**Abolition movement**

The [abolition](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) movement refers to the popular movement to end slavery in the areas bordering the Atlantic Ocean during the 18th and 19th centuries. The movement had its roots in religious movements, the Enlightenment's emphasis on natural rights of humans. The successes of the abolition movement were uneven, and it took nearly a century to achieve the goal of ending slavery.

The abolition movement first began in the British North American colonies. The movement's started with Quaker antislavery activities that began as early as the 1680s, as well as colonial antislavery literature. As the ideas of the Enlightenment spread, other Americans came to view the right to [liberty](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) as a natural birthright regardless of skin color.

After American independence, early abolitionists feared that new ideas (like abolition) could threaten the social order, so they wanted easy measures designed to eliminate slavery over time. Their agenda included ending the slave trade, a gradual emancipation of slaves, and compensation for slaveholders for their economic losses. During that time, abolitionists succeeded in getting legislation passed that prevented slavery in the Northwest Territory, freed the children of slaves in Northern states. In 1816, the [American Colonization Society](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) was founded to popularize the idea of transporting freed slaves to colonies in Africa in order to remove the threat of a free African-American population. Yet even as Northern leaders compromised with Southern slaveholders and most abolitionists took a slower course, other activists spoke out against the immorality of slavery

Many abolitionists paid a price for their outspokenness. In 1837, for example, [Elijah P. Lovejoy](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) was killed by a proslavery mob in Alton, Illinois. Lovejoy, editor of the antislavery St. Louis *Observer* and Alton *Observer,* had founded the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society. Slavery advocates wrecked Lovejoy's presses in Alton, set his shop afire, shot him to death, and hauled him through the streets.

In the 1830s, the U.S. abolitionist movement separated into two camps, known as the "moral" and the "political" abolitionists. The moralists felt that with moral persuasion, slavery would slowly be rooted out. By contrast, the political wing embraced electoral success as the only way to end slavery. The latter group formed the Liberty Party in New York in 1839. The party collapsed in 1848 and was replaced by the more moderate Free Soil Party.

In 1854, abolitionist delegates from the [U.S. Whig Party](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement), the [U.S. Democratic Party](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement), and the Free Soil Party founded the [U.S. Republican Party](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) in Ripon, Wisconsin. Although the Republicans' first presidential candidate, [John C. Frémont](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement), came in second in 1856, the party was victorious in 1860 with [Abraham Lincoln](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement). After Lincoln's [election](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement), Southern states chose to leave the Union rather than give up their "peculiar institution," and the move precipitated the [American Civil War](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement). On January 1, 1863, Lincoln signed the [Emancipation Proclamation](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement), which freed the slaves in the Southern states, but it was not until the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865 that all slaves were freed forever.

Abolitionists in other countries, notably Great Britain, were inspired by the examples of the American societies. At the end of the 18th century, Quakers and evangelical abolitionists in England campaigned against British participation in the transatlantic slave trade. They hoped a diminished supply of slaves would encourage planters in the West Indies to treat their workers more humanely and ease transition to a free labor market.

British abolitionists proposed to register all slaves in the West Indies in order to protect them from abuses and as a step toward emancipation. Slave revolts in British territories helped the abolitionists convince the [British Parliament](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309322?terms=abolitionist+movement) to pass the Emancipation Act in 1833. The act called for apprenticeships (job training) for slave children and compensation for slaveholders. In 1838, laws were passed that did away with those requirements and immediately freed the 750,000 slaves in the West Indies.

By the end of the 19th century, international agreements were negotiated to end slavery around the world. The most important was the Brussels Act of 1890, which authorized direct intervention to end domestic slavery and the slave trade in African countries. Such agreements as those helped to fuel European imperial agendas at the end of the century. Although formal slavery was outlawed, other forms of human bondage remained in effect through the 20th century.

 **Further Reading**

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1

Roots of Racism and Anti-Semitism

During the last five centuries, humanity has experienced the rise of a powerful idea used to distinguish and differentiate among the world's diverse human populations: "race." The idea of race suggests that observed differences in culture and social status are actually the product of biologically based differences among major ethnic groups. Out of that distinction among groups based on supposed natural, physical traits came the idea of racial superiority.

The biological differences that can be seen commonly associated with race didn't appear as a cause of social problems until the 16th century. The large-scale exploration and [colonization](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) movements led by the European countries in American, Asian, and African territories produced in European society a drastic change: Europeans' concept of humankind dramatically altered. The new ideas about humanity and its differences were explored during the following four centuries. Scientific, moral, and social concepts powerfully influenced economic and political decisions based on the ways of classifying human groups. Yet it was not until the late 18th and 19th centuries that the idea of racial superiority found a strong "scientific" discourse that justified, and promoted, classifying races and a natural way to deal with new social structures. At that time, groups within a society were assigned diverse roles (basically those of domination and submission) determined by their so-called racial capacities.

**White Superiority**

The belief in white superiority had its roots in the European nations, a process that generated the sense of a superior, ruling elite in contrast with the inferior masses, particularly rural groups. How did the concept of a superior-inferior division of society become so closely involved with issues of race?

