



HANDOUT

A Select Immigrant and Refugee History of Oregon

This is a select timeline of Oregon history, focused specifically on immigrant and refugee communities. Please note that you'll see language in the timeline that pulls from the existing laws and policies that were on the books. We've used that language word for word to remind all of us of the historical context and how communities of color were viewed.

1848 Exclusion Law. Oregon's provisional government passes its first Exclusion Law. The law declares it unlawful for any "negro or mulatto" to reside in the Oregon Territory.

1850 Oregon Trail. Congress passes the Oregon Land Donation Act. Land is granted to every "white settler or occupant of the public lands, American half-breed Indians included, above the age of 18 years, being a citizen of the United States, or having made a declaration according to law of his intention to become a citizen." The law explicitly excludes Blacks and Hawaiians. By the time the Donation Land Act expires in 1885, approximately 30,000 White immigrants have entered the Oregon Territory, claiming more than 2.5 million acres of land. In the decade between 1850 and 1860, Oregon's population grows by more than 500%.¹

1862 Color Tax. Oregon adopts a law requiring all Black people, Chinese, Hawaiians and "mulattos" residing in Oregon pay an annual tax of \$5. If they can't pay, the state can force them into service maintaining roads for 50 cents a day.²

1868 14th and 15th Amendments. Post U.S. Civil War, Congress passes the 14th Amendment (citizenship and equal protection under the law) and the 15th Amendment (gives Black men the right to vote). Oregon is one of six states to refuse to ratify the 15th Amendment, only ratifying it in 1959 and the 14th Amendment in 1973.

1884 Oregon Railroads. The Oregon statewide railroad system is completed, connecting all regions of the state. Of the Central Pacific railroad's 13,500 employees, 12,000 were Chinese immigrants. Chinese immigrant workers receive \$26 to \$35 a month for a 12-hour day and 6-day work-week, and have to provide their own food and tents. White workers receive about \$35 a month and are furnished with food and shelter.

1888 Deep Creek Massacre. As many as thirty-four Chinese gold miners are ambushed and murdered by a gang of horse thieves and schoolboys from Wallowa County in Hells Canyon. One of the murderers confesses and turns state's evidence against the others. But at the trial in Enterprise, three men are acquitted of murder. Only in 2012 is a marker installed at the site.³

Early 1900s Latino workers in Oregon. Just before World War I, the Oregon Railroad and Navigation Company, Union Pacific Railroad, and Oregon Short Line recruit Mexicans to work as laborers. In addition, Southern Pacific Railroad has extensive lines in western Oregon, hiring Mexican laborers to work in maintenance section gangs. The 1920 Oregon Census places the number of "foreign born" Mexicans at 569.⁴

1920s Klan on the rise. By the mid 1920s, Klan membership is estimated at nearly 35,000,⁵ the largest per capita membership of any state.⁶ Additionally, numerous KKK sympathizers are not official members, but supportive of Klan positions. The KKK is so prevalent that politicians cater to and court their votes. From 1922 to 1926, Governor Walter M. Pierce is overtly supported by the Klan and he promotes the Klan's agenda in Oregon. Portland's Mayor George Luis Blake is photographed with members of the KKK, who are wearing hoods.⁷

1923 Alien Land Law. The Oregon state legislature, dominated by members of the Klan, passes a number of restrictive laws. The Alien Land Law bars Japanese immigrants from owning or leasing land. The Oregon Business Restriction Law allows cities to refuse business licenses to Japanese immigrants.⁸

1923 U.S. v. Bhagat Singh Thind. Indian immigrant and WWI veteran Bhagat Singh Thind is denied U.S. citizenship. The U.S. Supreme Court unanimously rules that Thind cannot become a naturalized citizen because he doesn't qualify under the "common man's" (aka White people's) definition of "White." Thind had worked in an Oregon lumber mill during summer vacations and applied for his citizenship in Oregon in 1920.⁹

1927 Black Suffrage in OR Constitution. The Oregon State Constitution is finally amended to remove a clause denying Black people the right to vote and eliminating restrictions that discriminate against Black and Chinese voters.¹⁰

1942 Executive Order 9066. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, authorizing the building of "relocation camps" for Japanese Americans living along the Pacific Coast. More than 4,000 Japanese Americans from Portland are sent to internment camps, two-thirds being American citizens. The Portland Expo Center (at the time, the Pacific International Livestock Expo) is used as a staging facility for metro area internees.

1945 Hostility to return of Japanese internees. Oregon House passes Joint Memorial 9 urging President Roosevelt to "prevent the return of said Japanese aliens and said citizens of Japanese extraction to the west coast states for the duration of the present war with Japan." In Hood River, almost every store displays a "No Japs Allowed" placard in their window. Former Oregon governor Walter Pierce, speaking for many, says, "We should never be satisfied until every last Jap has been run out of [the] United States and our Constitution changed so they can never get back." By the time the war ends, Japanese internees hold title to only 25% of the land they had held prior to internment.¹¹

1943–1947 Bracero Program in Oregon. Under a wartime agreement between Mexico and the United States, Oregon imports over 15,000 laborers from Mexico between 1942 and 1947 using the Mexican Farm Labor Program (MFLP) or Bracero program (referring to brazos, arms or helping hands).¹²

1950 Operation Wetback in Oregon. During the 1950s, Operation Wetback is a federal military operation that rounds up a million undocumented Mexicans for deportation. In Oregon, "the city of Woodburn and other places where Mexican workers live were punctuated by the presence of sweeps through local farms and roads that picked up undocumented workers."¹³

1965 Immigration Act. The Immigration Act of 1965 abolished the quota system based on national origin. The Act eliminated the use of national-origin quotas, under which the overwhelming majority of immigrant visas were set aside for people coming from northern and western Europe.

