

# History of Whiteness

**Systemic racism upholds the false notion of white supremacy:** Genomic and genocidal experimentations, policies and laws based on the notion of a “white” race have led to the persistent systemic inequality we see in the U.S. today ranging from economic equalities to health disparities.

—“Historical Foundations of Race”  
National Museum of African American History & Culture



## The Color of Colonization

The term “white people” wasn’t used by the English until the late 1600s when they attempted to colonize and differentiate themselves from citizens of India.  
—National Museum of African American History & Culture

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Illustration by Harry Williams

“The tendency has really been, insofar as this was possible, to dismiss white people as the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing.”

—James Baldwin  
“James Baldwin and the Meaning of Whiteness,” Canadian Dimension (Feb. 2017)

## ‘White’ as a Political Construct

■ From 1790 to 1952, the right to become a U.S. naturalized citizen “was restricted by race; initially, naturalization was limited to “free white persons.”  
—Boston Univ. Law Review

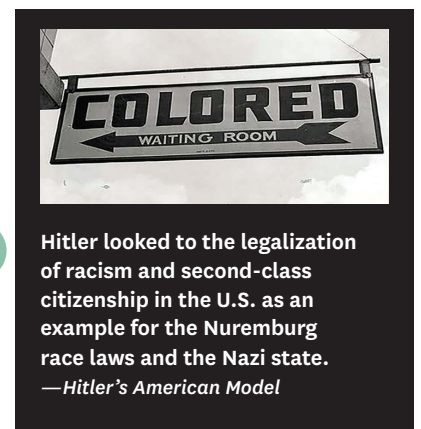
■ This racialized terminology continued to grow along with derogatory terms for Africans, Native Americans and other groups who European colonizers attempted to enslave. Which eventually led to laws like the three-fifths clause which diminished the Black and



“non-white” population’s political representation, equal rights as citizens and voting power.  
—Black History Bulletin

■ Prior to the Immigration Act of 1952, U.S. immigration policies played a strategic role in defining whiteness and ensuring a “white majority” in America while barring other inhabitants (including Native Americans, Africans, Asians and Latin Americans) from citizenship. —NPR

■ Not all European immigrants were deemed white when they arrived at Ellis Island. Irish, Italians, Greeks and others assimilated for generations to “become white.” —NPR



Hitler looked to the legalization of racism and second-class citizenship in the U.S. as an example for the Nuremberg race laws and the Nazi state.  
—Hitler’s American Model



## The One-Drop Rule Be Damned

A law created in 1662, the “one-drop rule” continues to be used to define “whiteness” and exclude anyone with any noticeable Black lineage (even if they are mostly “white”) from citizenship, voting rights, and political and economic rights. People who are half Black and white were less likely to be considered white than those who were half Asian and white. This racial categorization contributes to racial bias and boundaries based on perception of race.  
—The Harvard Gazette

Modern genetic tests like 23andMe challenge the one-drop rule that led to “whiteness,” white supremacy and racial biases and highlight genetic and racial categorization discrepancies. —PBS