

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY TIMELINE

This timeline is intended to provide some of the relevant historical context surrounding the creation of the Black dolls in the Museum's exhibition, *Portraits of Childhood: Black Dolls from the Collection of Deborah Neff*. It is not meant to be comprehensive of African American History as a whole.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY TIMELINE

3100 BCE-1400 CE

Long before the slave trade, the continent of Africa consisted of rich and powerful civilizations that were major players on the world stage. For 3,000 years, Ancient Egypt's influence contributed to Western civilization as we now know it, as it contained the building blocks for the creation of empires like Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. The kingdoms of Askum (modern day Ethiopia) and Mali, and the Empire of Ghana developed as major trading powers across Asia, Europe, and Africa in the first millennium. The Oyo Empire, the biggest of the Yoruba states, had thriving urban cultural centers and rural farm communities long before and after European colonization began.

1400s

The first instances of Africans being transported against their will to Europe and the Americas, establishing the Atlantic Slave Trade, was recorded in 1441 after enslaved Africans were transported to Portugal. In 1492, Christopher Columbus arrived in Hispaniola with Africans on board, though their status is unknown. Holding on to hope and the memory of their loved ones became important for those who were taken. In a symbolic act to remember their children, some African women began fashioning Abayomi Dolls, a practice of Yoruba cultural tradition, using remnants of their own clothes.

1526

The Spanish brought enslaved Africans to what would become South Carolina and Florida while attempting to establish colonies in the area. This included St. Augustine, the United States' oldest city.

1619

About 20 enslaved Africans were brought ashore to Jamestown, Virginia, England's first permanent settlement in the New World. Jamestown was founded in 1607.

1700s

1705

The Virginia Slave Codes [of 1705] were enacted. This legally codified chattel slavery in the English colonies, thus transformed the previous practice of indentured servitude. Though similar laws and cultural customs enslaving African people had already started to develop in the colonies, these codes stripped enslaved people of their remaining rights and humanity and outlined the definition of what it meant to be an enslaved person. Rather than an indentured servant who would gain their freedom after a specified number of years, Africans and African Americans were now enslaved for life.

1775-1783

The Revolutionary War resulted in the formation of the United States. The foundation of freedom and liberty, on which the country was built, was seen as hypocritical by some due to the prevalence of slavery in the newly formed nation. African Americans even served in the war but were not granted the same freedoms.

1780s

Some northern states began to phase out slavery. In 1780, Pennsylvania enacted gradual abolition, freeing anyone born after the enactment once they reached the age of 28. New Hampshire followed in 1783. Connecticut and Rhode Island developed similar plans in 1784. Massachusetts became the first of the original 13 states to abolish slavery outright in 1783.

1794

Eli Whitney invented and patented the cotton gin, a new machine that sped up cotton processing after harvest. The southern economy, which relied primarily on cotton crops after the decline of tobacco and indigo, boomed in productivity, and slavery became even further tied to the economy of southern states.

1800s

1804

New Jersey agreed to gradually abolish slavery, but people remained enslaved in the state until 1860, making it the last of the northern states to eradicate slavery from its borders.

1817

In 1799, New York agreed to gradually abolish slavery for those born after the adoption of the bill. Later, in 1817, the state legislature passed a law to eliminate slavery by July 4, 1827.

1820

The enactment of the Missouri Compromise added Missouri to the Union as a "slave" state, and Maine as a "free" state. It also included the outlawing of slavery in the rest of the territories acquired through the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. The compromise was an attempt to quell growing animosity between anti-slavery northern states and the pro-slavery South. This set a precedent for the next several decades as more states joined the Union as either "free" or "slave" states to balance complex political powers.

1830s-1860

The abolitionist movement started to gain major momentum as states began gradually ending slavery. African Americans, like Frederick Douglass, and white allies championed the abolition of slavery at the federal level. They established newspapers, organized rallies, and committed to direct action like the Underground Railroad, a network of people and organizations that helped people escape slavery. Estimates indicate that individuals like Harriet Tubman (who escaped slavery in 1849) and the countless others who contributed to the Underground Railroad helped 25,000-100,000 men, women, and children escape from their enslavers.

1831

Nat Turner organized a revolt with fellow enslaved Virginians that resulted in the deaths of approximately 60 white people, more than any other revolt in United States history. White slaveowners responded to the revolt with increased violence and restrictions toward both free and enslaved African Americans in the South.

1843

Isabella, an emancipated slave from New York, changed her name to Sojourner Truth, and committed her life to abolition, women's rights, and religion.

