Handout 1

# African American-Time Line

Historic Time Line

(1619) The First African People Came to American

Racism and oppression towards African Americans began in this country the very moment they stepped foot on American soil. The first African people who came to America arrived at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 when a Dutch trader for food exchanged them. Although their status is not clear, it is probable that they were sold as indentured servants who served as the primary source of labor to the developing colonies of America. A common practice in England and colonial America, indentured servants were laborers who were sold under contract for a fixed period of 3-7 years in exchange for food, clothing, and shelter. Many immigrants entered this country as indentured servants. However, due to the grueling conditions, many did not survive. Over time the conditions of working in the fields, in particular the tobacco crops, became widely known. This led to increased difficulty in recruiting indentured servants. This difficulty contributed to the rise of the importation and sale of Black slaves to do this hard labor.

(1640) First Legal Case Making Race a Factor for Indentured Servants

In the mid-17th century, colonial laws began to differentiate between indentured servants and slaves based on race. Slaves became the property of their masters for life. One such law reflects the changing times. In 1640, Re: Negro John Punch was one of the first legal cases that made race a distinguishing factor among indentured servants.

(1662) Law Regarding the Birthright of Children Born to Negro Women

Among the many laws that were passed in the 17th century, one focused on the birthright of children born to Negro women. In 1662, Virginia passed a law that based the status of slaves on heredity by ruling that the offspring of a slave woman would become the property of her master, resulting in the child facing a lifetime in slavery (Hening, 1810)

(1790) Naturalization Act

Toward the end of the 18th century, the 1790 Naturalization Act reserved the right to American citizenship for Whites only. African Americans were not guaranteed citizenship until 1868. Without citizenship, those who were not White were not allowed to vote, own property, bring suit against another party, or testify in court. All of the privileges that were exclusively afforded Whites were eliminated for African Americans and other people of color.

(1865) U.S. Constitution Abolishes Slavery

The 13th Amendment to the United States Constitution was adopted on December 6, 1865, officially abolishing slavery.

(1876-1965) Jim Crow Laws

Beginning in the late 19th century, southern states enacted the Jim Crow laws that spread throughout the country between 1876 and 1965. These laws authorized the subordination of Black Americans to Whites through segregation of the two races in all public places and institutional settings. Although the Supreme Court decision Plessy vs. Furgeson in 1896 stipulated "separate but equal" accommodations for Black Americans, they continued to be denied the freedom of assembly and movement and full participation as citizens in many states. Integration would not occur until the mid-1960s.

(1924) Virginia Racial Purity Act

Efforts to define those who were Black began as early as the 17th century. In 1924, the Virginia Racial Purity Act more clearly defined Black persons as having any trace of African ancestry. The one-drop rule of this Act, which stipulated that anyone with one drop of African blood was considered to be of African ancestry, was adopted by several states. However, most people could not prove their ancestry. Therefore, the determination of ancestry was solely based on observation of skin color. If you appeared to be Black, you were Black; that is if you looked Black, you were Black. Due to the subjectivity of this rule, a person could literally cross state lines and be perceived as another race.

(1954) Brown v. Board of Education Topeka

It was not until the mid-20th century that shifts in the social and political climate began to occur. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court made a landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. The Court ruled that state laws that established separate public schools for White and Black children denied Black children equal educational opportunities. There was widespread resistance to integration in public schools during this time.

(1964 & 1965) 1964 Civil Rights Act & 1965

The civil rights movement organized peaceful protests and marches that while focused on public school integration, soon expanded to public transportation, voting rights, and other social liberties. The efforts of the civil rights movement culminated in the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

(1967) Interracial Marriage Laws Overturned

Laws prohibiting interracial marriage remained in over half of the 50 states. It was not until 1967 that such laws were overturned. In 1959, a Virginia couple was tried and convicted of miscegenation. The couple filed a lawsuit challenging the law that reached the Supreme Court. In Loving v. Virginia, in 1967, the Court unanimously ruled that a person’s individual right to marry cannot be restricted by race. The Loving decision reversed the racist policies that were based on Virginia's 1924 Racial Purity Act.