US Conservation and Colonialism Timeline

This US Conservation and Colonialism Timeline was collated from published scholarly research, journalism, and community-led historical recovery efforts. It was created to support environmental and conservation organizations committed to fulfilling their missions through a justice lens. This timeline is not all inclusive, but intended to support a foundational understanding for how settler colonialism has impacted the ways we value and understand wilderness, and how settler values have shaped our collective relationship to land and the people living on it. This resource is best used for staff, Board, or community trainings; either as part of an onboarding process or a dedicated training around diversity, inclusivity, equity, and justice. We recommend using or modifying the activity offered below.

ACTIVATING THE CONSERVATION AND COLONIALISM TIMELINE

1491: Original Societies

1492: The "New" World

1619-1865: Slavery in the United States

1750s-1820s: The Fur Trade, Independence, and Public Lands

1800-1850s: Westward expansion and ethnic cleansing

1860-1990s: Cultural genocide

1862: Homesteading

1849-1870: The Gold Rush and The Yosemite Land Grant

1850-1920s: Migrant Asian labor transforms the land

1863-1865: The "End" of Slavery

1860's-1954: Segregation and Jim Crow

1868: Alaska

1887: Allotments and the ongoing destruction of Indian Land Rights

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1892: The Sierra Club

1893-1900: Colonizing the Pacific Islands

1901-1916: The Rise of National Parks and Monuments

1916-1970s: The Great Migration

1924: Indian Citizenship

1930s: Conservation during The Great Depression

1942: Japanese Internment

1962: Silent Spring

1964-1970s: Legislating Environmental Protection

1970: Earth Day

1974: United States v. Washington, The Boldt Decision

1977-ongoing: The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

1978: Superfund Sites

1987: Environmental Racism

1989: Exxon Valdez

1991: Environmental Justice Principles

2014-ongoing: Flint Water Crisis

2017: Attacks on National Monuments

2015-2021: Standing Rock Sioux and the Dakota Access Pipeline

2018: Reconciliation at Yosemite

2020: Wildfires and Prison Labor

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Activating the Conservation and Colonialism Timeline

This activity can be used either for remote or in person trainings. If you are meeting remotely, we recommend using the PDF version of the timeline and sharing it as a Google Doc for participants to be able to add their comments to it.

TIME: 120 minutes

GOALS

- To develop a shared framework and honest acknowledgment of conservation/environmentalism's roots in North America
- To recognize the ongoing impacts this history has had on Indigenous, Black, and non-white settler communities, their relationships to the land, and their participation in conservation and environmental organizing work.
- To promote dialogue from personal, community, and institutional perspectives around equity, justice, and conservation

FRAMING

This timeline was collated to clarify historical context from which conservation and environmental work emerged in western North America. Our imagination of, and relationship to, the land are deeply shaped by history; events from hundreds of years ago continue to impact our lives, opportunities, and environment. This timeline is not comprehensive. It is intended to illustrate patterns of actions in order to help identify unnamed value systems and their cascading social and environmental effects.

Many of the historical events captured here are common knowledge, but presented to honestly account for their effects on Indigenous, Black, and non-white settler communities. These communities have been violently targeted, excluded, or exploited in service of the acquisition and development of natural resources and wilderness spaces. Developing a clear understanding of historical impact can guide us into more ethical and supportive partnerships with one another and deepen our ability to protect, serve, and enjoy our world.

MATERIALS

- Timeline printed on single pages and posted around a large room
- 2 stacks of different colored sticky notes (yellow, pink, etc.) with every participant receiving 5-10 each
- Pens

ACTIVITY OUTLINE

- Welcome and Framing
- Timeline Review
- Individual Additions to the Timeline
- Small Group Discussion
- Share Back & Large Group Discussion
- Closing

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PRE-WORK

All participants receive a PDF of the timeline, with the assignment to view it an advance and answer two questions:

1. What events in this timeline do you have personal or familial connections to? What effect did that event have on you and your family? Those connections can include individuals you are descended from.
2. What 2-4 events are missing from the timeline that you'd like to include?
   You will be invited to contribute your responses in a way that is anonymous but available for everyone to see.

ACTIVITY

10 MINUTES: *Welcome, review goals, framing, and activity outline.*
Before continuing, take a moment to invite questions or requests.

30 MINUTES: *Everyone views the timeline and contributes their individual answers (on sticky notes) to different pages.* They are to use one color for answers to question 1, and the other color for answers to question 2.

20 MINUTES: *Everyone views the timeline again, focusing on the contributions.*

20 MINUTES: *Small groups of 4*

1. What stood out or surprised you from viewing the timeline and everyone's collective comments?
2. How does this history shape your understanding of your organization's mission and work?

25 MINUTES: *Share backs and large group discussion*
Each group shares 1-2 highlights form their discussion with an opportunity for more open large group discussion.

15 MINUTES: *Closing with Head, Heart, and Hands*
If the group is smaller than 15, everyone should speak. If it is a larger group, closing statements are shared in groups of 6.

Their closing statement should include:

- Head: Something I learned
- Heart: Something I felt
- Hands: Something I want to offer or do

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1491: Original Societies

Before "discovery," **Indigenous societies had occupied and shaped every part of the Americas,** established extensive trade networks, and were sustaining their populations by adapting to specific natural environments and shaping the environment to suit human ends. **They thrived through successful land management and agricultural practices**, including the development of maize, irrigation systems, use of controlled burns, and sustainable game management. Archaeological and anthropological studies indicate that the Western Hemisphere held 90 to 112 million people, meaning far more people lived in the Americas than in Europe at the time.



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1492: The "New" World

Contact with Europeans led to a series of genocidal pandemics that spread quickly, decimating Indigenous communities before full blown European exploration and colonization efforts began. Smallpox, typhoid, bubonic plague, influenza, mumps, measles, whooping cough—all rained down on the Americas in the century after Columbus. (Cholera, malaria, and scarlet fever came later.) When English colonists landed in Plymouth in 1620, they settled in a deserted Indian village. All through the



coastal forest the Indians had "died on heapes, as they lay in their houses," the English trader Thomas Morton noted. "And the bones and skulls upon the several places of their habitations made such a spectacle" that to Morton the Massachusetts woods seemed to be "a new found Golgotha."[1]

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[1] Mann, Charles C. *1491: New Revelations of the Americas Before Columbus.* New York, New York: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 2005.
Dunbar-Ortiz, Roxanne. *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2014.
Image Source: New England Historical Society

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1619-1865: Slavery in the United States



In late August 1619, the White Lion, an English privateer commanded by John Jope, dropped anchor in the James River. Virginia colonist John Rolfe documented the landing of the ship and the "20 and odd" Africans on board, who were sold as property in exchange for food. One woman known as Angelo was counted in the 1625 census as a slave working in New Towne; no other records of her remain.

Slavery was an accepted practice long before it was written into the founding documents of the US and was legally protected until 1865. Its adoption created racial hierarchies, immense wealth for white settlers, and continues to have global social, economic, and political impacts. The economic value of the 4 million slaves in 1860 was, on average, $1,000 per person, or about $4 billion. That was more than all the banks, railroads and factories in the U.S. were worth at the time. In today's dollars, that is roughly $42 trillion. **Slave labor deeply transformed the environment;** they converted forests and wetlands for cash crops, logged, mined, and built canals, bridges, and roads.[2]

[2] https://time.com/5653369/august-1619-jamestown-history/
https://www.forbes.com/sites/hbsworkingknowledge/2017/05/03/the-clear-connection-between-slavery-and-american-capitalism/?sh=693258217bd3
https://www.bloombergquint.com/business/pay-check-podcast-episode-2-how-much-did-slavery-in-u-s-cost-black-wealth
Image Source: Hulton Archive/Getty Images

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1750s-1820s: The Fur Trade, Independence, and Public Lands

The growing—and incredibly **lucrative international fur trade**—led to increasing violence between the British, French, and Indigenous communities over the land. The British had large settlements along the coast, while the French had penetrated farther into the interior, with large swathes between them held by tribes.



