-class citizens.

Despite progress brought by the Civil Rights movement, Black Americans have disproportionately experienced discrimination and racial profiling, poverty, maternal mortality, lack of health care, unemployment, inferior education, high incarceration rates, and police brutality. Known as the ‘school-to-prison pipeline,’ young black men are punished under zero-tolerance drug possession and three strikes imprisonment laws and convicted of felonies, stripping them of their right to vote and denying them educational resources when compared to their white peers. Black Americans make up 13% of American citizens; yet 34% of incarcerated Americans are Black people.

Throughout American history, white police officers have murdered thousands of Black Americans with impunity. In 2013, white police officer George Zimmerman shot and killed Trayvon Martin, an unarmed black teen. He was acquitted of any crime. The acquittal drew the attention of the world to police brutality against Black people. Police murders of Michael Brown, Freddie Gray, and Alton Sterling inspired national protests and resulted in the Black Lives Matter movement. In 2020, after the police murders of George Floyd & Breonna Taylor, and after two white racists hunted down and murdered Ahmaud Arbery, the Black Lives Matter movement resurfaced, with massive nationwide protests calling for reforms of policing and the unequal American judicial system.

Since Black Americans continue to experience mass incarceration, are barred from voting through felony convictions, are vilified as criminals by racist political leaders and by the media, are brutalized by racist police, and the history of Black Americans' persecution is denied, Genocide Watch asserts that the United States is in Stage 3: Discrimination, Stage 4: Dehumanization and Stage 10: Denial.

Genocide Watch recommends:

- K-12 education should be required about Native American and African American history and current affairs.
- The United States government should acknowledge that it is still in violation of its treaties with Native Americans.
- Affirmative action should continue to support Black and Native American success in academia and the workforce.
- Police departments should be purged of racist police officers after intensive investigation and vetting under new federal law.