1850

Tensions continued to grow after the Missouri Compromise. In 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act resulted in the first significant bloodshed over the issue of slavery in new United States territories. The United States government allowed the new states to vote on the issue of slavery for themselves, officially repealing the Missouri Compromise. Both the abolition and pro-slavery camps rushed to send settlers to infiltrate the states in the hopes of swaying the elections. This led to violence and political turmoil, primarily in Kansas.



c. 1850-1870
Maker Unknown, United States
Leather, wood, cotton stuffing,
metal rod (doll); hand-stitched
cotton, coral necklace (clothing)
11.75" H x 6.5" W x 4.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.1

1857

The Dred Scott v. Sanford case was decided by the Supreme Court after a ten-year-long battle in lower courts. A Black man named Dred Scott attempted to sue his owner for his freedom after he had been moved from Missouri to the free state of Illinois, and then the free territory of Wisconsin, before being moved back to Missouri. Despite the national attention the case gained, the Supreme Court denied Scott and his family their freedom, enraging abolitionists, and further fanning the flames of discontent on all sides of the conflict.

1859

John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry was one of the last major national conflicts before the outbreak of the Civil War. Brown, a white abolitionist, led 22 men including his three sons and five Black men on a raid to occupy a federal arsenal. The raid resulted in the death of 16 people, 10 of whom were Brown's men. After being captured, convicted, and hanged for the raid, Brown was celebrated as a hero in the North, and a villain in the South, causing greater rifts between the two sides.

c. 1860-1870
Maker Unknown, Massachusetts,
United States
Silk, cotton, buttons, mohair,
leather (doll); wool, glass and
metal buttons, velvet, cotton,
silk, leather (clothing)
16.0" H x 7.0" W x 2.5" D

Object ID: L2024.1.22



1860-1865

Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in 1860. Southern states began to secede and formed the Confederate States of America to preserve their power and ability to keep slavery as the driving force of their economy. The Civil War was fought for five years and ultimately ended with the surrender of the Confederacy in 1865. Lincoln was assassinated just days after this.

1862

Following a preliminary version on September 22, 1862, Abraham Lincoln declared all slaves in the Confederacy "freed" with the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. Despite this, the act shifted public discourse about the war's purpose from preserving the Union towards ending slavery. England and France, who had been considering support for the Confederacy prior to Lincoln's proclamation, opted out due to their anti-slavery stance.

1865

At the end of 1865, the Ku Klux Klan was formed with the goal of reestablishing and maintaining white control of the South. Members of the Klan objected to Reconstruction era policies, especially those that granted rights and freedoms to Black people. That same year, Paul Jennings wrote *A Colored Man's Reminiscences of James Madison*, a memoir reflecting on his time as an enslaved person owned by former president James Madison.

1865-1870

After the Confederacy lost the war and surrendered on April 9th, 1865, Reconstruction began. The 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were passed. They freed all people still held in slavery, granted citizenship to everyone born in the United States, and ensured the right to vote for all men. Across the former Confederacy, states began to enact "Black Codes" to heavily restrict the rights of newly emancipated African Americans. These were the precursors to Jim Crow laws of the 19th and 20th centuries.

1865

On June 19th, 1865, the final groups of enslaved people in Texas were given news of their freedom via the Emancipation Proclamation. This occurred several months after the surrender of the Confederacy, and three years after Lincoln's initial announcement of the proclamation. The next year, in 1866, the formerly enslaved people of Texas began to celebrate "Juneteenth" in commemoration of their freedom. Over time, the celebration grew, and it became a national holiday 155 years later, in 2021.

1877

The Compromise of 1877 between presidential candidates Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel J. Tilden ended Reconstruction, and Hayes was elected.



c. 1895
Maker Unknown, United States
Glazed cotton, yarn (doll);
machine-stitched cotton
(clothing)
18.5" H x 9.5" W x 5.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.50

1887

Eatonville, Florida, was established by African American freedmen, becoming the first black-incorporated municipality in the United States. The founding of this town represented an enormous achievement for once-enslaved Black men and women throughout the United States.

1892

Ida B. Wells began a campaign against lynching with a speech in New York. She became one of the most famous anti-lynching activists of all time.

1896

The United States Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation laws were not unconstitutional in *Plessy v. Ferguson* after Homer Plessy, a Black man, boarded a "whites only" train car. The decision reinforced the idea of "separate but equal" treatment between white and Black citizens and further legitimized segregation.

1903

Black sociologist W.E.B. DuBois published *The Souls of Black Folk*, which denounced those like Booker T. Washington, another Black activist, who advocated for compromise with white people on racism and civil rights.

1905

Entrepreneur Madame C.J. Walker became the first Black female millionaire in the United States.

1909

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was formed. It is the oldest active civil rights organization in the United States. W.E.B DuBois and Ida B. Wells were two of its founders.

1900s

1913

The 50th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation was celebrated.

