

## Influential Americans & Racism

- “In vain may we expect peace with the Indians on our frontiers so long as a lawless set of unprincipled wretches can violate the rights of hospitality, or infringe the most solemn treaties, without receiving the punishment they so justly merit.”

**George Washington, president**

*Third Annual Message to Congress; John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1939), XXX, 392.*

- “Comparing them (blacks) by their faculties or memory, reason, and imagination, it appears to me, that in memory they are equal to the whites; in reason much inferior, as I think one could scarcely be found capable of tracing and comprehending the investigations of Euclid; and that in imagination they are dull, tasteless, and anomalous...among the blacks is misery enough, God knows, but no poetry.”

**Thomas Jefferson, president**

from Jefferson’s article “Manners,” *Notes on the State of Virginia, 1787*, cited in *Race and the Enlightenment*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, 1997, p. 99.

- “What the native savages become when surrounded by a dense population and by mixing with the whites may be seen in the miserable remnants of a few Eastern tribes...”

**Andrew Jackson, president**

*Second State of the Nation Address, 1830.*

- “ I will say, then, that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races; that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people.”

**Abraham Lincoln, president**

speech given during U.S. Senate candidacy, 1858. *A Peoples History of the United States*, Howard Zinn, 1995, p. 184.

- “The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side; this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages.”

**Theodore Roosevelt, president**

from Roosevelt’s book, *The Winning of the West*, 1889. Quoted in *The Ethnic Myth*, Stephen Steinberg, 1981, p. 16.

- "...our only safety depends upon the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one more wrong and wipe these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth."

**L. Frank Baum, author, *Wizard of Oz***

The Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer, 1891.

- "The truth is I didn't want the Philippines, and when they came to us as a gift from the gods, I did not know what to do with them... we could not leave them to themselves – they were unfit for government – and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain's was: and ... there was nothing left for us to do but take them all and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them..."

**William McKinley, president**

*A Peoples History of the United States*, Howard Zinn, 1995, p. 305.

- "It is like writing history with lightning, and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true."

**Woodrow Wilson, president**

regarding the 1915 racist movie "Birth of A Nation," which portrayed the Ku Klux Klan as having rescued the South. *Hooded Americanism; The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, David M. Chalmers, 1987, p. 26-27.

- "I realize that it is an unpopular and unhumanitarian position, for which I have been excoriated by 'liberal' colleagues, but I think Plessy v. Ferguson was right and should be reaffirmed."

**William Rehnquist, Supreme Court Justice**

memo to Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson, when Rehnquist was his clerk, 1952 (cited in *Simple Justice*, Richard Kluger, 1976, p. 606.)

- "Every day, the jungle draws a little closer... Our city streets are jungle paths after dark, with more crimes of violence."

**Ronald Reagan, president**

1966 radio commercial. Cited in *On Reagan*, Ronnie Dugger, 1983, p. 199-200