Racism in Oregon History
A Brief Overview

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We are on stolen land.
OREGON has a racist HISTORY. Let's not have a racist FUTURE.
#SilenceIsCompliance

Saturday, June 6, 2020, Salem, Oregon
photo by Jo Ogden
Recognize & Respect

Harriet “Hattie” Redmond, woman suffrage activist, 1912
OHS Research Library, bb009628

“Whiteness is an expectation (sometimes an unconscious expectation) that the government will maintain laws and policies generally benefiting White people. That system, which has been effectuated through all institutions that govern American society, is White supremacy. . . . On a day-to-day level, the system of White supremacy repeatedly has provided advantages to White people. . . . The system thereby encourages those of European ancestry to internalize their top-ranking — that is, to embody White supremacy — and that embodiment of expectation, conscious or otherwise, is Whiteness.”

Oregon Donation Land Act, 1850

THIS TAX RECEIPT, issued to James Richter Pool(e) for his Yamhill County land claim, is dated October 9, 1850. According to the Donation Land Claim Act, single men who arrived in Oregon prior to December 1, 1850, could claim as many as 320 acres.
George Williams’s anti-slavery letter

One free white man is worth more than two negro slaves in the cultivation of the soil, or any other business which can be influenced by zeal or the exercise of discretion.

Negroes are naturally lazy and as slaves actuated by fear of the whip — are only interested in doing enough to avoid punishment.

Establish slavery here and the effect will be as it has been elsewhere. You will turn aside that tide of free white labor which has poured itself like a fertilizing flood across the great States of Ohio, Indiana and Illinois, and is now murmuring up the eastern slope of the Rocky Mountains.
Article II — Suffrage and Elections

Sec. 1. All elections shall be free, and equal.

Sec. 2. In all elections, not otherwise provided for by this Constitution, every white male citizen of the United States, of the age of twenty-one years, and upwards, who shall

Preliminary draft of the Oregon State Constitution, Article II — Suffrage and Elections
OHS Research Library, Mss1227_f02a_Article-II_SuffrageElections
Anti-Asian Advocacy & Violence

One of the earliest photographs of Portland, Oregon, this view of Southwest First Street between Yamhill and Morrison Streets, taken in about 1857, documents the presence of Chinese in the state; next to Monnastes & Davis foundry (large center building) is Hop Wo Washing & Ironing. The resistance of Oregonians and other Westerners to Chinese citizenship helped curb proposals for broad civil rights after the Civil War.

photo by Candise Nokes
Japanese American WWII Incarceration

Soldier posting Civilian Exclusion Order #1, 1942, in Kitsap County, Washington
OHS Research Library 021104

Incarcerated Japanese Americans at Heart Mountain, Wyoming
OHS Research Library 44601
Racism & Organized Labor

THE PORTLAND LABOR PRESS published this headline on July 6, 1906, for an article describing how longshoremen refused to unload “coolie-operated” boats, and mill workers refused to work alongside “Asiaties.” While Indians in North America were not “coolie” or “contract” workers, these were terms signaling non-White and, by definition, inferior workers in a system that privileged organized, White laborers.

ON JULY 21, 1943, the People’s Observer newspaper reported that the Kaiser Company fired over two hundred Black workers for refusing to join the segregated auxiliary union, which was subservient to the White local and would be dissolved after the war.
Housing Discrimination
Ron Herndon stands on a table (in white sweater) at this 1982 BUF school board protest. At right, behind the table, is school board member James Fenwick. Protesters are angry about the placement of Harriet Tubman Middle School.
Discrimination Against Latinos

Valley Migrant League
A child is immunized at a Valley Migrant League health clinic.
*Oregon Historical Society Research Library bb004074*

Interior of migrant worker housing, documented by activists in order to advocate for improvement
*OHS Research Library, OrHi 97841*
Police Violence

CAPT. WALTER ODALE, pictured here in 1949, led the Portland Police subversive activities detail, or “Red Squad,” during the 1930s. Odale’s Red Squad integrated with groups such as the Silver Legion and American Defenders in its efforts to quash communist influence, especially among organized labor.

Portlanders protest the killing of Lloyd “Tony” Stevenson by Portland police in 1985.
Everyday Racism
Everyday Racism

ABOVE: This bench is from the segregated section at the Mayfair Theatre, which allowed Black people to sit only in the upper gallery, on these wooden benches, while White people were allowed to sit in the individual seats. Photo from display in OHS’ History Hub exhibit.

LEFT: Inside of the Heilig/Mayfair Theater; OHS Research Library bb00209
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