



Online Courses for High School Students
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African American History

Over the course of U.S. history, how have African Americans helped shaped American culture? This African American History course answers that question by tracing the accomplishments and obstacles of African Americans beginning with the slave trade on up to the modern Civil Rights movement. What was it like during slavery, or after emancipation, or during the years of discrimination under Jim Crow? Who were some of the main figures who have shaped African American history? In this course, you'll learn about the political, economic, social, religious, and cultural factors that have influenced African American life, come face to face with individuals who changed the course of history, and explore how the African American story still influences current events today.

Course Highlights

- Learn about the African societies and family histories that were torn apart by the slave trade.
- Trace the effects of the slave trade in the forming of the United States.
- See other ways African Americans have laid their lives down for their country, even when that country was not respecting them.
- Recognize the key players in the Civil Rights Movement.
- Set the Obama presidency as a milestone in historical context; see what current strides and struggles African Americans are facing.
- Analyze what the Black Lives Matter movement and other movements say about race relations in contemporary society.

Prerequisite: None

Course Length: One Semester

Required Text: There are no required textbook for this course.

Materials List: There are no required materials for this course.

Course Outline

Unit 1: Africa

Every great legendary figure finds power in the origin story, the story of where a person or group came from. Even a civilization finds power in understanding its roots, whether that story comes with pain or triumph or both. Studying African American History must, necessarily, begin in Africa with a study of the richness of the continent that has been called the cradle of civilization. You'll learn not only about the geographical diversity of the world's second largest continent but also the rich historical and cultural influence that Africa had over the world. From triumph to tragedy, this unit will move from the great kingdoms of Egypt, Ghana and Mali to the development of the transatlantic slave trade, including the harrowing story of Olaudah Equiano and his experience of the Middle Passage. As with any origin story, you may be surprised by how much you don't know about where you come from and how you became who you are.

Unit 2: Slavery in America from Early Colonies to Independence

The presence of slaves in the British colonies, which later became the United States of America, began with the first settlement and continued through the Civil War. But the character of slavery continued to change and develop as the colonies became stronger and worked toward independence. The events that shaped America and its beginnings also changed slavery, demonstrating the vast differences between the North, the Chesapeake and Upper South, and the Deep South. As the colonies struggled for independence from the British, slaves and their anti-slavery allies agitated for freedom, using the same principles that motivated the Patriots to strike against their British oppressors. Though many were successful in obtaining their freedom from slavery, the efforts toward independence—both as a nation and for slaves—became stronger in the Deep South and nearly obsolete in the North. That divide reflects a deeper economic, social, and philosophical divide that would later become explosive during the Civil War.

Unit 3: The Expansion of Slavery

Despite all of the strides African Americans made toward freedom during the Revolutionary War in the North, the slave trade in the South simply changed its appearance and continued to expand between 1800 and 1860. The emergence of the Cotton Kingdom, a huge economic boom in the South that drove the establishment and expansion of the domestic slave trade, was contrasted with the simultaneous expansion of free black communities and the abolitionist movement. As the North grappled with what free blacks should be allowed to do, abolitionists worked through violent and non-violent means to secure not only freedom but equal rights for all African Americans.

Unit 4: African Americans and the Civil War

By 1861, the Union that had held together the United States of America had fractured along the lines of slavery and the economy. The road to the Civil War, fought by the North to preserve that Union and by the South for the rights to be an independent nation free to pursue the expansion of slavery as they saw fit, was long and marched right through weighty issues like Westward Expansion and Manifest Destiny, the Supreme Court, and the growing tension between Northern abolitionists and Southern slave owners. Understanding how the Civil War came to be, and the role African Americans played in that important chapter in our nation's history, will help you to understand the century of struggle for civil rights that blacks fought after they were free, and continue to fight today.

Unit 5: Freedom and Reconstruction

The Civil War ended in early 1865, but the real work had just begun. Suddenly, four million African Americans were now free, with generations upon generations of slavery as their history and an uncertain future before them. The United States had quite a challenge ahead of it—how to completely change a society that, for generations, had only known a deeply divided North and South and slavery. Deep racial divides and an uncertain economic future led the South to pass restrictive black codes and to grapple with violence, while Northern industrial workers worried about job competition. Through it all, lawmakers in Washington, D.C., worked to knit the divided nation back together. Would they be successful?

Unit 6: The Jim Crow Era

The glorious hope at the end of the Civil War, and the potential of the Reconstruction Era, very quickly made way for the demoralizing reality of the Jim Crow Era for African Americans. Particularly in the South, African Americans faced persecution, poverty, injustice, violence, and an increasing attempt to strip them of their Constitutional right to vote. Amid all of this chaos were the success stories—prosperous black landowners and courageous settlers who moved West to establish thriving towns and cities. As the twentieth century loomed closer, many black Americans felt like their great hope for equal rights had been snatched away by the failure of Reconstruction and the resentment of whites.

Unit 7: African America in the Earliest Twentieth Century

By the turn of the twentieth century, African Americans found themselves once more under the thumb of a white population that was violent and angry. Though it began with Southern backlash against the policies of Reconstruction, the trend toward white supremacy and anger toward blacks began to spread across the entire United States. At the same time, African Americans were moving forward, focusing on ways to improve their lives. They were actively examining how to address Jim Crow laws and discrimination while also funneling energy and effort into economic and cultural progress. The result, in the early twentieth century, was a time of tension and triumph.

Unit 8: The Great Depression and the World War II

The 1920s was an era of growth and progress, excess and extravagance, economic stability and the beginning of the consumer credit craze. The Jazz Age, named for the music African Americans created in neighborhoods like Harlem, was an era of triumph and tragedy for African Americans, much like the times before it. As the 1920s ended, and the economic crash sent America reeling, African Americans suffered more than nearly anyone else as they faced devastation far harsher than most of their white counterparts. Despite the struggle, the 1930s also saw huge steps forward as the NAACP fought for racial justice and a new president brought a new approach to relief and racial progress. Though it was a painfully slow road toward progress, the 1930s and 1940s laid the solid foundation for the Civil Rights movement and real change for African Americans.

Unit 9: Protest and Struggle in the Civil Rights Era

After nearly one hundred years of struggling for equal rights, with progress and backlash becoming the cycle that African Americans had both learned to live with and fear in equal measure, the time had finally come. The civil rights movement, after the efforts of the NAACP in the courts during the 1930s and small steps toward desegregation during World War 2, had reached a point where real change could happen. But how would it happen—and what would be the result? If you've ever heard of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the lunch counter sit-ins, this is that chapter in the incredible history of African Americans.

Unit 10: To the Present

From the story of their passage to the Americas to the election of the first African-American President of the United States, the history of black Americans has one common theme: progress and backlash. As we bring the story of African Americans to the present day, we will focus on the political and economic progress that has been made and what challenging issues still remain. From representation in Congress, to increased presence in professional fields and universities, to the continuing gap in wealth and income between white and black workers, the present day is filled with points of great pride and points of great tragedy. What will the future hold?