1915

The Ku Klux Klan was revived in Georgia, after several decades of inactivity. Members of this new iteration of the Klan were not only against Black people, but also targeted Catholics, Jewish people, foreigners, and organized labor. This resurgence was primarily in response to the increase in immigration to the United States in the early 20th century.

c. 1890-1910

Maker Unknown, possibly Cape Cod, Massachusetts, United States

Oil paint, cotton (doll); machine-stitched cotton, lace, goat leather, wool (clothing)

16.0" H x 9.0" W x 5.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.70

c. 1890-1910

Maker Unknown, possibly Cape Cod, Massachusetts, United States

Oil paint, cotton (doll); wool, cotton, buttons, metal (clothing)

16.25" H x 7.5" W x 3.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.71



1915-1960s

The Great Migration, spurred by the outbreak of World War I (1914 – 1918), began. For the next half-century, millions of African Americans moved out of the South to northern and western urban centers to escape extreme racism and lack of opportunities.

1920s

The Harlem Renaissance, a creative period celebrating African American culture, history, and art in Harlem, New York, flourished.

1920

The Negro National League was established in Kansas City, becoming the first of baseball's professional "Negro Leagues."

1921

The Tulsa Race Massacre occurred, in which white mobs in Tulsa, Oklahoma, destroyed the affluent Black neighborhood of Greenwood, also known as "Black Wall Street."



c. 1920-1930
Maker Unknown, possibly New Hampshire, United States
Oilcloth, animal fur, leather, socks, metal bells
12.0" H x 5.0" W x 2.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.61

1930

The National Panhellenic Council was formed as a coalition of historically Black sororities and fraternities. It was founded with five Black Greek organizations and grew to include another four in the next several years. They became known as the Divine Nine. Since the 1960s, member organizations of the Divine Nine have established chapters at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and other regional colleges and universities.

Vesa, c. 1930
Leo Moss (d. 1936), Macon,
Georgia, United States
Papier-mâché, cotton (doll);
cotton, leather, metal (clothing)
16.0" H x 9.5" W x 6.0" D

Object ID: L2024.1.84



1936

Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, ruining Adolph Hitler's plan to prove the legitimacy of white supremacy through German domination at the Games.

1940

Hattie McDaniel received "Best Supporting Actress" at the Oscars for *Gone with the Wind*, becoming the first Black person to win an Academy Award.

1941-1945

The United States entered World War II in 1941. Due to their experiences in the war, Black servicemen pushed the "Double V" campaign, fighting for victory over fascism abroad, and equal rights for African Americans in the United States.

1947

Jackie Robinson became the first African American to play in Major League Baseball when he was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers. Robinson played for the Kansas City Monarchs, a Negro Leagues team, during the 1945 season.

Jackie Robinson Doll, 1950
Allied-Grand Doll
Manufacturing Company, Inc.,
United States
Composition, cotton
13.0" H

Object ID: 2014.29.1
Currently on view in *Toys from the Attic*



1948

President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, desegregating the armed forces.

1952

The Tuskegee Institute reported that no lynchings occurred in the United States after recording annual lynchings for 71 years.



Sara Lee Doll, 1951-1953
Ideal, United States
Vinyl, paint, cotton, synthetic
fabric, canvas
17.0" H x 13.25" W x 3.0" D

Object ID: 2020.49.1

1954

The Supreme Court decided *Brown v. Board of Education*, a landmark case bringing an end to legalized racial segregation of children in public schools and subsequently overruling "separate but equal." The Brown team utilized the testimonies and conclusions of "the doll tests" to prove that segregation created a feeling of inferiority and damaged the self-esteem of African American children. It was demonstrably proven that Black children were not receiving the same quality of education as white children. A year later "Brown II" forced the hand of public schools who were ignoring the decision, ordering them to desegregate "with all deliberate speed."

1955

Emmit Till, a fourteen-year-old boy from Chicago, was lynched in Mississippi, sparking a wave of protests when the story made national news. That same year, Rosa Parks, in an act of protest, refused to vacate her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama.

Rosa Parks Doll, Inspiring
Women Series, 2019-2022
Mattel, United States
Plastic, polyester
11.5" H x 10" W

Object ID: 2022.5.4
Not currently on view



1957

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1957. That same year, the Little Rock Nine became the first African American students to attend the previously all-white Little Rock Central High School, despite resistance from the Arkansas government and white mobs that harassed them outside the school.

1958

Martin Luther King Jr. was elected as the first president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The SCLC was a major organization of the Civil Rights Movement. In 1960, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), committed to nonviolent direct action in support of equal rights for Black people, was formed.