1973 Colegio Cesar Chavez founded. Colegio Cesar Chavez, the only independent, accredited, degree-granting institution for Latinos in the country, is established in Mt. Angel.

1985 PCUN forms. WVIP agrees to format of a labor union, founding Piñeros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste. Following the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986, PCUN helps nearly 1,300 immigrants apply for residency. More than 23,736 Mexicans and Guatemalans receive permanent residency under the IRCA.¹⁴

1987 Oregon Sanctuary state law passed. Rep. Rocky Barilla sponsors a bill to sever the relationship between local law enforcement and federal immigration authorities. The bill states that “no law enforcement agency of the State of Oregon or of any political subdivision of the state shall use agency moneys, equipment or personnel for the purpose of detecting or apprehending persons whose only violation of law is that they are persons of foreign citizenship present in the United States in violation of federal immigration laws.” The bill passes the Senate 29 to 1 and passes the House 58 to 1. Gov. Neil Goldshmidt signs it into law.¹⁵

1988 Murder of Mulugeta Seraw. A 28-year-old Ethiopian student and father Mulugeta Seraw is fatally beaten in Portland by three racist skinheads. In 1990, Mulugeta Seraw’s father and son successfully file a civil law suit against the killers and affiliated organization, White Aryan Resistance (WAR). They win a civil case against White Aryan Resistance’s operator Tom Metzger for a total of \$12.5 million. The Metzgers declare bankruptcy, and WAR goes out of business.¹⁶

1995 Causa formed. Causa, Oregon Immigrant Rights Coalition is formed.

1996 Federal anti-immigration bills signed into law. President Clinton signs the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) after the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. AEDPA greatly expands the grounds for detaining and deporting immigrants, including long-term legal residents, authorizing for the first time fast-track deportation procedures, which are now frequently used in the U.S. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration and Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) allows the government to detain and deport immigrants, including legal, permanent U.S. residents, for a range of relatively minor, nonviolent criminal convictions.¹⁷

2007 Del Monte Raid. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) personnel conduct a raid at Fresh Del Monte Produce Inc. in Portland. More than 168 detained workers are sent to a processing facility for possible deportation. Staffing at the plant is the responsibility of American Staffing Resources Inc., whose offices are also raided.

2008 English only in schools ballot measure defeated. Oregonians defeat Measure 58 that would have banned all programs that support bilingual education for English language learners. The measure would have limited the time that students receive bilingual education to two years, regardless of the student’s, parent’s or teacher’s choice.

2008 Proof of ID required for driver’s license. Oregon legislature passes a law requiring proof of legal status to get an Oregon driver’s license.

2013 Safe Roads Act. Oregon Legislature passes SB 833 Safe Roads Act, creating a driver card. Oregonians for Immigration Reform receive \$100,000 in out-of-state money to help collect signatures to refer the new law to the November 2014 ballot.

2014 Measure 88 loses. Oregon voters reject Measure 88, revoking the driver card. Over 80,000 undocumented Oregonians have no legal way to renew their driver license. Yes on Measure 88 is able to register 9,000 voters, recruit 3,000 volunteers, identify 140 new leaders, and build up a diverse coalition.

2016 Larnell Bruce is murdered. Bruce, a Black teenager, is killed by White supremacist prison gang leader Russell Courtier in Gresham, Oregon.

2017 Racist Attack on MAX train. Known White supremacist Jeremy Joseph Christian verbally assaults two young women on the MAX train, shouting anti-Muslim threats and insults. Christian attacks three bystanders who try to intervene, killing Rick Best and Taliesin Myrddin Namkai-Meche, as well as gravely injuring Micah David-Cole Fletcher.

2017 Expansive Healthcare laws passed. Oregon legislature passes Cover All Kids and Reproductive Health Equity Act. Both bills support undocumented immigrant communities in accessing healthcare services, ensuring our families are healthy and able to thrive.

Endnotes

1. [Oregon Donation Land Act](#). By William Robbins. Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
2. [Oregon Racial Laws and Events, 1844–1859](#). Oregon Department of Education, Accessed August 25, 2017.
3. [Chinese Massacre at Deep Creek](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
4. [Latinos in Oregon](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
5. [Oregon Was Once Ku-Ku for the Klan](#). By Dana Alston. Willamette Week, August 17, 2017.
6. [Portland Isn't Portlandia. It's a Capitol of White Supremacy](#). By Keegan Stephan. The Washington Post. June 1, 2017.
7. [Oregon Was Once Ku-Ku for the Klan](#). By Dana Alston. Willamette Week, August 17, 2017.
8. [Oregon and the Roaring Twenties](#). Oregon Secretary of State, Accessed August 25, 2017.
9. [Roots in the Land: Bhagat Singh Thind](#). Oregon Public Broadcasting, Accessed August 25, 2017.
10. [Oregon Racial Laws and Events, 1844–1859](#). Oregon Department of Education, Accessed August 25, 2017.
11. [Japanese American Wartime Incarceration in Oregon](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
12. [Latinos in Oregon](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
13. [Latinos in Oregon](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
14. [Latinos in Oregon](#). Oregon Encyclopedia, Oregon Historical Society.
15. [30 Years Later, Oregon's "Sanctuary State" Law Serves as a Model for Others](#). By Conrad Wilson. Oregon Public Radio, May 1, 2017.
16. [Legacy of a hate crime: Mulugeta Seraw's death a decade ago avenged](#). By Bryan Denson. The Oregonian, November 3, 1998.
17. [Bill Clinton's Shameful Legacy on Immigration](#). By Ben Norton. Salon, April 27, 2016.