



Civil Protest

CALIFORNIA
history-social
science CHSSP
PROJECT

Recent protests in communities across the country reflect frustration, anger, and disbelief over the deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, two African Americans who have been killed by white police officers, and the officers' cases that have ended without indictment. The protests, which have taken many forms, boil down to the issue of race and racism, and the conditions that allow for an unarmed black man to seemingly pose enough of a threat to a white police officer that the latter can kill with impunity.

Civil disorder - as a means to enact change - has a long history in the United States, and arguably played a key role in forming the nation's identity. Colonial protests against British rule such as the Boston Tea Party or the tarring and feathering of Loyalists could be termed riots, or acts of public violence leading to casualties and/or property damage. Protests in Ferguson, New York, and around the country reflect a pattern of protest and rioting that emerged in the last century when a clash between a minority citizen and a white authority figure triggers unrest and inspires action from those who identify with and condemn the harsh treatment of their fellow citizen.

During the twentieth century a common thread linked many of the nation's most violent racially-motivated riots. Major social upheavals – primarily war and economic depression – helped trigger events in which whites perpetrated violence against blacks. New conditions in the World War I era – black migration to northern cities and black military experience abroad – had changed social parameters and set the tone for inter-racial strife. In the summer of 1919 alone there were 26 race riots across the country, but these were bookended by deadly riots in East St. Louis in 1917 – when more than 50 people died – and in Tulsa in 1921 – a particularly gruesome event that caused the deaths of close to 100 blacks and 50 whites. During World War II, thousands of white servicemen and some Angelenos attacked Mexican-American youth living in Los Angeles. For ten days these groups battled it out in what was known as the Zoot Suit Riots (because whites often stripped the Mexican-Americans of their signature suits deemed unacceptably baggy during wartime cloth rations). Wartime anxieties brought to a head the fears, distrust, and misunderstanding that too often brewed among America's ethnic and racial groups, groups that have long been divided at school, at work, in the neighborhood, and in leisure-time pursuits. But war also

brought colored men into positions of authority as servicemen that altered the social hierarchy; some whites sought to suppress such advancement.

Widespread discrimination continued to drive civil protest after World War II. Minority servicemen returned home from a war against racist Nazis only to be met by continued prejudice. This experience prompted the Civil Rights Movement that brought important legal victories – the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts – but also resistance from some whites. The 1963 KKK bombing of an African-American Baptist church in Birmingham, the passage of Prop 14 in California to repeal a fair housing act, as well as many other such reactions, revealed a further entrenchment of prejudice that spurred some blacks to reject the non-violent approach of Martin Luther King, Jr. The Watts Riots of 1965, sparked by the arrest of a black driver by a white police officer, revealed a deep and complex set of issues in the black L.A. neighborhood, problems that echoed in urban areas across the country. Residents of Watts reacted against economic and social discrimination; a state commission convened in the wake of the uprising determined that these residents suffered from inadequate health and social services, employment, education, housing, and transportation. Strikingly, these shortcomings all existed during the state's phenomenal post-war economic expansion. The state called for improvements along these lines, but the L.A. Riots of 1992, during the state's post-Cold War recession, exposed just how little progress had been made. In fact, a later report revealed that opportunities in education and housing for minorities had actually deteriorated in the region since 1965. Throughout the United States, deindustrialization and the growth of middle-class suburbs further isolated urban minorities from social and economic opportunities; a war on drugs increased incarceration rates and conflict between black communities and police; and the urban rebellions of the late 1960s, in turn, led to increased middle-class and business flight out of city centers.

Racial discrimination is complex; it stems not only from socio-economic factors and a history of oppression, but from biases portrayed in popular culture and media. In 1968 the Kerner Commission's federal investigation and report argued that the nation was "moving toward two societies, one black, and one white – separate and unequal." Cases like Brown's and Garner's, and disproportionate minority incarceration rates, reveal that in the twenty-first century President Barack Obama presides over a country that has made strides in addressing its long and brutal history of racism, but has not yet successfully addressed the structural inequalities faced by minorities. Today's protests are not only in response to the flash points in Ferguson and New York, but also to the underlying issues that include record levels and growing concentration of poverty, a growing wealth gap between rich and poor, the recent recession hitting hardest against non-white communities, and disturbing levels of de facto segregation of schools and neighborhoods: indicators of persistent discrimination.

-Shelley Brooks, Ph.D., CHSSP Statewide Office

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**CURRENT
CONTEXT**

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The number of racially-motivated civil disorders are too numerous to include in a short timeline. Listed below is a small number, as well as relevant legislation and developments.

