



USA Report

March 2021

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Aim

This monthly report presents an overview of the human rights issues against minority groups in the United States. It aims to raise awareness for these issues and violations of minorities' rights in the U.S. This report starts with a general introduction of the country, followed by significant human rights concerns faced by its minority population. It also highlights some significant cases that happened in March 2021.

United States of America

The United States of America is the second-largest and most populated country in the American continent. It is constituted of 50 states, a federal district – Washington D.C. – five self-governing territories, and over 300 Indian reservations. As a federal presidential constitutional republic, the United States has three levels of government: federal, state, and local.

History

Before the arrival of Columbus in America, the territory was inhabited by different indigenous cultures, each of which developed its own social and economic organization.¹

While the Spanish arrived first in the South of the United States, the English took control and established themselves in a conglomerate of colonies in the early 17 century, until the United States proclaimed itself as an independent State in 1776.² Following their independence, the colonies formed a confederation of states with a centralized government, though the latter did not exercise much power.³ Not long after, the first American constitution was written, and the state was set up with three branches of government.

The 19th century was marked by a period of detachment from European influence and the development of American industrial expansion. In addition, the Civil War, motivated by a South-North divide and their different perceptions on slavery, ended up abolishing the practice after many years.⁴

Major economic developments in the United States were observed in the 20th century when Europe was devastated by the World Wars. Aiming at selling the lifestyle of the ‘American dream’, where, through hard work and perseverance, people achieve prosperity and are given rights and freedoms, the U.S. focused more energy on growing their power internationally, exporting goods, gathering intelligence, and emphasizing the power of capitalism.⁵

Such focus on economic growth negatively influenced the lives and rights of minorities, giving rise to many civil rights demonstrations, protests, and waves of violence.⁶

¹ Britannica Editors [n.d.] “History of the United States” *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States/The-New-England-colonies>.

² Britannica Editors [n.d.] “History of the United States” *Britannica* <https://www.britannica.com/place/United-States/The-New-England-colonies>.

³ History.com Editors [October 27th, 2009] “Articles of Confederation” *History.com* <https://www.history.com/topics/early-us/articles-of-confederation>.

⁴ Library of Congress [n.d.] “U.S. History – Overview” <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/rise-of-industrial-america-1876-1900/overview/>.

⁵ Patterson, James T. [1996] “Great Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974” *Oxford University Press*.

⁶ Pruitt, Sarah [February 25, 2021] “How the Black Power Movement Influenced the Civil Rights Movement” *History* <https://www.history.com/news/black-power-movement-civil-rights>.

Society

The population in the United States is very diverse, as it was formed throughout the years and is influenced by different cultures and ethnicities. Today, most Americans identify as white and have British or Irish origins. American society is also heavily influenced by Hispanic and Black history and their cultures as these groups have immigrated on a large scale to the U.S.⁷



Country	United States of America
Population	331 million
Capital	Washington D.C.
Languages	English. Also spoken: Spanish, Chinese, Tagalog
Religion	Protestantism, Catholicism, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Judaism
Ethnicities	American, Indian, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Pacific Islander, White.

⁷ Thompson, William; Joseph Hickey (2005) "Society in Focus".

Human rights violations against minorities in the USA

As highlighted in the Human Rights Watch Report of 2020 events,⁸ human rights violations in the United States have increased in relation to previous years. Racial discrimination alongside systemic racism, xenophobia, arbitrary detentions, excessive use of force by police authorities, as well as other infringements of civil and political nature are present in Americans' daily lives. In the last four years, laws and policies were invoked as discriminatory attempts of restricting migration, specifically of Muslims⁹ and those arriving at the Southern border, who would often be forcefully returned to their home countries.¹⁰ Aside from targeted measures against minorities, social practices contribute to the longstanding status quo of the racial and ethnic divide in a society filled with economic disparity, poverty, and inequality among Black, Latino, Native American, and other non-white backgrounds.¹¹

Race and ethnicity

In a country where over 13% of the population identifies as Black or African American, systemic racism is still prevalent in social and hierarchical interactions.¹² Racial divide and discrimination are rooted in the early history of the United States, where colonialism came hand in hand with centuries of slavery.¹³ The consequences of slavery materialized and manifested in social, economic, and political aspects.

In the 20th century, discrimination continued with segregation policies in the federal sphere, measures that have contributed to the pervasive systemic racism still observed today.¹⁴ Practices such as racial segregation in public education, public places, and events were common in many states throughout the

⁸ Human Rights Watch [2020], "United States Events of 2020" <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/united-states#>.

⁹ Federal Register [2017, January 27], Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry Into the United States <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2017/02/01/2017-02281/protecting-the-nation-from-foreign-terrorist-entry-into-the-united-states>.

¹⁰ Homeland Security [2019, January 24], "Migration Protection Protocols" <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols>.

¹¹ Worland, Justin [June 11, 2020] "America's Long Overdue Awakening to Systemic Racism" *Time* <https://time.com/5851855/systemic-racism-america/>.

¹² Ghosh, Iman [December 28, 2020] "Visualising the U.S. Population by Race" <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-u-s-population-by-race/>.

¹³ Craemer, T; Smith, T; Harrison, B, et al. [June 19, 2020] "Wealth Implications of Slavery and Racial Discrimination for African American Descendants of the Enslaved" *Sage Journals* 47(3).