In 1776, British colonists win the War for Independence from England and established the United States of America.

In 1778, at the Second Continental Congress, operating under the Articles of Confederation, the newly formed federal government began persuading states to cede unsettled claimed land in order to **create public lands**. By 1802, all territory west of the colonies, from the Appalachian Mountains to the Mississippi River, became public domain lands owned by the federal government.

The social, political, cultural, and ecological impact of the fur trade and settler efforts to control these natural resources were severe. The British preferred to try and clear out native communities through genocidal tactics, including biological warfare and bounties for scalps. Beaver populations were nearly extinct by the 1820s. Indigenous societies saw their longstanding, sustainable practices for game management swept aside as new economic incentives and treaties transformed their communities, relationship to the land, and inter-tribal relationships.[3]

[3] https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/native-history-french-and-indian-war-ends-with-treaty-of-paris
https://www.mpm.edu/content/wirp/ICW-146
https://www.blm.gov/about/history/timeline

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1800-1850s: Westward expansion and ethnic cleansing



Massive land acquisition and westward expansion led the US to extend from "sea to shining sea." Thousands of Indigenous tribes were coerced through warfare and violence into unequal treaty agreements that radically limited their access to heritage lands or forced them to relocate. Land acquisitions included the Louisiana Purchase, the Spanish cession of Florida, the Oregon Treaty with Britain, the Treaty of Guadalupe de Hidalgo which gave the US California and vast portions of the inland West, and the Gladsen Purchase which added land from southern Arizona and New Mexico. In 1812, The General Land Office was founded to help oversee homesteading efforts out west. In 1946, it became the **Bureau of Land Management.**

The **Office of Indian Affairs** (later re-named the **Bureau of Indian Affairs)** was founded in 1824 as part of the War Department to negotiate trade, treaties, and forcibly assimilate Natives by banning their cultural practices and placing children in boarding schools. Settler colonists rationalized their violence under the **Doctrine of Discovery**, an ideology which empowered Christians to take lands from and dominate non-Christian inhabitants. These values became codified through governmental policy and the courts. The Supreme Court ruled in Johnson V. M'Intosh (1823) that rightful land ownership lay with the settlers who had "discovered" it, not its original inhabitants.

In 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the **Indian Removal Act,** which gave the federal government the power to exchange Native-held land in the cotton kingdom east of the Mississippi for land acquired as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Chocktaw, Seminole, Chickasaw, Creek, and Cherokee tribal communities were forced to leave their homelands and walk hundreds of miles on the **Trail of Tears**.[4]


R. Michelson Galleries "The Trail of Tears" © Max D. Standley

[4] https://www.blm.gov/about/history/timeline
https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears
https://www.unitedcherokeenation.net/history/the-trail-of-tears/
Image source: Wikimedia

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1860-1990s: Cultural genocide

In 1860, The Bureau of Indian Affairs established the first **Indian Boarding school** on the Yakima Indian Reservation in Washington state as part of a plan to "assimilate" Indigenous people. **To try and strip them of traditional spiritual, language, and cultural practices**, Indigenous children would be taught to value private property, material wealth, and nuclear families.

Discipline within boarding schools was severe and generally consisted of confinement, starvation, and undocumented physical, mental, and sexual abuse. Severe overcrowding and lack of hygienic resources also meant that the children were ravaged by disease.

In the US, there were more than 350 government-funded—often church-run—Indian Boarding schools. This practice was legally supported until the passage of The Indian Child Welfare Act in 1978, which gave Native American parents the legal right to deny their children's placement in off-reservation schools.[5]



[6]

[5] http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=PWNA_Native_History_boardingschoolsNP

[6] Native pupils at the Carlisle School in Pennsylvania. Image Source; Wikimedia.

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1862: Homesteading

In 1862, President Lincoln signed the first **Homesteading Act**. Citizens could claim a 160-acre plot of public land in the West by filing an application, living on and improving the land for a minimum of five years, and filing for a deed within seven years. This act opened land ownership to male citizens, widows, single women, and immigrants pledging to become citizens. This "free" land came at a great cost to Indigenous communities, as most of it was seized from the tribal nations who previously inhabited the Great Plains.

The 1866 Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed that African Americans were eligible as homesteaders as well. Black homesteaders used it to build new lives in which they owned the land they worked, provided for their families, and educated their children. They built meaningful cultural and religious lives for their communities and governed their own affairs themselves—that is, they sought the full benefits of being free and equal citizens. Dearfield, Colorado—the only self-sustaining Black homesteading colony in the state—flourished with a population of about 700 before massive regional droughts and the Great Depression forced inhabitants to seek opportunities elsewhere.[7]



[7] https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/homesteading.htm
https://www.5280.com/2020/06/dearfield-the-story-of-colorados-historic-all-black-settlement/
https://www.nps.gov/articles/african-american-homesteaders-in-the-great-plains.htm
Image source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, HABS KANS,33-NICO,1–6

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1849-1870: The Gold Rush and The Yosemite Land Grant

The 1849 discovery of gold in California led to a massive **Gold Rush with devastating environmental consequences**. Approximately 140,000 gold hunting miners moved into the area within just 5 years. They used jets of water to wash away hillsides (hydraulic mining) and burrowed thousands of mine shafts into the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Mercury, used as part of the extraction process, flowed downstream polluting fresh water, harming wildlife, and damaging crops.

Before 1849, about 150,000 Indigenous people lived throughout California—by 1870 about 30,000 remained. More than half died from diseases brought by the settlers; others died during massacres or forced marched relocations. Sexual exploitation and enslavement was commonplace; approximately 4,000 Indigenous children were sold into slavery. Between 1851 and 1863, California paid $1 million in bounties for Indigenous scalps and heads.



In 1864, President Lincoln signed the **Yosemite Land Grant Act**, setting aside 39,000 acres in Yosemite Valley and Mariposa Grove as protected wilderness areas “for public use, resort, and recreation.” California’s experiment pioneered a new field of public land management and provided valuable lessons–positive as well as negative–for other park advocates who followed. This was a huge win for advocates like Robert Underwood Johnson and John Muir who sought to protect the land; however, protection did not include Indigenous use or habitation, and tribal communities continued to be displaced for tourism and settler recreation.[8]

[8] https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/after-gold-rush/
https://www.nps.gov/cali/learn/historyculture/california-gold-rush.htm
https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-chinese-immigrants/
https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/environment/yosemite-national-park-native-american-village-miwuk/
https://indiancountrytoday.com/archive/native-history-yosemite-national-park-created-on-native-homelands

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1850-1920s: Migrant Asian labor transforms the land

Following decades of European intervention and war to gain dominance in Asia, Chinese and east Asian workers started migrating to the US and became exploitable labor after slavery was abolished. In 1870, the Colorado Territorial Legislature passed a resolution encouraging Chinese workers to immigrate to the area and offset their chronic labor shortages. **Asian traditional agricultural techniques** dramatically increased the land's profitability: by 1920, Japanese immigrant farmers controlled more than 450,000 acres in California and generated more than 10 percent of its crop revenue. Asian workers helped **build the railroads** that accelerated industrialization and economic growth by connecting the continent's resource-rich interiors to the coasts. Cultural practices—like boiling water for tea—meant Asian laborers were less disease prone, healthier, and could work longer.