Back to the beginning of the Christian period, and during the [Middle Ages](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), the concept of whiteness developed in contradistinction to darkness. The darkness eventually was seen as a negative thing, while white came to represent Christian purity and perfection. White contrasted with the new skin colors discovered by rapid colonial expansion, and those colors were immediately associated, because of their visible darkness, and seen as inferior.

The idea of race that developed from the late 17th century differed from any previous theories, particularly in its relation to the issue of power. The increasingly dominant presence of "white" Europeans in the farthest corners of the world seemed to justify the belief that the whites had inherited a superiority that would allow them to rule over inferior, uncivilized peoples who were in need of a master's hand to find the path of [Christianity](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism). Thus, as it developed, white superiority was clearly not a biological question of differences but a social idea that was needed to maintain dominance.

**From the**[**Enlightenment**](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism)**to Social Darwinism**

For 18th-century theorists, unequal social levels (race, education, $$) were seen as a natural part of the social order. "Race" designated ancestors belonging to a [family](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) line. The characteristics and values of aristocratic elites were considered superior, and thus the elites were suited to rule. At the end of the Enlightenment period, however, race began to be considered as based on [natural law](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), and so-called scientific reasoning was applied to the understanding of physical differences. Race was from then onward increasingly defined by such differences in physical traits, but it still included those of language, customs, behavior, and "aptitude for civilization."

During the first half of the 19th century, the increasing social instability of European countries created a climate of tension within which the development of new scientific movements became the way to legitimize a new social order. Liberal intellectuals of the Victorian Age weren't strong enough to overcome the already popularized views of racial superiority. While the abolitionist movement embraced liberal notions of universal equality among ethnic groups, a new scientific reasoning declared that there existed distinct and unequal racial groups. That science served to justify both [imperialism](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism)and [slavery](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), which by then had become an integral part of American economies.

The first so-called scientific study on racial classification appeared in 1795, and the numerous subsequent racial theories insisted on the same point: the innate superiority of whites. Theorists even adopted new terms for the white race: Caucasian, [Aryan](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), or the Germanic Race. Many classifications and theories appeared on the scientific scene from the beginning of the 19th century onward. Writers living in the colonies and anthropologists studying "savage peoples" contributed to the emphasis on the supposed importance of race and skin color in determining cultural differences.

2

After [Charles Darwin](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) published*On the Origin of Species* in 1859, racial superiority theories changed once again. Darwin's work defied all previous arguments by showing that species were not permanent but were subject to evolution by adaptation and selection. His studies raised many questions and debates, and the ways in which his evolutionist theories were interpreted and applied in the study of society came to be called [social Darwinism](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism). Social Darwinists like [Herbert Spencer](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) argued that evolution helped to eliminate "impure" specimens (i.e., nonwhites) and help to perpetuate the ideal type (i.e., whites). Whites were thus powerful and successful because they were racially superior.

By the end of the 19th century, racial superiority theories provided the grounds for scientifically based [racism](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), which particularly served the interests of the European [new imperialism](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) in [Africa](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and [Asia](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and helped to continue the horrible treatment of racial minorities in the United States.

**White Imperialism, Holocaust, and the Redefinition of Race**

White, Western superiority was seemingly confirmed by the fact that, by [World War I](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), a handful of European states, headed by the [United Kingdom](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and the [British Empire](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), were ruling over more than one fourth of the world's land. The perceived success of imperialism supported the idea that whites' inherited superiority justified their moral obligation to govern and civilize other peoples. Yet within the political scene, emerging democratic movements were destined to bring to the surface the contradictions of the discourse of racial superiority.

So-called racial science boosted racist policies during the first half of the 20th centur. Different "scientific" tests, “proved” the inferiority complex of colored people and worked to measure each race's capacities, especially intelligence. The first ideas for racial planning saw the light: [eugenics](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) science, directed toward the improvement of the genetic potentiality of the human species, was conceived by [Francis Galton](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and continued by U.S. eugenicist Harry Laughlin. Such ideas, which eventually became a major American program of forced sterilization during the 1920s-1950s, unfortunately it did not stop at the American borders. American eugenicists were in close dialogue with eugenic scientists around the world and, in particular, with German advocates of racial sterilization.

The beginning of the Nazi era in 1933 marked the cruelest practical use of racial science. The [Nazi Party's](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) pseudoscientific (a collection of beliefs or practices mistakenly regarded as being based on scientific method.) methods ended in the final solution, the planned extermination of the Jewish race and led to the deaths of 6 million Jews in the [Holocaust](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism).

The post-[World War II](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) years witnessed the development of an international position condemning racial superiority theories and, particularly, their use to gain political objectives. For example, the [United Nations](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which declared that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1951) declared [genocide](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) an international [crime](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism).

In the 1960s, the scientific world turned its general opinion against the use of race as a tool to justify [apartheid](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and unequal social arrangements. Social scientists called for a redefinition of the term "race" and emphasized the need to understand ethnic aspects of human groups as based on history and culture, not biology. At the same time, the United States experienced the rise of the its [U.S. civil rights movement](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism) and [black power](http://worldhistory.abc-clio.com/Search/Display/309401?terms=anti-semitism), which began a public transformation of the image of black people.

**Further Reading**

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