1908: Race riot in Lincoln's hometown of Springfield; displaces 40 some black families, destroys businesses.

1909: NAACP forms to restore legal rights of African-Americans.

1910: City of Baltimore approves the first ordinance to ensure neighborhood segregation. Numerous southern cities follow suit. Supreme Court declares the ordinances unconstitutional in 1917. De facto segregation continues.

July 1917: Brutal race riot in East St. Louis over housing and jobs displaces thousands of African-Americans.

July 1917: 10,000 march in New York City in support of civil rights. Organized by NAACP in protest of lynchings, race riots, and denial of rights.

April - October 1919: 26 race riots occur around the country during the "Red Summer."

1910s-1920s: Great Migration of African-Americans out of the South. By 1930 there are 1,035,000 more blacks in the North, and 1,143,000 fewer blacks in the South than in 1910.

1921: A bloody Tulsa, OK riot claims many lives and devastates the African-American section of Tulsa.

1922: After thousands of African-American deaths by lynching, a federal anti-lynching bill fails to pass due to Senate filibuster.

1941: Executive Order 8802 desegregates war production plants and creates the Fair Employment Practices Committee

WWII and beyond: Mobilization for war draws many African-Americans from the South to the North and West for defense jobs. The Second Great Migration is considered to last until 1970, and involves the relocation of approximately 5 million African-Americans.

1943: Several race riots throughout country, including Zoot Suit as well as Detroit (over jobs), where more than thirty people died.

1948: Executive Order 9981 desegregates the military.

1952: The first year with no reported lynching. The Tuskegee Institute had reported lynchings each year for the last 71 years.

1954: Brown v. Board of Education declares segregation of public schools unconstitutional.

1955: Montgomery Bus Boycott helps jumpstart the Civil Rights Movement.

1964: Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in all public places and in employment.

1964: In a 2-1 vote, Californians pass Prop 14 to repeal Rumford Fair Housing Act; Supreme Court declares Prop 14 unconstitutional in 1967.

1965: Voting Rights Act passes in response to disenfranchisement of African-Americans by such measures as literacy tests and poll taxes.

August 1965: Watts Riot in Los Angeles.

1966: Black Panther Party forms in Oakland to protect and defend African-Americans.

1967: Bloody riot in Detroit, sparked by a night club bust, kills more than 40, and injures over 1,000.

1968: Civil Rights Act prohibits discrimination in the sale or rental of housing.

1992: Officers acquitted in trial over the beating of Rodney King; riots erupt in Los Angeles. More than 50 die, over 2,00 injuries.

2012: 17-year-old Trayvon Martin is fatally shot by a neighborhood watch volunteer in Sanford, Florida.

2014: Deaths of Michael Brown and Eric Garner, both killed by police. Officers not indicted.

KQED's civil protest resources and timeline: <http://blogs.kqed.org/lowdown/category/protest-movements/>



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Additional Resources*

Teaching Tools:

- CHSSP blog: http://chssp.ucdavis.edu/copy_of_blog/from-watts-to-ferguson-persistent-structural-inequality
- KQED: <http://blogs.kqed.org/lowdown/category/protest-movements/>
- UC Berkeley History-Social Science Project: <http://ucbhssp.berkeley.edu/news/notes-director-0> & <http://ucbhssp.berkeley.edu/FSM>
- Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute: <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1979/2/79.02.04.x.html>
- Teaching Tolerance: <http://www.tolerance.org/publication/teaching-new-jim-crow>
- Georgetown University: <https://college.georgetown.edu/collegenews/the-ferguson-syllabus.html>

Background Materials:

- Library of Congress: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aap/aaphome.html>
- PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/eleanor-riots/>
- Encyclopedia of Chicago: <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/1032.html>
- Oklahoma Historical Society: <http://digital.library.okstate.edu/ENCYCLOPEDIA/ENTRIES/T/TU013.html>
- LIFE: <http://life.time.com/history/detroit-race-riots-1943-photos-from-a-city-in-turmoil-during-wwii>
- HISTORY: <http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration>
- NPR: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129827444>

Data and Reports:

- Pew Research: <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2011/07/26/wealth-gaps-rise-to-record-highs-between-whites-blacks-hispanics/>
- Brandeis University: <http://iasp.brandeis.edu/pdfs/Author/shapiro-thomas-m/racialwealthgapbrief.pdf>
- Brookings: <http://www.brookings.edu/research/interactives/2014/concentrated-poverty#/M10420>

*The resources listed above are provided for further research and do not imply an endorsement by the California History-Social Science Project or the University of California.