

# My Pledge to Help Heal America's Racial Wounds

**Preamble:** In light of recent events, I am pained by the huge injustices people of color in our nation are subjected to, generation after generation. So, as a white American, I am now ready to face – with honesty and self-compassion – my discomfort and fears. I want to become far more involved in racial justice efforts. By signing this Pledge, I affirm the points below about both U.S. history and “whiteness” in America today, and I commit myself to the actions listed. I know that this work will be needed for many years to come.

**Section 1.** I accept, and regret, that the below facts of American history are true. They are too often minimized, and therefore some deep national wounds remain largely unhealed today. Though I did not carry out these wrongs, my ancestors enabled some of them and I have benefited - directly or indirectly - from them. Other key facts of our history do not override or negate these painful American legacies.

- Vast Native lands were taken by white settlers for 280 years. In the process, millions of Native people died, and scores of treaties were broken. The U.S. government later seized another 150 million acres of “surplus land” from tribes (1887-1934). Our textbooks whitewashed these conquests and land grabs as “America’s Westward Expansion”.
- Generations of Native children were forced into boarding schools, where clothing and activities were alien and using their language was forbidden. Deep pain from this persists in Native tribes today.
- Black Africans were brought to America in thousands of death ships for 200 years - by and for white people. Millions would be dehumanized, beaten, and/or raped, to create wealth for their “owners”.
- To politically empower Southern states, slaves were counted as 3/5 of a person in the Constitution.
- Efforts in slave states to normalize the cruelty of slavery were relentless. They were driven by the wealthy landowners, supported by churches as biblically based, and accepted by most whites.
- The fundamental purpose of the Confederacy was to preserve slavery, and the wealth it created. This was clearly stated in several of the states’ declarations of secession.
- After the Civil War, “slavery by another name” persisted for Southern blacks for another 100 years. It was seen in convict leasing, sharecropper abuses, prevention of voting, and rigid segregation. White terrorism led to thousands of lynchings, shootings, and cross-burnings.
- Periodically white mobs killed scores of black people and burned their businesses and homes. Major “riots” occurred in Cincinnati, New York City, New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, Elaine (AK), and Tulsa.
- Economic discrimination against people of color (re: jobs, wages, loans, etc.) was the rule in America for 350 years. The devastating effects of that still echo today.
- Black men fought in both World Wars, but the U.S. military only integrated in 1947. School segregation did not end for another 20+ years, after fierce resistance from whites - North and South.
- The Civil Rights movement and affirmative action programs led to the restoration of voting rights, desegregation, and some economic gains for minorities. But voter suppression, prevented in the South for 50 years, is now returning – and this time nationwide.
- With white flight in the 1960s-1980s, millions of jobs and much of the tax base moved from cities to white suburbs. Resources for schools and social services shrank, and poverty, despair, addiction, and crime became major challenges for cities. Policing usually became more aggressive. Not surprisingly, communities of color and police now often have adversarial relationships. Hundreds of episodes of police brutality against people of color have been documented in the last 30 years.
- From the 1880s till 1942, immigration from China to the U.S. was banned for purely racist reasons.
- During WW II, Japanese Americans - most of them U.S. citizens - were kept in internment camps for over 2 years based just on their ethnicity. As a result, many of them were financially wiped out.
- Discrimination by whites against Hispanics, common in the Southwest for 150 years, is now occurring nationwide. Also, millions of tax-paying Latinx people, in the U.S. illegally, live in constant fear of deportation, and are too often taken advantage of by employers, landlords, etc.
- Given our failure to reach a sensible national plan, many Americans support even harsher treatment of illegal immigrants. Thus, cruelties to poor, brown adults and children at our Southern border continue daily. Now, even endangered asylum seekers are seldom allowed entry.

- With the “war on drugs”, incarceration of black and brown people has skyrocketed. For people convicted of identical crimes, whites on average get far lighter punishments.
- Corporations run many of our prisons and detention centers, creating a perverse feedback loop: more prisoners -> more profits -> more political donations -> harsher laws -> more prisoners.

**Section 2.** I accept that I cannot fully understand the daily challenges faced by a person of color in America, but do know that they are innumerable, painful, and unacceptable. With most whites not registering that these problems (and the above history) are “real” or “important,” I see why people of color often feel hopeless, and/or bitter. Their demands for major systemic changes are 100% justified.

I also know that white privilege is pervasive in America, and includes, among other things, these advantages:

- Being assumed by other whites to be smarter, less dangerous, harder-working, cleaner, etc.
- Starting adulthood with far more financial help (since the median white family has more than 8 times the wealth of black and Hispanic families.)
- Hiring preferences, helpful work “connections”, and awareness of internal job openings
- Getting loans at lower rates
- Acceptance and safety in predominantly white neighborhoods and events
- Being free of questions about whether a success in one’s life was “earned”
- Less need for guardedness when discussing family, community, schooling, etc.
- More freedom to challenge ideas, policies, etc.

I, and most white Americans, find racial topics very uncomfortable to discuss with a person of color. Fears of mistakes, misunderstandings, judgement, conflict, and hurt feelings crop up. Avoiding drowning in white-guilt or defensiveness can feel paramount. These have inhibited my willingness to discuss, learn about, and oppose US racism. I want to change that ASAP.

**Section 3.** I see that I could respond to America’s racism with shame/guilt, cynicism, avoidance, or apathy. Instead, I am choosing to follow a far more constructive path. **To that end, I hereby pledge to:**

1. Educate myself on the history of racial oppression and economic injustice in America, by reading about this subject over the next 6 months. I will also advocate for better race education in schools.
2. Attend 1-2 workshops in the next year re: white fragility, white privilege, and/or anti-racism actions.
3. Step back and look at any difficult feelings that arise. Common ones are guilt (for what I and my ancestors have/haven’t done, or what I own), fears of losing my influence, fears of being a failure as an anti-racist ally, and anger that this hard work is asked of me. Expecting these will help me cope.
4. Pay attention regularly to what the leaders among people of color are stressing is needed now.
5. Take strong and ongoing political actions that help end systemic racism.
6. Consider joining a group that works on these issues, to find support and ideas for helpful strategies.
7. Build relationships with people of color as opportunities arise, and really listen to their concerns.
8. Give myself credit for being one of the white Americans who is finally saying that this lying, minimizing, cruelty, and apathy must stop.
9. Go easy on myself. Though rewarding and important, this work will also be difficult at times. But now is the moment that people like me must answer history's call. Perfection is not needed or expected.
10. Gently encourage white friends and family members to consider signing this Pledge, so we can help create a better, kinder, and more equitable America.
11. Register my signing of this pledge (publicly or confidentially) at the website below.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

To register your signature and see helpful, quality anti-racism resources, go to [www.anti-racismpledge.org](http://www.anti-racismpledge.org)