1960

Sit-ins began at Woolworth's Drug Store in North Carolina to protest company policy that banned African Americans from sitting at lunch counters. The students and citizens who participated practiced nonviolent resistance, despite being harassed and assaulted by white groups. The Civil Rights Act of 1960 was passed in an effort to enforce nondiscrimination policies in voting.

1961

The Freedom Rides, a series of bus trips started by seven Black and six white activists to protest segregated bus terminals, occurred. Congressman John Lewis was one of the original 13 riders, and he experienced several acts of violence including the bombing of the bus on which he was travelling, violent beatings, and mobs. As violence continued, different groups and organizations stopped and started their own rides, and after several months of continuous protests, the Kennedy administration urged the Interstate Commerce Commission to push for desegregation in all interstate travel accommodations.

1963

Martin Luther King Jr. wrote his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." As protests continued, police in many southern communities used attack dogs and firehoses on nonviolent demonstrators. Later that summer, 200,000 people gathered for the March on Washington, where King delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech. The Sixteenth Street Baptist Church was bombed in Birmingham, killing four young girls. President John F. Kennedy, who had been a significant supporter of the civil rights movement and legislature during his administration, was assassinated.

1964

Cassius Clay (Muhammad Ali) won his first heavyweight boxing championship, and Sidney Poitier received the Academy Award for Best Actor for the motion picture, "Lilies of the Field." The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed, banning discrimination by employers and in all public accommodations. The Equal Opportunity Employment Commission (EEOC) was also established, with the goal of eliminating employment discrimination at all levels.

1965

Malcolm X was assassinated in Manhattan, New York. The Voting Rights Act was signed into law after Martin Luther King Jr. and other civil rights leaders led a series of protests from Selma to Montgomery to raise awareness about the barriers to voting. The Watts Uprising occurred in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles, where 34 people were killed and over 1,000 people were injured. In response to the uprising, Shindana Toys, Inc., a Black toy manufacturer, was founded. Its goal was to rejuvenate the Los Angeles area, provide jobs to the community, and create Black toys for children.

Baby Nancy, 1972 – 1975
Shindana Toys, Inc., United States
Vinyl, paint, synthetic hair
13.0" H x 6.5" W x 3.0" D

Object ID: 2020.52.2
Another Baby Nancy doll, copyright 1968,
in its original box is currently on view in *Toys
From the Attic*



1966

The Black Panther Party was formed by Bobby Seale and Huey P. Newtown, and the Black Power movement gained momentum. Black Power ideology celebrated Blackness and was intended to instill self-reliance, community, and racial pride among African Americans.

1967

The Supreme Court decided the case of Loving v. Virginia, ruling bans on interracial dating and marriage to be unconstitutional. States began repealing their anti-miscegenation laws; Alabama was the last state to do so in 2000.

1968

Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. In response to his death, protests and uprisings occurred in 125 cities across 29 states. An estimated 35,000 people were injured. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968, outlawing discrimination in housing. San Francisco State University established the nation's first Black Studies Program.

1969

Chicago police assassinated two Black Panther leaders, Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, in an early morning house raid where several members of the Black Panther Party were staying. The occupants were asleep inside when police entered and fired over 90 bullets, killing Clark and Hampton and wounding several others. Hampton was killed in bed while sleeping next to his fiancée Deborah Johnson who was 8 1/2 months pregnant with their child.

1972

New York Congresswoman, Shirley Chisholm, became the first African American to campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination. In 1968, Chisholm was the first Black woman elected to U.S. Congress.

1983

President Ronald Reagan signed a bill recognizing Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a Federal Holiday.

2000s

2008

Barack Obama was elected as the first Black President of the United States. He won re-election in 2012.

2020

Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Ahmaud Arbery were murdered. Taylor and Floyd were killed by police, and Arbery was the victim of white vigilantes. Their murders sparked nationwide protests. The white officer who killed Floyd was found guilty of murder in 2021, and the three white men who killed Arbery were convicted in 2022. The family of Breonna Taylor filed and won a wrongful death suit in 2020 against the Louisville Metro Government, resulting in a \$12 million payout to the family.

2021

Kamala Harris was sworn in as the first African American and female Vice President of the United States.

2022

Ketanji Brown Jackson was appointed to the United States Supreme Court, the first Black woman to hold the position.



Nia Doll, 2021
Brains and Beauty Dolls,
United States
Plastic, human hair, cotton, tulle,
polyester
18.0" H x 8.0" W x 5.5" D

Object ID: 2022.45.2

Sources for this timeline include, but are not limited to, [BlackPast.org](#), [The National Museum of African American History and Culture](#), [The National Park Service](#), [The Library of Congress](#), and [The National Archives](#).

If you would like to explore more African American history, visit the [Black Past African American History Timeline](#), or visit the above websites for additional resources.

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