Asians were an easy target when there were economic downturns, and restrictive policies limited their numbers and opportunities. In the South, the Ku Klux Klan targeted African Americans and their white allies; in the West, Klansmen assaulted the Chinese. In 1871, a mob of 500+ rioters targeted Chinese workers in one of the US's largest mass lynchings. 1882 Chinese Exclusion Acts prevented them from accessing citizenship and capped their numbers. California passing a 1913 ban prohibiting Asian workers from owning land or leasing property for more than 3 years. Anti-Asian immigration caps remained until the 1960s, which prioritized educated professionals.[9]

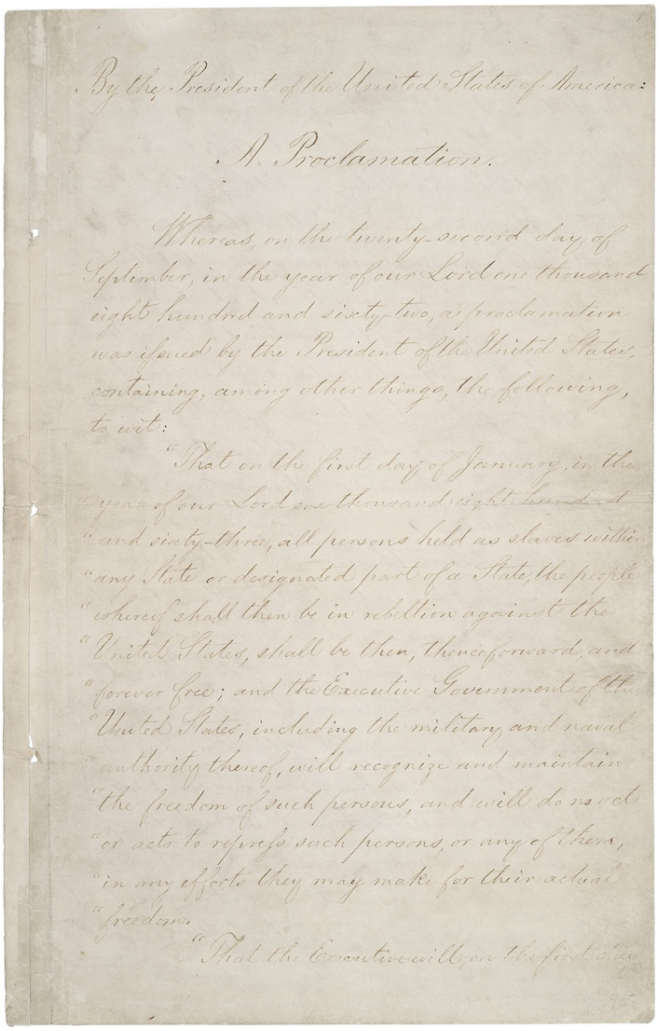
[9] https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china
https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/japanese/the-us-mainland-growth-and-resistance/
https://mollybrown.org/denvers-hop-alley-and-chinatown/
https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/the-bloody-history-of-anti-asian-violence-in-the-west
Image Source: Amon Carter Museum

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1863-1865: The "End" of Slavery

The **Emancipation Proclamation** declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious states "are, and henceforward shall be free."

Despite this expansive wording, the Emancipation Proclamation was limited in many ways. It applied only to states that had seceded from the United States, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. It also expressly exempted parts of the Confederacy (the Southern secessionist states) that had already come under Northern control. Most important, the freedom it promised depended upon Union (United States) military victory.


By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day

Two years later, the 13th amendment abolished slavery in the United States and provides that "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Essentially, this legally permitted the exploitation of prison labor.[10]

[10] https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation

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1860's-1954: Segregation and Jim Crow



In 1860, Congress passed the Army Organization Act, creating six all-Black cavalry and infantry regiments. Known as **Buffalo Soldiers** by the native communities on the Great Plains, these regiments captured cattle rustlers, thieves, and protected settlers, stagecoaches, wagon trains and railroad crews along the Western front.

This segregated army core has a long history with conservation lands. In addition to helping drive out Indigenous communities for settler colonists, they fought wildfires and poachers in the Yosemite and Sequoia national parks, and served as park rangers in the Sierra Nevadas. The 9th Cavalry was critical during the Red River War against the Kiowas, the Comanches, the Cheyenne and the Arapahoe. For over two decades the Ninth and Tenth Cavalry campaigned on the Great Plains, along the Rio Grande, in New Mexico, West Texas, Arizona, Colorado, and the Dakotas.

Southern states passed **Jim Crow laws** requiring the separation of whites from "persons of colour" in public transportation and schools. **Segregation** principle was extended to parks, cemeteries, theatres, and restaurants in an effort to prevent any contact between Blacks and whites as equals; this practice was codified on local and state levels and most famously with the "separate but equal" decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in Plessy v. Ferguson (1896).





In 1954 the Supreme Court reversed Plessy in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. It declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional, and, by extension, that ruling was applied to other public facilities. In the years following, subsequent decisions struck down similar kinds of Jim Crow legislation.[11]

[11] https://www.history.com/topics/westward-expansion/buffalo-soldiers
https://www.nps.gov/gumo/learn/historyculture/soldiers2.htm
https://www.britannica.com/event/Jim-Crow-law
https://www.nationalparkstraveler.org/2019/08/how-national-park-service-grappled-segregation-during-20th-century
Image Source: National Park Service

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1868: Alaska



At the start of Russian occupation in 1774, **Alaska** was home to about 100,000 people, including Inuit, Athabascan, Yupik, Unangan, and Tlingit. Though far outnumbered—no more than 800 Russians ever dwelled there—the foreign settlers used firepower, force, and fear to dominate the Indigenous inhabitants. They frequently took women and children hostage in order to exploit the local hunters' expertise, forcing them to exchange valuable furs for their families' lives. On the island of Attu, Russians executed 15 women and children after a failed fur hunt to set a terrifying example. After decimating sea otter populations and unable to sustain remote settler populations, Russia decided to sell Alaska to the US for $7.2 million. By the time of cession, Indigenous populations had been halved by warfare, enslavement, and disease.



The U.S. gained about 370 million acres of wilderness–almost a third the size of the European Union–including 220 million acres of what are now federal parks and wildlife refuges. Rich in natural resources, hundreds of billions of dollars in whale oil, fur, copper, gold, timber, fish, platinum, zinc, lead and petroleum have been produced in Alaska over the years.[12]

[12] https://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/alaska-purchase-check
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/why-russia-gave-alaska-americas-gateway-arctic-180962714/
https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/636.html
Image source: Alaska State Library. Unangan in a quajaq (kayak) off the coast of Saint Paul Island, Alaska, by Ukrainian artist Louis Choris. Choris was a sketch artist aboard a Russian ship that explored the Pacific and west coast of North America from 1815 to 1818.

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1887: Allotments and the ongoing destruction of Indian Land Rights

The Dawes Act (sometimes called the General Allotment Act) further sought to dismantle Indigenous culture and traditional lifestyles by encouraging them to farm, which meant **dividing tribal lands into individual plots.** Only those who accepted the division of tribal lands were allowed to become US citizens. Tribal nations controlled about 150 million acres of land before the Dawes Act: the government stripped over 90 million acres of tribal land from tribal members.



