



FROM PRINCIPLE TO CONTESTED REALITY

An expanded timeline of every historical and civic reference in the audio document

CIVILISATION REFERENCE SHEET

Use the third column to connect each entry to a precise allusion in the recording. The final column explains how that reference illustrates the tension between the American creed and American conduct.



DATE	MILESTONE	REFERENCE IN THE DOCUMENT	WHY IT MATTERS
1776	Declaration of Independence	Jefferson; “all men are created equal”; the founding promise	Universal equality becomes a national standard although Jefferson himself enslaves people and the new nation excludes most inhabitants from political power.
1787	US Constitution	“A more perfect Union”; institutions; self-government	The phrase assumes that the Union is unfinished. The Constitution creates institutions capable of applying principles, but also protects compromises with slavery.
1791	First Amendment and Bill of Rights	Individual rights; religious minorities; newspapers	Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly and petition gives citizens and minorities tools with which to challenge government and organise collectively.
1830–1838	Indian Removal Act and Trail of Tears	Indigenous people made insecure in their lands	Federal policy forces Native nations westward despite treaties and legal resistance, illustrating the conflict between expansion and equal rights.
1848	Seneca Falls Convention	Suffragists; political equality for women	The Declaration of Sentiments deliberately reworks the language of 1776 to demand civil and political equality for women.
1852	Frederick Douglass, “What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?”	Douglass; slavery; criticism as patriotism	Douglass invokes the Declaration to expose the moral contradiction between Independence Day celebrations and the continued enslavement of millions.
1863	Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address	Abraham Lincoln; the nation’s “central proposition”	Lincoln links the Civil War to equality and a “new birth of freedom”, recasting 1776 as a promise to be completed.

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1865	Thirteenth Amendment	The Declaration did not end slavery	Constitutional abolition comes eighty-nine years after the Declaration, except as punishment for crime.
1868	Fourteenth Amendment	Equal citizenship; courts; individual rights	Birthright citizenship, due process and equal protection provide a constitutional basis for later civil-rights claims.
1870	Fifteenth Amendment	Consent of the governed; disenfranchisement	The Constitution prohibits racial discrimination in male voting rights, but violence, poll taxes and literacy tests later undermine the guarantee.
1877–1965	Jim Crow laws and voter suppression	Segregated; disenfranchised; second-class citizenship	State and local laws enforce racial separation and restrict Black voting, revealing the distance between formal rights and lived equality.
1882	Chinese Exclusion Act	Immigrants unequal in public life	The first major federal law to exclude immigration by nationality makes Chinese migrants explicit targets of unequal treatment.
1886–1935	Labour mobilisation and the National Labor Relations Act	Workers; exploited communities; civic associations	Unions organise collective action for safer conditions, fairer pay and bargaining rights; federal law eventually protects collective bargaining.
1896	Plessy v. Ferguson	Courts; segregation	The Supreme Court validates “separate but equal”, showing that institutions may preserve injustice rather than automatically defend founding principles.
1920	Nineteenth Amendment	Suffragists; women’s political equality	Women gain constitutional voting rights nationwide after decades of mobilisation, although discriminatory barriers continue to affect many women of colour.
1924	Indian Citizenship Act	Indigenous citizenship and voting	US citizenship is extended to Native Americans, yet some states continue to restrict their vote and conflicts over tribal sovereignty remain.
1924	Immigration Act	Immigrants; exclusion by national origin	A quota system favours northern and western Europeans and sharply restricts other groups, institutionalising a racial hierarchy of belonging.
1954	Brown v. Board of Education	Schools; courts; civil rights leaders	The Supreme Court rejects segregation in public schools, while implementation requires activism, federal action and sustained community pressure.

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1955–1968	Modern Civil Rights Movement	Civil rights leaders; communities; civic action	Boycotts, marches, litigation and grassroots organising turn the founding language of equality into concrete demands for citizenship and justice.
1964	Civil Rights Act	Segregation; equal citizenship; legislatures	Congress prohibits discrimination in public accommodations and employment, translating protest and constitutional principles into federal law.
1965	Voting Rights Act	Voting; disenfranchisement; consent of the governed	Federal enforcement attacks racial barriers to voting and demonstrates that constitutional promises require institutions and citizens to act.
1965	Immigration and Nationality Act	Immigrants; equality in public life	The national-origins quota system is abolished, reshaping legal immigration and broadening the practical meaning of national inclusion.
1968	Fair Housing Act	Segregation and unequal citizenship	Federal law prohibits discrimination in housing, addressing another major structure of racial exclusion after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.
1971	New York Times Co. v. United States	Newspapers; institutions defending democracy	The Supreme Court rejects prior restraint in the Pentagon Papers case, illustrating the press's role in scrutinising government.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	Disabled Americans; schools	Federal law guarantees access to public education for children with disabilities and recognises exclusion from school as a civil-rights issue.
1990	Americans with Disabilities Act	Disabled Americans; equal participation	Civil-rights protections are extended to disability in employment, public services and public accommodations.
1993	Religious Freedom Restoration Act	Religious minorities; legislatures and courts	The law strengthens protection for the free exercise of religion, showing how minority rights depend on continuing legal interpretation and defence.
2013	Shelby County v. Holder	Courts; voting rights; unfinished progress	The Supreme Court weakens federal preclearance under the Voting Rights Act, renewing controversy over access to the ballot.
2015	Obergefell v. Hodges	“Other communities”; equal citizenship	The Supreme Court recognises a constitutional right to same-sex marriage, extending equal protection and liberty claims to LGBTQ+ Americans.