

Lessons from History

- 1. *Hard economic conditions can lead to bad public policies.*** During times of economic recession and hardship, there's more competition for jobs and scarce resources. During these times, it's easy for politicians and conservative forces to scapegoat different racial groups and blame them for the economic problems. There's a lot of racism, which can lead to anti-immigrant legislation, punitive policies directed at people of color and anti-union legislation. For example, during the recession in the late 1800's, there was a wave of anti-immigrant policies enacted—this happened again after the stock market crashed in 1929. During the recession in the 1980s, there were increasing attacks on affirmative action policies.
- 2. *The legacy of our racist history still greatly affects people lives and our organizing efforts.*** The genocide and forced relocation of Native Americans, the enslavement and apartheid of African Americans, the exploitation of Asian and Latino labor—and the preferences and privileges often given to white people—have all resulted in vast inequities and deep divisions in our society. Our history has a lot to do with our current economic status, our relations to other racial groups, the amount of political power we have and the life opportunities that we have. We have to understand this history in order to counteract its damaging effects. Otherwise, we'll just keep repeating history, replicating racist patterns, and allowing ourselves to continue to be divided and conquered.
- 3. *Strong and inclusive social justice movements can result in positive changes in public policy.*** When people organize, especially across race and ethnicities, it can lead to a lot of policy change. In the 1940s, when labor was at its peak, it led to the New Deal policies. In the 1960's, at the height of the civil rights movement, there were many new "Great Society" policies enacted, including new civil rights and voting rights legislation.
- 4. *In current times, the way we organize will have a major effect on what public policies result.*** While the economy is slumping and states are experiencing huge deficits, and while political conservatives dominate our national policy agenda and continue to cut social services to expand military operations, there are many challenges to organizing for social justice. If people can come together and organize across racial, ethnic and class lines—instead of competing with each other and blaming each other—there can be new opportunities to build a reinvigorated social justice movement to push for major policy changes – such as legalization of immigrants, universal health coverage and equitable school reform. Our success will depend largely on how effectively we address racial equity and how committed we are to building multi-racial organizations with strong leaders of color.
- 5. *Learning our history and the legacy of racism can be a major tool to help us build organizations that truly support unity and equity.*** Though there are similarities in many of our paths, there are also real differences. It's important to understand *both* the similarities and the differences because they shape who we really are. If we only look at our similarities, we lose a lot of the richness and value of our differences. It's important to keep all these stories alive and share them with each other. This way, we can better know the truth of our past, while collectively creating the visions and strategies for a more equitable future.

Racial Legacies

(This is not a complete history, but depicts some key events, policies and trends.)

| Years | Economic & Political Climate | Social Justice Movements | Public Policies |
|-------|---|--|---|
| 1840s | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1830-40: Indian Removal Act (70,000 Native Americans forced to relocate) • 1846-48: Mexican War: U.S. takes Southwest – Mexicans now “illegal” in their own land. |
| 1850s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20,000 Chinese miners—most indentured servants—in California | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolitionist’s (John Brown) raid at Harpers Ferry, VA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1857: In <i>Dred Scott</i> decision, Supreme Court denies citizenship to Black people |
| 1860s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1866: KKK started | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing labor movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1863: Emancipation Proclamation frees all slaves • 1866 Indian wars –extermination/relocation of Indians to reservations (through 1891) • 1868: 14th Amendment grants citizenship to all born in U.S. (except indigenous) |
| 1870s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1877: end of post-civil war reconstruction • Anti-Chinese movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reconstruction in the South | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1870: 15th Amendment grants all freedmen the right to vote; white supremacist groups terrorize blacks • 1875: Civil Rights Act grants equal access to public accommodations to all races • 1877: Black Codes prevent blacks from testifying against whites |
| 1880s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worldwide recession | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese Exclusion Act (bans immigration of Chinese labors. prevents citizenship ‘til 1943) • 1883: Supreme Court strikes down 1875 civil rights act; Jim Crow segregation era begins (and lasts until 1964); increased black lynchings (3,600 from 1884-1914.) |
| 1890s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • worldwide recession | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1896: Supreme Court, in <i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i>, legally sanctions “separate but equal” rule. |
| 1900s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arabs from “Greater Syria” migrate to U.S. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1909: NAACP founded | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1907: Japanese and Korean immigration restricted. |
| 1910s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1914-1918: WWI • Blacks move North in Great Migration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mexican Revolution (1910) and Russian Revolution (1917) • 1919 race riots in 26 U.S. cities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palmer Raids: FBI (J. Edgar Hoover) targets political and labor leaders for repression and deportation. (10,000 labor and immigrant activists deported.) |