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GET A HOME OF YOUR OWN ❊ EASY PAYMENTS

PERFECT TITLE ❊ POSSESSION WITHIN THIRTY DAYS

FINE LANDS IN THE WEST

IRRIGATED IRRIGABLE — GRAZING — AGRICULTURAL DRY FARMING

IN 1910 THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR SOLD UNDER SEALED BIDS ALLOTTED INDIAN LAND AS FOLLOWS:

Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.	Location.	Acres.	Average Price per Acre.
Colorado	5,211.21	$7.27	Oklahoma	34,664.00	$19.14
Idaho	17,013.00	24.85	Oregon	1,020.00	15.43
Kansas	1,684.50	33.45	South Dakota	120,445.00	16.53
Montana	11,034.00	9.86	Washington	4,879.00	41.37
Nebraska	5,641.00	36.65	Wisconsin	1,069.00	17.00
North Dakota	22,610.70	9.93	Wyoming	865.00	20.64

The Dawes Act designated 160 acres of farmland or 320 acres of grazing land to the head of each Native American family. However, tribes already controlled the land that was being returned to them at a fraction of the acreage, most were not accustomed to standardized ranching and agriculture, and the lands were often unsuitable for farming. After families claimed their allotments, any remaining tribal lands were declared “surplus” land, which were then sold off to settlers. The Daws Act took land that had been held in common by the entire tribe and divided it into a jumbled mix of trust lands, fee lands, and lands owned by the tribe, individual Native Americans, and settlers.

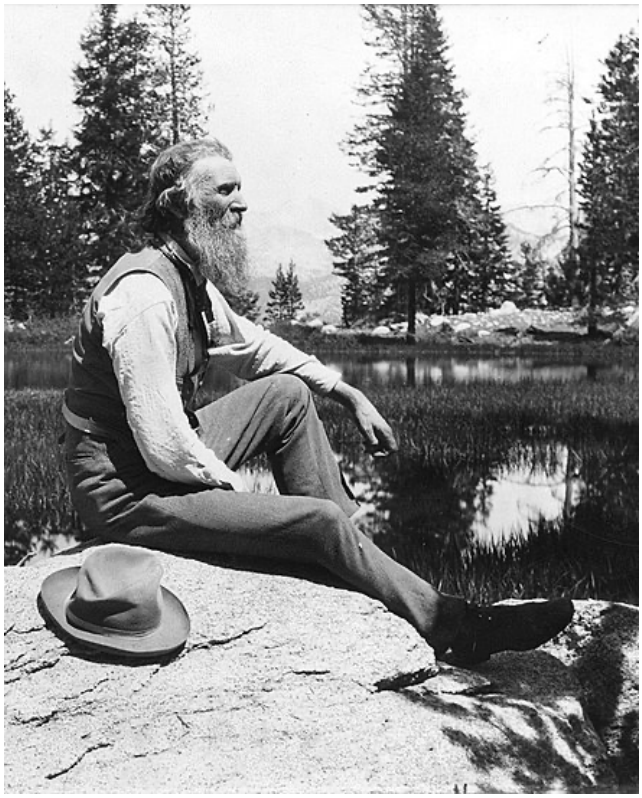
Today, the loss of tribal lands combined with the mixed ownership patterns within reservation boundaries poses serious challenges for the sovereignty and self-determination of Indian nations. Loss of access to sacred and cultural sites makes it harder for each successive generation to remain rooted in their culture. The checkerboard ownership pattern creates jurisdictional challenges and makes it very difficult to use reservation land for economic development. Billions of dollars in income are derived from these alienated lands, but the money goes off the reservation instead of to the Indian communities that need it most.[13]

[13] https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm
https://iltf.org/land-issues/issues/
Image Source: National Park Service

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1892: The Sierra Club

Writer, philosopher, and conservation activist **John Muir founded the Sierra Club** to protect the Sierra Nevadas and other wilderness areas. It is now one of the largest environmental preservation organizations in the world, with chapters in every US state and an annual operating budget of approximately $100 million. The organization was instrumental in helping to shape the creation and preservation of state and national park lands, including passage of the 1960 Wilderness Act.



John Muir's and the Sierra Club's legacy is complicated: though a champion of land preservation, **Muir's vision for protecting lands did not respect or include Indigenous communities, rights, or perspectives.** His racism kept him from seeing that Natives had not merely reaped the bounty of the landscapes he wandered through but had shaped them with sophisticated land-management strategies.

Muir also maintained friendships with people like Henry Fairfield Osborn, who worked for both the conservation of nature and the conservation of the white race. Head of the New York Zoological Society and the board of trustees of the American Museum of Natural History, Osborn also helped found the American Eugenics Society in the years after Muir's death. **Other early Sierra Club members and leaders**, such as Joseph LeConte and David Starr Jordan, **were vocal advocates for white supremacy** and its pseudo-scientific arm, eugenics. Jordan co-founded the Human Betterment Foundation, whose research and model laws were used to create Nazi Germany's eugenics legislation.[14]

[14] https://www.sierraclub.org/michael-brune/2020/07/john-muir-early-history-sierra-club
Image Source; Library of Congress

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1893-1900: Colonizing the Pacific Islands

The first known settlers of the Hawaiian Islands were Polynesian voyagers who arrived sometime in the eighth century. The first American traders came to Hawaii in the early 1700s to exploit the islands' sandalwood, which was much valued in China at the time. The sugar industry was later introduced and by the mid-19th century was well established. New diseases, harsh labor conditions, and the exploitation of traditional *kapu* governance practices to accelerate production-for-use into a production-for-profit economy all dramatically impacted the native Hawaiians. Hawaii entered into a number of political and economic treaties with the United States, and in 1887 a U.S. naval base was established at Pearl Harbor as part of a new Hawaiian constitution.



In 1893, **a group of American sugar planters** under Sanford Ballard Dole **overthrow Queen Liliuokalani and established a new provincial government** with Dole as president. Native Hawaiians staged mass protest rallies to prevent annexation, but their efforts were suppressed. In 1898, the Spanish-American War broke out, and the strategic use of the naval base at Pearl Harbor during the war convinced Congress to approve formal annexation. Two years later, **Hawaii was organized into a formal U.S. territory and in 1959 entered the United States as the 50th state.**

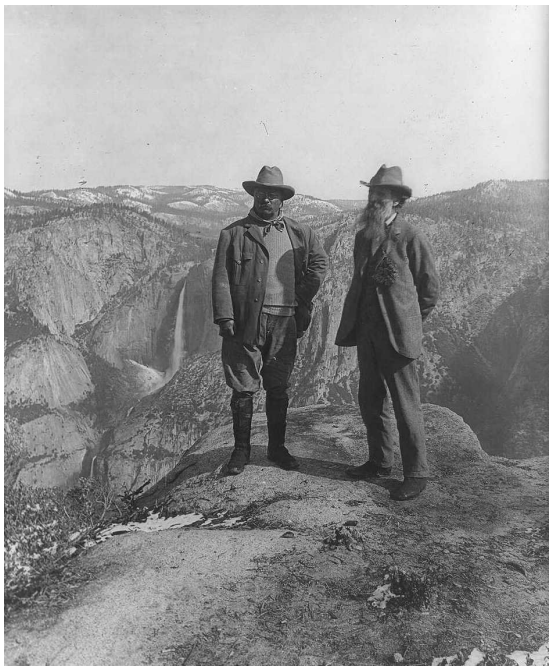
Guam had been inhabited for nearly 4,000 years when the **Spanish began colonizing the island in 1521.** The Spanish suppressed the Chamorro language and replaced the native religion with Christianity. Even the Chamorros' matrilineal system all but disappeared.

