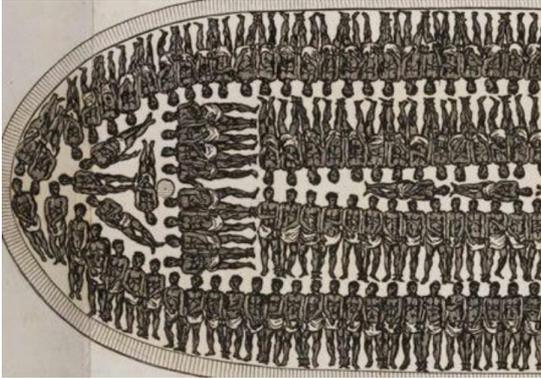


# African Americans, from Slavery to the Present Day

There are and have been famous African Americans in many fields; entertainment, music, politics, sport. How many famous African Americans can you think of?

## The slave trade



The first Africans arrived in America in 1619. They were not slaves but servants contracted for a number of years to the English settlers and they worked in return for their board. The slave trade developed in the 18th century. Africans were brought against their will and transported to the American colonies under terrible conditions. There they were sold as slaves to work on the plantations mainly in the southern states. A white

slave owner was free to do whatever he wanted with them as they were considered to be his property. He could sell the slaves, divide up their families, punish or kill them.

## From the Civil War to the Great Migration

The slave trade was made illegal in the North in 1808 and eventually during the **Civil War** (1861 – 1865) the president, Abraham Lincoln, signed the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) making all slaves free. However, this was not the end of the problems for African Americans. They were discriminated against and suffered oppression for another hundred years. In the South, there were laws which said that they were not allowed to own land, to vote or to mix with whites. This is called segregation and the laws were called Jim Crow laws. Many African Americans migrated to the North in the early 20th century. This was called the Great Migration. But even in the North, blacks were generally worse off than whites. They had lower incomes, higher unemployment and poorer educational opportunities.

### THE CIVIL WAR

From 1861-1865 the northern and southern states were at war with each other. One reason was the issue of slavery. President Abraham Lincoln wanted to end slavery and this angered many Southerners who needed slaves to help pick their cotton. For four years the two sides fought. The southern states wanted to separate from the North (leave the Union) to form their own federation. Lincoln fought hard to keep all the states together. The North won, the Union remained and slavery was abolished.

## The Civil Rights Movement

The **Civil Rights Movement** (1955 – 1968) grew from the desire to abolish racial discrimination against African Americans. There were **sit-ins**<sup>1</sup>, demonstrations and boycotts arranged in areas which were reserved for whites in buses, trains and restaurants.

One of the leaders for the Civil Rights Movement was **Martin Luther King jr.** He fought against discrimination using peaceful and non-violent means. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 and in 1968, less than four years later, he was assassinated.

Other black leaders like **Malcolm X**, were more militant.

In August 1963, over 200,000 people took part in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. There Martin Luther King jr. gave his famous speech, **“I Have a Dream”**. This and other protests led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The new law banned discrimination in public places. Blacks and whites could now go to the same schools and use the same public facilities, such as parks, buses, restaurants, etc.

## African-Americans today

At the time of the American Civil War, every fifth American was an African. Today, there are 38.1 million (2009) African Americans, or 12.6% of the population. More than half of the African Americans have raised their standard of living, have improved their economical status and have better education and work opportunities. However, many of the blacks live in large cities with high rates of social problems such as unemployment, illiteracy, drug addiction, crime and violence.

Many African Americans are leading figures in politics and business and, of course, in the fields of entertainment and sport. They have come a long way from slavery to the inauguration in 2009 of **Barack Obama**, the first black president of the United States.



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<sup>1</sup> **Sit in**: a form of protest where demonstrators seat themselves, often in public places, and do not move. Used often by African Americans to protest racial segregation. They would sit in the seats reserved for whites, for example in restaurants and on buses.

## Comprehension activities

### 1. Answer the questions

1. Who did the first Africans work for and what was their job called?

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2. Why did the Americans need slaves?

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3. Did the slaves have any rights?

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### 2. Decide if the sentences are TRUE (T) or FALSE (F)

- |  |                            |                            |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Slavery was one reason for the the American Civil War.          | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| 2. The Emancipation Proclamation ended the Civil War.              | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| 3. In 1863, by order of the president, all slaves were freed.      | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| 4. Many African Americans moved from the North to the South.       | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| 5. In the South, there was discrimination and segregation.         | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |
| 6. In the North the blacks were usually worse off than the whites. | <input type="checkbox"/> T | <input type="checkbox"/> F |

### 3. Match the beginning (1-6) to the endings (A-F) to make true sentences. Write the sentences.

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| 1. The Civil Rights Movement | A. took place in August 1963                                 |
| 2. Martin Luther King        | B. banned discrimination in public places                    |
| 3. Malcolm X                 | C. was a famous speech                                       |
| 4. The March on Washington   | D. fought discrimination with non-violence                   |
| 5. "I Have a Dream"          | E. was a militant black leader                               |
| 6. The Civil Rights Act      | F. wanted to stop racial discrimination of African Americans |

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

4. Fill in the blanks with a word from the list. Use each word once only.

**abolished - addiction - discrimination - non-violent  
opportunities - oppression - slave - slaves  
unemployment - violence - education**

The African <sup>1</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ trade started in the early 18th century. <sup>2</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ worked on the plantations in the South. Slavery was <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ by President Abraham Lincoln in 1863. However, African Americans still suffered segregation and <sup>4</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ in the South.

Today many African Americans have problems with <sup>5</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ and drug <sup>6</sup>\_\_\_\_\_, but others have a better <sup>7</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ and good work <sup>8</sup>\_\_\_\_\_.

Martin Luther King fought racial <sup>9</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ with <sup>10</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ methods, but other leaders used <sup>11</sup>\_\_\_\_\_.

## Follow-up activities

### 1. Find Out

Search the Internet for information. Choose 2 of the following topics and find out who or what it is, in which time period it was important and one or two facts about it.

1. Harriet Beecher Stowe
2. Sojourner Truth
3. Rosa Parks
4. Klu Klux Klan
5. Martin Luther King
6. Malcolm X
7. Freedom Rides

### 2. Presentation

Choose a famous African American from the present day and make a short oral presentation of the person. You should use a variety of media in your presentation, e.g. text, pictures, sound, video, etc. Remember to include your sources of information.