

Timeline of Events

- 1600s** Slavery begins in America with the arrival of Africans who have been forcibly removed from their homes, sent by ship to America, and sold as property to farmers and other landowners.
- 1775** The American Revolution begins.
- 1776** The Declaration of Independence is written, approved, and officially issued.
- 1780** The Industrial Revolution begins in the United States.
- 1788** The U.S. Constitution becomes law after being ratified by two-thirds of the original thirteen states.
- 1790** The Walnut Street Jail, the first penitentiary in the United States, is built in Philadelphia, emphasizing humane treatment and repentance through physical labor.
- 1792** The Bill of Rights, the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, is adopted.
- 1798** The Alien and Sedition Acts, intending to curb protest against American war with France, are signed into law.
- 1808** Congress prohibits importing of African slaves.
- 1816** American Colonization Society is formed to gradually emancipate slaves and resettle them in Africa.
- 1830s–1840s** Educational reformer Horace Mann travels throughout Massachusetts, inspecting schools and calling for a statewide public school system that would be free and available to all children. His

efforts pay off, leading to the establishment of public schools in Massachusetts and throughout the American Northeast.

1831 William Lloyd Garrison begins publishing the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, to encourage the end of slavery.

1834 Textile mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, go on strike.

1836 The publication of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “Nature” launches the American Transcendentalist movement, which centers around the principle that there is a spiritual connection between humankind and its environment.

1836 The gag rule, forbidding the discussion of slavery in Congress, is passed.

1837 The Massachusetts Board of Education is formed, becoming the first state supervisory organization of education.

1837 The first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women convenes in New York City.

1838 The “Trail of Tears”—the forced migration of the Cherokee from Georgia and southeastern Tennessee to Oklahoma—leaves more than 4,000 Native Americans dead.

1838 Angela Grimké, an abolitionist and women’s rights advocate, delivers a speech in Philadelphia. The lecture hall where she is giving the speech is attacked by protesters and later in the night it burned to the ground.

1840s Social reformer Dorothea Dix campaigns for improved conditions for the mentally ill in prisons, hospitals, and other institutions. Her efforts lead to the establishment of separate state hospitals and more humane treatment for the mentally ill.

1840s Free blacks in the North, with assistance from white abolitionists, establish the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape from the South to freedom in the northern United States and in Canada.

1842 The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision *Commonwealth v. Hunt* asserts that unions are legal organizations and have the right to organize workers and call strikes.

- 1845** “The Sanitary Condition of the Laboring Population of New York City,” issued by the city’s Board of Health, makes some of the first convincing arguments about the link between disease and poverty.
- 1845** *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* is published.
- 1846** Mexican War (1846–1848) begins. Newly elected Congressman Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) calls the war immoral and a threat to the nation’s values, and writer Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862) is arrested when he refuses to pay a state tax as a protest against the war.
- July 19–20, 1848** The first women’s rights convention in American history meets in Seneca Falls, New York, marking the beginning of a women’s rights movement that primarily sought the right to vote.
- 1849** “Resistance to Civil Government,” an essay by Henry David Thoreau, is published. Better known as “Civil Disobedience,” the essay argues for nonviolent resistance as a means to protest unfair laws or government actions.
- 1850** The Fugitive Slave Act passes, a law that makes it easier for slave owners to retrieve escaped slaves and severely punish anyone helping runaways. Under this law, even free blacks who had been living in the northern United States for years could be accused of being runaways and sent south for a life of bondage.
- 1852** Massachusetts becomes the first state to require all children to attend school.
- 1852** A 2,500-year-old sequoia from what later becomes Yosemite National Park is cut down for a carnival display, and prominent East Coast newspapers condemn the act.
- 1856** Bloody Kansas—a year-long war between pro- and antislavery factions—results in more than two hundred deaths over whether slavery will be permitted when Kansas becomes a state.
- 1857** Supreme Court rules in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that even free blacks were not U.S. citizens.
- October 1859** With the help of about twenty others, abolitionist John Brown raids the federal arsenal, a collection of weapons for the U.S. military, at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. He intends to pass the weapons along to slaves in the region and lead them into battle against their

- owners. The U.S. Marines capture or kill many in the raiding party; Brown is captured and, on December 2, 1859, is executed by hanging.
- 1860** The landmark Married Women's Property Act passes in New York, giving women the right to own, buy, and sell property; to sign contracts and file lawsuits; to share guardianship of their children in case of divorce; and to possess any money they earn outside the household.
- 1860** Abraham Lincoln, a northerner, is elected president of the United States.
- 1860** More than twenty-thousand shoemakers in twenty-five New England towns strike to prevent their wages from being cut and to gain union recognition.
- 1861** *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, by Harriet Jacobs, is published under the pseudonym Linda Brent. The book shows how religion was used in the South as a means for supporting slavery.
- 1861–65** The American Civil War is fought, pitting the North against the South. The war begins when southern states withdraw from the Union over such issues as states' rights and slavery, and it ends with victory for the northern, or Union, troops.
- 1862** Congress authorizes the Union Army to accept African American soldiers.
- January 1, 1863** Abraham Lincoln signs the Emancipation Proclamation, a document that frees all slaves living in states that are at war with the Union. Some 800,000 African Americans remain enslaved, but the proclamation marks an important first step in the abolition of slavery.
- 1865** Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery throughout the United States. In the ensuing years, the Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing African Americans citizenship and equal protection under the law, and the Fifteenth Amendment, securing the right to vote, are also passed.
- 1865** Henry George publishes *The Crime of Poverty*, detailing widespread poverty in America and its effects.
- April 14, 1865** Abraham Lincoln is shot by John Wilkes Booth, an actor who sympathizes with the South; the president dies the following day.

- 1868** An eight-hour work day for federal employees becomes law.
- 1869** Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony form the National Woman Suffrage Association.
- 1869** The Knights of Labor is founded in Philadelphia. Representing workers in various professions, the Knights lobbied for an eight-hour workday, abolition of child and convict labor, equal pay for equal work, and elimination of private banks. The organization reached its highest total membership, more than seventy thousand, in 1886.
- 1872** Yellowstone National Park is established.
- 1872** Susan B. Anthony and more than a dozen other women attempt to vote in the presidential election in Rochester, New York. When stopped at the polls, Anthony reads aloud the Fifteenth Amendment, which has no wording that indicates the right to vote is restricted to men.
- 1874** The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) becomes a national organization. With Francis Willard as its longtime national president, the WCTU effectively campaigns for a national ban on alcohol.
- 1877** Reconstruction, the period of transition for the South following the American Civil War, ends, and with it so do the limited rights and protections offered to southern blacks during this period.
- 1877** Declaring, "I will fight no more for ever," Chief Joseph surrenders after having led around seven hundred of his band of Nez Perce nearly two thousand miles from Oregon toward freedom in Canada, pursued by more than two thousand American troops.
- 1877** More than one hundred thousand workers strike for better wages and working hours. Strikebreakers kill over one hundred, and over one thousand strikers are jailed.
- 1879** Women lawyers are permitted to argue cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.
- 1881** The Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, later renamed the American Federation of Labor (AFL), forms, representing mostly skilled workers. The AFL, which eventually joins up with the Committee for Industrial