When the U.S. won the Spanish American War, it made Guam an official U.S. territory. The Organic Act of 1950 re-identified **Guam as an unincorporated U.S. territory**, granting Chamorros U.S. citizenship by birth, but no voting rights for president. And just like citizens of Washington D.C. and the other U.S. territories—**Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and American Samoa**—Guam's 162,000 people **have no voting representatives in Congress**.[15]

[15] https://www.hawaii.edu/uhwo/clear/home/HawaiiLaborHistory.html
https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/brief-500-year-history-guam-180964508/
https://www.publichealthpost.org/research/the-trauma-of-colonization/https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/americans-overthrow-hawaiian-monarchy
https://www.history.com/news/how-the-united-states-ended-up-with-guam

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1901-1916: The Rise of National Parks and Monuments



President Theodore Roosevelt doubled the number of sites within the National Park system by signing legislation establishing five new national parks: Crater Lake, Oregon; Wind Cave, South Dakota; Sullys Hill, North Dakota (later re-designated a game preserve); Mesa Verde, Colorado; and Platt, Oklahoma. In **1905 Forest Service is established.**

The Antiquities Act of 1906 enabled him and succeeding Presidents to proclaim historic landmarks, historic or prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest in federal ownership as national monuments. He proclaimed four national monuments: Devils Tower (Wyoming), El Morro (New Mexico), Montezuma Castle (Arizona), and Petrified Forest (Arizona). Additionally, he interpreted the authority expansively, protecting a large portion of the Grand Canyon (Arizona). (New Mexico), Montezuma Castle (Arizona), and Petrified Forest (Arizona). Additionally, he interpreted the authority expansively, protecting a large portion of the Grand Canyon (Arizona).

Between 1905 and 1909, national forests increased in size by around 96 million acres, while Allotment Laws led to tribal lands diminishing nearly 90 million acres. The rise of conservation dovetailed with a "national closeout sale on the Indians' land heritage."

The National Park Service was established in 1916, with the mission "to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."[16]

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[16] *Theodore Roosevelt: Naturalist in the Arena*. Edited by Char Millier and Clay S. Jenkin. Lincoln, NE: University of NE Press, 2020.
https://www.nps.gov/mabi/learn/historyculture/conservation-timeline-1901-2000.htm
Image Source: Creative Commons. Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir at Glacier Point in Yosemite.

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1916-1970s: The Great Migration

Black Americans began their **Great Migration** northward and into cities to escape poverty, racist violence, and oppression. Six million people journeyed out of the South over the course of six decades, seeking political asylum within the borders of their own country.

This migration also accelerated a massive re-orientation for Black Americans to the land. While enslaved, they developed knowledge of the land that was both intimate and precise, using the forest environment around them for sustenance, safety, medicine, and sometimes as a tool for sabotage. As woods workers, slaves worked as loggers and producers of naval stores. Forests were also important venues for worship, spirituality, and escape. This transformed during the Civil War and years afterwards; the Ku Klux Klan and other terrorist organizations that opposed black freedom took advantage of forest cover to mask their movements, and forests became the primary venue for lynchings. Around the beginning of the twentieth century, a black man was lynched every three and one-half days.



The Great Migration moved Black communities away from agriculture, ranching, and forest industries and into low wage service and factory work.[17]

[17] https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/long-lasting-legacy-great-migration-180960118/
https://www.fs.fed.us/people/aasg/PDFs/African_Americans_and_forests_March21%202006.pdf
Image Source: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/long-lasting-legacy-great-migration-180960118/

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1924: Indian Citizenship

The **Indian Citizenship Act** passed. Citizenship for Indigenous communities was complicated, as not all tribal members desired US citizenship–which often came with limitations and stipulations. In many cases individuals were forced to choose between staying with their tribes and being removed to the west or remaining behind in the old lands and accepting citizenship and a small allotment of land. However, accessing US citizenship entitled Native Americans the legal right to vote. When the Indian Citizenship Act was passed, almost one-third of the Indigenous people in the United States were not considered citizens.[18]



Despite possessing citizenship, many Native Americans living on reservations continued to be excluded from the democratic process. In 1948, Native Americans in New Mexico and Arizona successfully litigated their right to vote. Utah and North Dakota became the last states to afford on-reservation Native Americans the right to vote in 1957 and 1958, respectively. When the right to vote was finally secured, voter suppression laws kept Native Americans from voting and seeking elected office. In 2021, Native Americans continue to litigate for their right to vote.[19]

[18] http://www.nativepartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=airc_hist_citizenshipact
[19] https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/voting-rights/how-the-native-american-vote-continues-to-be-suppressed/
Image Source Yellow Horse Passport, 1923. Wind River Reservation, Wyoming. https://centerofthewest.org/2017/06/02/june-2nd-1924-93-years-of-native-american-citizenship/

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1930s: Conservation during The Great Depression



During the Great Depression, the **Civilian Conservation Core (CCC)** was created to put jobless young men to work on public land projects, including "the prevention of forest fires…plant pest and disease control, the construction, maintenance and repair of paths, trails and fire-lanes in the national parks and national forests and such other work…as the President may determine to be desirable." The CCC operated 4,500 camps in national parks and forests, as well as state and community parks, **planting three billion trees, protecting 20 million acres from soil erosion, and aiding in the establishment of 800 state parks**; it invested $3 billion in America's young men and the forests and parks they worked in.



Though considered a success, **CCC benefits went almost exclusively to white Americans**. Despite a stated commitment to inclusion, the agency continued segregationist and exclusive practices. Black men were regularly overlooked for selection and local leaders balked at the prospect of racially integrated camps. Alton Wright, superintendent of the Colored Rescue Mission, Inc., of Kansas City, protested to Roosevelt that "Negroes can't get into the CCC" and "no-one seems to care." Of the 2,500,000 men the CCC enrolled, under 200,000 were Black and less than 85,000 were Native American.[20]

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[20] https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/ccc/salmond/chap5.htm
https://livingnewdeal.org/tag/racial-segregation-in-the-ccc/
Image Source: https://corpsnetwork.org/blogs/moving-forward-initiative-the-african-american-experience-in-the-civilian-conservation-corps/

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1942: Japanese Internment

Shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, the US opened **Japanese internment camps**, dispersing Japanese immigrant settlements along the west coast to remote camps in the interior. People with Japanese ancestry—regardless their citizenship status—were given 48 hours to evacuate and be incarcerated in detention camps. 112,000 people, including infants and children, were sent to long-term "relocation centers" that would be their home for the rest of the war. Over half were citizens. There were no charges of disloyalty against any of these citizens, nor was there any vehicle by which they could appeal their loss of property and personal liberty.



These camps also operated as prison farms that produced five types of livestock and sixty-one produce varieties; despite the short growing season, inhospitable climate, pests, and low access to equipment, they "succeeded" through intensive labor practices. Agriculture wasn't incidental at any of the incarceration camps in the US. Many of the new War Relocation Authority administrators came right from the Department of Agriculture. Camp locations, though usually in deserts and other inhospitable places, were often chosen for their existing government irrigation projects or agricultural potential. The government's intention was to improve the land for after the war. Japanese internment created vast wealth, predominately for the white Americans who took over and inhabited their farms, homes, and businesses, then benefited from their work to cultivate the land for white post-war homesteaders.[21]