Racial Legacies (continued)

| Years | Economic & Political Climate | Social Justice Movements | Public Policy |
|-------|--|---|---|
| 1920s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1929: Stock Market Crash | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Filipinos lead farm labor organizing movement through Agriculture Workers Organizing Committee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1920: 19th Amendment (woman can vote) • 1921: immigration quotas established, favoring northern and western Europeans • 1922: Gov't bombs Black Wall Street in Tulsa • 1924: Johnson-Reed Act restricts immigration; Mexican deportations • 1924: Indian Citizenship Act and right to vote. • U.S. Border control created |
| 1930s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1929-1941: Great Depression; • New Deal era | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southern Tenant Farmers Union organize in Arkansas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1935-36: "New Deal" policies -- Social Security Act; Aid to Dependent Children, min. wage • 1935: Wagner Act extends workers' rights, but excludes agricultural, restaurant & government workers (where most Latinos & Blacks work). |
| 1940s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1941-45: WWII • 1945: Puerto Rican immigration to escape poverty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Labor movement at an all-time high, WWII veterans of color demanding dignity and rights | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1942: Japanese American internment • Bracero "Mexican guest worker" program introduced; wartime labor shortage • 1944: World Bank and International Monetary Fund created • 1947: Taft-Hartley Act reduces rights of labor • 1948 Sup. Court., in <i>Shelley v. Kramer</i>, outlaws restrictions on sale of private homes to blacks. • 1948: UN Treaty on Human Rights |
| 1950s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General economic expansion • 1950-53: Korean War • Cold War | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1954: Puerto Rican Independence movement • Chicano movement • 1955: Montgomery Bus Boycott • Civil Rights movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1954: Sup. Ct., in Brown v. Board of Education, bars "separate but equal" doctrine in education. • 1954: Operation Wetback--one million Mexicans and Mexican Americans deported. • Indian Relocation Act: moves Indian people from homelands to big cities, accelerates assimilation & detachment from native culture. |
| 1960s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General economic expansion • Vietnam war | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil Rights movement • 1960: Greensboro sit-ins • 1963: March on Washington; MLK "I Have a Dream" • 1964: MS Freedom Summer • 1968: MLK assassination. • Anti-Vietnam war movement • Women's movement • Lesbian/gay rights movement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Mexico is last state to extend right to vote to Native Americans • 1963: "War on Poverty" begins • 1964: Civil Rights Act passed, outlawing discrimination in private facilities, federally funded programs & employment. • 1965: Affirmative action policies begin • 1965: Immigration Reform Act eliminates racial and national quotas • 1965: "Great Society" acts: Medicare/Medicaid • 1966: Voting Rights Act passed. • 1967: COINTELPRO established, attacks Black Panther Party, American Indian Movement • 1968: Fair Housing Act |

Racial Legacies (continued)

| Years | Economic & Political Climate | Social Justice Movements | Public Policy |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 1970s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic decline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anti-Vietnam war movement • 1973: American Indian Movement--Wounded Knee | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pres. Nixon tries to ban bussing; new anti-civil rights and anti-affirmative action backlash |
| 1980s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General economic decline | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • growth of immigrant rights organizations • Harold Washington elected in Chicago as 1st Black mayor. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reagan and Bush Administrations, and Rehnquist-led Supreme Court begin attacking key sections of Voting Rights Act and affirmative action laws • 1981-82: World Bank and IMF begin Structural Adjustment Programs in poor countries. • “War on Drugs” and crack cocaine penalties send 100’s of thousands of blacks to prison. Massive prison build-up. • 1988: Civil Liberties Act for Japanese American redress. |
| 1990s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1991: Gulf War • economic prosperity for the wealthy, • unemployment on the rise • increased wealth stratification | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental justice movement launched • Gulf War protests • 1992: L.A. Rebellion after Rodney King acquittal • 1994: Zapatista uprising when NAFTA initiated • 1999: Seattle Anti-globalization protests | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1993: President Clinton signs NAFTA treaty • 1994 Crime Bill • 1995: World Trade Organization goes into effect • 1996 Welfare repeal/ forced work programs • 1996: Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act enacted • Anti-immigration, anti-affirmative action, “three strikes” mandatory sentencing and anti-bilingual education state ballot measures approved by California voters; similar measures proposed in other states |
| 2000s | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic downturn • 2003: U.S. War Against Iraq | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AFL-CIO supports legalization/amnesty of immigrants • Global anti-war movement responds to U.S. war in Iraq. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “War on Terrorism” / USA PATRIOT Act: <u>new</u> state-sanctioned racial profiling, detention and deportation of many immigrants of color. |