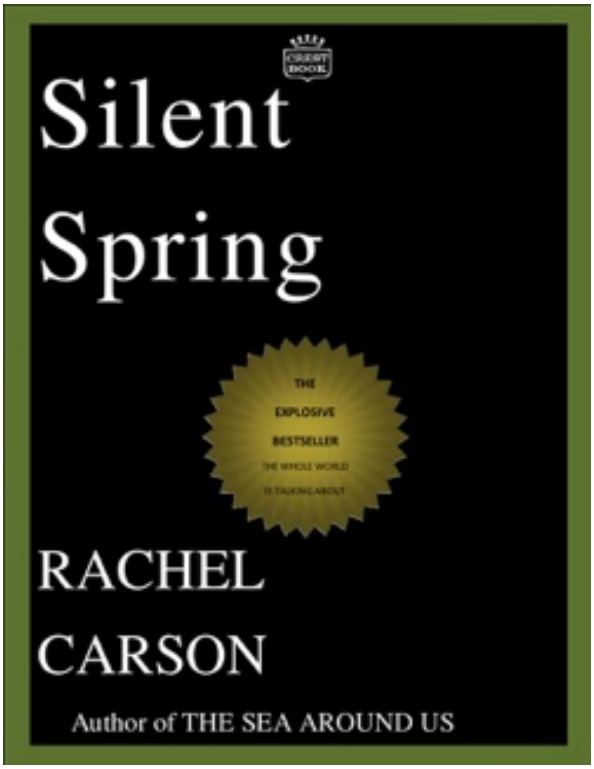
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[21] Lillquist, Karl."Farming the Desert: Agriculture in the World War II-Era Japanese-American Relocation Centers." *Agricultural history*, 2010-01-01, Vol.84 (1), p.74-104.
https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/japanese-relocation
https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2017/02/19/515822019/farming-behind-barbed-wire-japanese-americans-remember-wwii-incarceration
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/lost-fleet-exhibit-shows-how-racist-policies-devastated-b-c-s-japanese-fishing-community-1.4041358

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1962: Silent Spring

Biologist and science writer Rachel Carson published ***Silent Spring***, which became one of the most-influential books of the modern environmental movement. She questioned the then-dominant paradigm of scientific progress and the philosophical belief that man was destined to exert control over nature. She argued that the success of pesticides is necessarily limited because the target pests tend to develop immunity, while risks to humans and the environment will increase as the pesticides accumulate in the environment.[22]



[22] https://www.britannica.com/topic/Silent-Spring

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1964-1970s: Legislating Environmental Protection

1964: The Wilderness Act is passed to preserve and protect certain lands "in their natural condition" and thus "secure for present and future generations the benefits of wilderness." The Act recognized the value of preserving "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."[23]



1970: The **National Environmental Policy Act** established a new Council on Environmental Quality and, more practically, required an **Environmental Impact Statement** for major federal projects. The Environmental Impact Statement provision became an important tool for environmentalists and became the basis for hundreds of lawsuits aimed at stopping or delaying projects.[24]



Congress established much of the basic structure of the **Clean Air Act** and made major revisions in 1977 and 1990. Dense, visible smog in many of the nation's cities and industrial centers helped to prompt passage of the 1970 legislation at the height of the national environmental movement. [25]

In 1972, Congress rewrites the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (1948) as **The Clean Water Act (CWA)** and establishes the basic structure for regulating discharges of pollutants into the waters of the United States and regulating quality standards for surface waters.[26]

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[23] https://www.justice.gov/enrd/wilderness-act-1964
[24] https://www.historylink.org/File/9903
[25] https://www.epa.gov/clean-air-act-overview/clean-air-act-requirements-and-history
Image Source: North Birmingham, adjacent to US pipe plant and the most heavily polluted part of the city, July 1972: LeRoy Woodson/NARA
https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2011/12/smog-photos-1970s-america/
[26] https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-clean-water-act
https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/federal-water-pollution-control-act-1948
Image Source: https://cen.acs.org/environment/pollution/Marking-50-years-since-Cuyahoga/97/i24

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1964-1970s (continued)

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was passed in 1974 to protect public health by regulating the nation's public drinking water supply. By the late 1960s it became apparent that the aesthetic problems, pathogens, and chemicals identified by the Public Health Service were not the only drinking water quality concerns. Industrial and agricultural advances and the creation of new man-made chemicals also had negative impacts on the environment and public health by finding their way into water supplies through factory discharges, street and farm field runoff, leaking underground waste disposal areas, and were suspected of causing health problems.

However, a 2019 report between Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Environmental Justice Health Alliance for Chemical Policy Reform, and Coming Clean found "that race, ethnicity, and language had the strongest relationship to slow and inadequate enforcement of the Safe Drinking Water Act." Water systems that serve the communities that are the most marginalized are more likely to be in violation of the law—and to stay in violation for longer periods of time.[27]



[27] https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-04/documents/epa816f04030.pdf
https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=449348
https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/watered-down-justice-report.pdf
Image source: Wikimedia Commons "Mary Workman holds a jar of undrinkable water that comes from her well, and has filed a damage suit against the Hanna Coal Company, Steubenville (Jefferson county, Ohio), 1973."

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1970: Earth Day



The first **Earth Day** inspired 20 million Americans to take to the streets, parks, and auditoriums to demonstrate against the impacts of 150 years of industrial development which had left a growing legacy of serious human health impacts. The national day of action largely coalesced in response to a series of environmental disasters that captured national media attention; the Santa Barbara oil spill of January 1969 dumped the equivalent of 100,000 barrels of crude into Santa Barbara Channel, killing thousands of sea birds and mammals; the burning of the fouled, fuel-slicked Cuyahoga River; the near-death of Lake Erie; and the near-extinction of the bald eagle.



Less Than 100 Blacks Take Part in Gigantic Earth Day Rites Here

By CHARLES WILSON
(Of The Tribune Staff)

The massive Earth Day celebrations held across the country Wednesday might just as well been another day to the black community if their participation in parades and other events were any indication.

While television channels and the daily press saturated the public with the dangers of environmental pollution, blacks in general went about their daily business with little or no thought of the impassioned speeches taking place on Belmont Plateau in Fairmount Park.

Tribune reporters on hand during the day long festivities in the park spotted less than 100 black people, mostly young students and teachers, among the estimated crowd of 25-30,000.

Since everyone breathes the air, why are blacks holding back from active participation in save the environment campaigns?

TOO BUSY

One explanation is that while black people, and poor whites too, suffer more from air pollution than the more affluent whites who have adopted the cause with a vengeance, they are too busy dealing with the immediate necessities of life, as suggested by Jack Hampton, of 105 N. Sickels St.

Others suggest that blacks are more occupied with improving their immediate living conditions and gaining their civil and economic rights and have no time to participate in "side causes."

Others see signs of usual white hypocrisy in the sudden outcry over pollution. The poor have lived among trash and filth all their lives and affluent whites never staged protest marches about that.

One unidentified person said

(Continued on Page 3, Col 1)

Though some Black activists saw Earth Day as an opportunity to promote civil rights and racial justice, Black activist and the environmental movements remained largely separated. Many Black leaders viewed the sudden outcry over pollution as another example of white hypocrisy; others viewed the environmental movement as another attempt by educated, affluent whites to escape the fight against racism by embracing a cause "everyone can support."

Partnerships with Indigenous communities were disparate; the day opened in Washington DC with a sunrise invocation led by tribal leaders. However, for Earth Day 1971, the Keep America Beautiful nonprofit commissioned a widely viewed and problematic TV commercial showing a polluted landscape surveyed by a tearful Native American elder (played, in a bit of whitewashed casting, by "Iron Eyes" Cody, a Sicilian-American actor). Some Indigenous leaders have voiced concerns that Earth Day "has come to represent is meaningless, and ultimately, dangerous lip service for those most impacted by climate disaster."[28]

[28] https://www.earthday.org/history/
https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2020/04/how-earth-day-moved-environmentalism-front-and-center/
https://web.sas.upenn.edu/earthdayproject/civil-rights/
https://www.theguardian.com/environment/from-the-archive-blog/2020/apr/22/the-first-earth-day-april-1970
https://ndncollective.org/the-solution-to-the-ecological-crisis-isnt-earth-day-its-landback/
Image: Ira Einhorn, a leading force in the 1960s hippie establishment, leads the April 1970 celebration of Earth Day in Philadelphia. Photograph: AP

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1974: United States v. Washington, The Boldt Decision



Indigenous communities of the Pacific Northwest had long depended on the salmon harvest, which abundantly provided for their needs and allowed them to trade. By the 1840s, tribes were trading salmon to the Hudson's Bay Company, which shipped the fish to other locations around the world. Washington state agreed to a series of treaties, ensuring tribal fishing rights. Over time, however, the state infringed on those treaties despite losing a series of court cases on the issue.

Through the early 1970s, fishermen from the treaty tribes were taking only five percent of the total salmon catch. Commercial fishing techniques appropriated the resource before it entered the spawning grounds, where tribal people had always taken the bulk of their salmon catch for ceremonial, subsistence and commercial uses.

Decided by Judge George Boldt, the case held that the tribes were entitled to half the fish harvest each year. Where tribal salmon fishing previously had been restricted to reservation grounds, Boldt's decision permitted tribal fishermen protected access to off-reservation fishing grounds. At the same time Judge Boldt denies landless tribes—among them the Samish, Snoqualmie, Steilacoom, and Duwamish—federal recognition and treaty rights.

Rather than returning fish to traditional Indian river and inshore fisheries, the Boldt Decision appears to be encouraging the creation of a wealthy class of offshore, capital-intensive, treaty-tribe fishermen who are intercepting much of the resource before it reaches the traditional estuary and river fisheries of the tribes. Traditional tribal fishing has been characterized by strong collective, redistributive and ecological commitments. However, as treaty members adopt privately owned, capital-intensive fishing technologies, new commitments are made that do not necessarily harmonize with traditional values. In 1982, the 30 treaty purse-seine vessel owners took $6.6 million of salmon, slightly less than one-third of total treaty harvest value. One tribe alone harvested approximately 40 percent of the total value of the 20 treaty tribes.[29]

[29] Michael C. Blumm and Brett M. Swift, *The Indian Treaty Piscary Profit and Habitat Protection in the Pacific Northwest: A Property Rights Approach*, 69 U. COLO. L. REV.407, 421 (1998).
https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/unintended-consequences-boldt-decision
https://www.historylink.org/file/5282
Image source: https://www.nlm.nih.gov/nativevoices/timeline/634.html

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1977-ongoing: The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge



While many areas in Alaska are already open to **oil and gas drilling**, oil and gas interests have spent decades and millions of dollars lobbying to drill in the coastal plain. And while some parts of the Arctic Refuge are permanently protected, the coastal plain of the refuge has never received permanent protection through a Wilderness designation from Congress, leaving it vulnerable to industrial development.

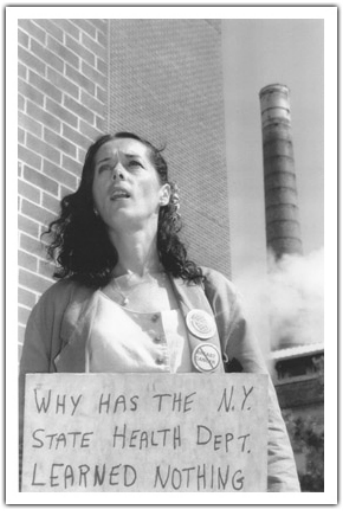
Gray wolves, musk oxen, caribou, and imperiled polar bears roam the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's 19.6 million acres. Migratory birds visit from all 50 states and six continents. These lands—first recognized with federal protections in 1960—are vital to the culture and survival of the indigenous Gwich'in people, who have relied on the Arctic Refuge for thousands of years.



After numerous attempts to open and close this region for development, A formal order from Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in 2021—the first Native American to serve in this role in US history—paused oil leases until her agency has completed an environmental analysis of their impact and a legal review of the Trump administration's decision to grant them.

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1978: Superfund Sites



Love Canal, located near Niagara Falls in upstate New York, was a working-class enclave with hundreds of houses and a school, sat atop 21,000 tons of toxic industrial waste that had been buried underground in the 1940s and '50s. Over the years, the waste began to bubble up into backyards and cellars; corroding waste-disposal drums could be seen breaking up through the grounds of backyards, and there was a disturbing increase in birth defects and cancer rates. After intensive whistleblowing and community organizing efforts spearheaded by resident Lois Gibbs finally led to nationwide outcry, hundreds of families sold their houses to the federal government and evacuated the area. The disaster led to the formation in 1980 of the **Superfund program**, which helps pay for the cleanup of toxic sites.[30]



[30] http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1986457_1986501_1986441,00.html
Image Source: https://www.loe.org/shows/segments.html?programID=13-P13-00050&segmentID=7

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1987: Environmental Racism

In 1987, **The United Church of Christ (UCC) Commission on Racial Justice** examined the statistical relationship between the location of a hazardous waste site and the racial/socioeconomic composition of host communities nationwide. They found **hazardous waste facilities were disproportionately located in minority communities** and called this unequal vulnerability "a form of racism;" over 15 million African Americans, 8 million Hispanics, and half of all Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans resided in communities with at least one abandoned or uncontrolled toxic waste sites. Additionally, the environmental movement, the report observed, "has historically been white middle and upper-class."



Three years later, activists sent a letter to the heads of major environmental organizations, claiming that **non-whites were less than two per cent of the combined seven hundred and forty-five employees** of the Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council (N.R.D.C.), and Friends of the Earth.[31]

[31] https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/environmentalisms-racist-history
Image Source: https://www.ucc.org/pollinator_an_interview_with_charles_lee/

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1989: Exxon Valdez



On March 24, 1989, the **oil tanker *Exxon Valdez*** struck Bligh Reef in Prince William Sound, Alaska, spilling more than 11 million gallons of crude oil—the largest spill in U.S. history. Many factors complicated the cleanup efforts following the spill: the spill's size and remote location, accessible only by helicopter and boat, made government and industry efforts difficult and tested existing plans for dealing with such an event. It threatened ten million migratory shore birds and waterfowl, hundreds of sea otters, dozens of other species, such as harbor porpoises and sea lions, and several varieties of whale, and has had long term environmental and social impacts.

Prince William Sound was a longstanding melting pot of various Alaska Native groups, including Eskimos, Aleuts, Athabaskans, Eyaks, and Tlingits—**the spill was especially harmful for these Alaska Native communities.** It attacked subsistence, the defining characteristic linking modern Native Americans with their traditional culture. Not only does the environment have sacred qualities, but Indigenous cultural survival depends on a healthy ecosystem and maintaining subsistence norms and values. Class-action litigation caused many Alaska Natives to feel further victimized because damages to their culture were disregarded. Natives were among groups seeking compensation and were awarded $20 Million for damage to subsistence resources and part of a share of $5 Billion in punitive damages. Exxon appealed these damages, and in 2008 the Supreme Court slashed total damages to $500 million—a fraction of what plaintiffs had hoped for.[32]

[32] https://www.epa.gov/emergency-response/exxon-valdez-spill-profile
Duane, Gill and Picou, Steven J. "The Day the Water Died: Exxon Valdez Disaster and Indigenous Culture." *American Disasters,* ed. Steven Biel. New Yor, NY: New York UP, 2001. p277-301.
https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=91891837

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1991: Environmental Justice Principles

The **First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit** drafted the **17 Principles of Environmental Justice**, which outlined the three major components of environmental justice that remain relevant today: (1) no community should bear a disproportionate burden of environmental hazards; (2) all communities should have access to environmental benefits; and (3) decision-making processes need to be transparent and include community voices.

Joined by delegates from Puerto Rico, Canada, Central and South America, and the Marshall Islands, those present at the meeting in Washington, D.C. set in motion a process of redefining environmental issues in their own terms. People of color gathered not in reaction to the environmental movement, but rather to reaffirm their traditional connection to and respect for the natural world, and to speak for themselves on some of the most critical issues of our times. For people of color, the environment is woven into an overall framework and understanding of social, racial, and economic justice. The definitions that emerge from the environmental justice movement led by people of color are deeply rooted in culture and spirituality and encompass all aspects of daily life—where folks of color live, work, and play. This broad understanding of the environment is a context within which to address a variety of questions about militarism and defense, religious freedom and cultural survival, energy and sustainable development, transportation and housing, land and sovereignty rights, self-determination, and employment.[33]



[33] https://www.naacpldf.org/wp-content/uploads/Water_Report_FULL_5_31_19_FINAL_OPT.pdf
https://www.reimaginerpe.org/20years/alston

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2014-ongoing: Flint Water Crisis

The **water crisis in Flint, Michigan**, began in 2014, when the city switched its drinking water supply from Detroit's system to the Flint River in a cost-saving move. Inadequate treatment and testing of the water resulted in a series of major water quality and health issues for Flint residents—issues that were chronically ignored, overlooked, and discounted by government officials even as complaints mounted that the foul-smelling, discolored, and off-tasting water piped into Flint homes for 18 months was causing skin rashes, hair loss, and itchy skin. An outbreak of Legionnaires' disease killed 12 and sickened at least 87 people. **The Michigan Civil Rights Commission, a state-established body, concluded that the poor governmental response to the Flint crisis was a "result of systemic racism."** In 2014, 57% of the residents identified as Black, and 42% of all residents lived under the poverty line. 15 people have been charged as criminally responsible for causing or contributing to the crisis.

For more than a century, the Flint River, which flows through the heart of town, has served as an unofficial waste disposal site for treated and untreated refuse from carriage and car factories to meatpacking plants and lumber and paper mills. The waterway has also received raw sewage from the city's waste treatment plant, agricultural and urban runoff, and toxics from leaching landfills.[34]



[34] https://www.nrdc.org/stories/flint-water-crisis-everything-you-need-know#sec-summary
Image Source: https://newrepublic.com/article/150032/abandonment-flint

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2017: Attacks on National Monuments

Spurred by development potential for fossil fuels and other energy, President Donald Trump drastically **reduced the size of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante** (by roughly 85 percent and half, respectively), the single largest rollback of public lands protections in history. These changes exposed archaeological and paleontological sites to vandalism and other harm and opened the door to drilling and mining claims.



Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument was designated in 1996, protecting a dramatic red-rock landscape in southern Utah that has yielded numerous significant fossils of dinosaurs and other ancient life. Bears Ears National Monument, to the east, was established in 2016 to preserve thousands of Indigenous cultural and archaeological sites. The Bears Ears Inter-Tribal Coalition, an alliance of five sovereign Tribal nations with ties to Bears Ears (the Navajo Nation, Hopi Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe and Pueblo of Zuni), was the driving force behind that monument designation—a momentous and perhaps unprecedented instance of Tribal interests joining forces to propose national monument protection.

Ever since, Tribal leaders, scientists, local businesses, conservation groups have been fighting the Trump rollbacks, including in court.[35]

[35] https://www.wilderness.org/articles/blog/6-big-questions-whats-happening-bears-ears-and-other-national-monuments

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2015-2021: Standing Rock Sioux and the Dakota Access Pipeline

The **Dakota Access Pipeline**'s route takes it over four states and nearly 1,200 miles, from the Bakken oil fields in northwestern North Dakota through South Dakota, Iowa and down to a terminal in Illinois. But one Missouri River crossing just north of the **Standing Rock Sioux Reservation** in North Dakota became the focal point of a fight over indigenous sovereignty, water quality and rights, the destruction of sacred lands, and the US government's long history of breaking treaties and agreements with tribal nations.

Through lawsuits and direct action efforts, tribal leaders and their supporters—who swelled into the thousands and came from all over the world—sought to stop the pipeline. Water protectors protesting at the site were often met with militarized violence, including being sprayed with water cannons in the middle of winter, attacked by guard dogs, sound cannons, teargas, rubber, bullets, and concussion grenades. The UN Human Rights Council admonished the US for excessive force and disregarding tribal sovereignty and water rights.



Since opening, the pipeline has had numerous leaks, of 5 documented leaks in 2017, one spilled 210,000 gallons; over 383,000 gallons leaked from another spill in 2018. In 2020, a federal judge ordered an environmental review of the pipeline.[36]

[36] https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/02/22/514988040/key-moments-in-the-dakota-access-pipeline-fight
https://abcnews.go.com/US/380000-gallons-oil-spill-keystone-pipeline-north-dakota/story?id=66683075
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/12/north-dakota-standing-rock-protests-civil-rights

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2018: Reconciliation at Yosemite



Yosemite Park authorities begin reconciliation efforts with the Miwuk (descendants of the Ahwanachee people) by signing a 30-year agreement that would allow the local American Indian Council of Mariposa County to build and use a village. The buildings will be constructed using traditional methods and materials and will serve as a focal point for Native American cultural and religious ceremonies.

The displacement of Yosemite's native population began in the mid-1800s during the Gold Rush, when a battalion of state militia found Yosemite while hunting for Native Americans. Villages were burned and Native Americans shot, hung, or captured. Others fled to the foothills or eastern Sierra. Despite these attacks, native communities continuously dwelled there until the 1960s when the park services razed their last village.

The project, which was first initiated over 40 years ago by Native leaders, has had ups and downs. “We knew how to build a roundhouse from traditional knowledge that’s been passed down. … The park service didn't understand that,” said Tony Brochini, former tribal chairman and executive director of the Wahhoga Committee. “That is where we butted heads. The park service wanted us to follow project management protocol and we were moving forward with our traditional methods.”[37]

[37] https://www.fresnobee.com/news/local/article212274659.html

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2020: Wildfires and Prison Labor

Incarcerated men, women, and youth join inmate wildfire crews as part of the "**Conservation Camp Program**" to fight over 600 wildfires in California, making up 33% of the state's firefighting work force. Colorado, Arizona, Montana, Nevada, and other states host similar programs. Inmates earn as little as $2.90 a day—saving the state over $100 million per year in firefighting costs. Dangerous natural events force crews to endure more than 10 million hours of labor each year. They face brutal 24-hour work-days, out of control fires, sickness, sleep deprivation, mountain lions, scorpions, rattlesnakes, and are four times more likely to suffer injuries. Many have died. They do all this after just two weeks of training.



Inmate firefighter programs began in 1915, when chain gangs helped build and maintain roads and railways. During World War II, civilian firefighters enlisted or were drafted, causing a serious labor shortage. California forced prisoners to pick up the slack, and by 1946 they had constructed their first permanent camp. Since then, the program has steadily grown.

California's firefighting program is only one part of the much broader use of **prison labor** across the US—some of which is *not* voluntary. The practice is explicitly allowed after the abolishment of slavery through the 13th Amendment of the US Constitution, which banned slavery and involuntary servitude "except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted." **Because Black and Native men are over-represented in prison systems, they are disproportionately vulnerable to this form of exploitation**.[38]

[38] https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/policing/2020/11/11/california-wildfires-raged-incarcerated-exploited-labor-column/6249201002/
https://www.ppic.org/publication/californias-prison-population/
https://www.vox.com/2018/8/9/17670494/california-prison-labor-mendocino-carr-ferguson-wildfires

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