¹⁴ Merve Yesilce, [2015] "The Role of Racism: the 20th Century United States" <https://www.grin.com/document/316541>.

country, especially in the South. It was not until the 1960s where federal and state began to repeal the segregation laws, slowly integrating Black people into American society. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 represented a step towards the protection of citizens against discrimination based on race, religion, sex, or national origin, as well as dismantled segregated public accommodations.¹⁵ Although some aspects of American racism have changed and progressed in theory, in practice, the social, economic, and political gaps are still present through systemic oppression and racism – and the numbers show. From a young age, Black and Native American students are more likely to be suspended at school, and Black students make more than a quarter of those who are referred to the police.¹⁶ The disparity continues in college. In 2019, 29% of African Americans held a bachelor’s degree compared to 45% of White Americans.¹⁷ Along the same lines, unemployment rates of the Black and African American population continue to increase, enlarging the gap between Black and White unemployment – the same holds true for Asian and Latino unemployment rates as well.¹⁸



Protestors holding a sign and gesturing the black resistance symbol during the “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations. Credits: <https://www.tampabay.com/news/nation-world/2020/06/23/politifact-protests-renew-call-for-reparations-for-african-americans/>

¹⁵ History.com Editors [February 10, 2021], Black History Milestone: Timeline <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-milestones>.

¹⁶ NPR [March 21, 2014] “Black Pre-schoolers Far More Likely to Be Suspended” <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2014/03/21/292456211/black-preschoolers-far-more-likely-to-be-suspended?t=1619455401276%20https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/08/21/through-good-times-and-bad-black-unemployment-is-consistently-double-that-of-whites/%20https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/05/african-americans-with-college-degrees-are-twice-as-likely-to-be-unemployed-as-other-graduates/430971/%20https://prospect.org/power/top-10-percent-white-families-almost-everything/>

¹⁷ PNPI [June 12, 2020] “African American Students in Higher Education” <https://pnpi.org/african-american-students/>.

¹⁸ United States Department of Labour “Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey” https://www.bls.gov/web/empsit/cpsee_e16.htm.

Today, the most evident racial discrimination can be observed in the context of police violence and the criminal legal system.¹⁹ Unfortunately, this was eventuated by the cases of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, Black Americans whom police officers killed in early 2020.²⁰ According to NAACP, a black person is five times more likely to be stopped by law enforcement personnel without a just reason than a white person. Moreover, 65% of Black adults, and roughly 35% of Latino and Asian adults, have felt targeted because of their race.²¹

In light of these incidents, U.N. Human Rights experts have recently appealed to the Biden administration to adopt reforms to end police violence and tackle systemic racism.²²

¹⁹ Office of the High Commissioner in Human Rights [2021 February 26], “UN Experts urge far-reaching reforms on policing and racism” <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=26805&LangID=E>.

²⁰ Destagir, Alia E. [March 11 2021] “Breonna Taylor has been gone a year. Why we need to talk more about the racial trauma of Black death.” USA Today <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/health-wellness/2021/03/11/breonna-taylor-george-floyd-and-racial-trauma-black-death/4630148001/>.

²¹ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet” <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>.

²² UN News [2021, February 26] USA: Rights experts call for reforms to end police brutality, systemic racism <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/02/1085872>

Human rights events of March 2021

Anti-Asian discrimination continues to haunt Asian Americans

Last month's Global Human Rights Defence lobbying report on the United States brought to attention the reality faced by Asian Americans since the pandemic began. Anti-Asian hate and violence against people of Asian descent have grown significantly since March of 2020²³. Fuelled by discriminatory rhetoric, Asians became the target of violent attacks in the United States. Following this pattern, in March 2021, several new cases were reported. In Atlanta, Georgia, a man killed eight people, out of which six were Asian women.²⁴ The area where the shooting happened was known for the prevalence of Asian-owned or operated businesses. While the police have not yet offered a motive in the attacks, the rise in cases targeted against people in the Asian community has left many in a state of apprehension.²⁵

As the situation haunts Asian Americans, law enforcement agencies and support communities across the United States attempt to reassure protective measures over these vulnerable minorities.²⁶ In California, police officers have contacted and visited Asian Americans in their businesses to offer support and engage with them. In New York and Chicago, undercover Asian police officers and patrols in Asian neighbourhoods have sought to build ties with these communities to fill gaps and understand their needs.²⁷

Initiatives by law enforcement agents are vital not only for the protection of Asian communities but also for building trust, which allows for more cases to be reported. Nevertheless, 83% of Asian adults say they have faced more discrimination in the U.S. in the past 12 months compared to other years, and 58% say that reports of anti-Asian racism and violence have affected their mental health.²⁸

²³ Liu, Jennifer [April 22, 2021] "8 in 10 Asian Americans say violence against them is rising – yet support is lacking" *CNBC* <https://www.cnn.com/2021/04/22/8-in-10-asian-americans-say-violence-is-rising-yet-support-is-lacking.html>.

²⁴ Dabashi, Hamid [April 8, 2021] "Murdering minorities in America: The white man's burden" *Al Jazeera* <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/4/8/murdering-minorities-in-america-the-white-mans-burden>.

²⁵ Wagner M., Macaya M., Hayes, M. [March 18, 2021] "8 killed in shootings at Atlanta-area spas" *CNN* <https://edition.cnn.com/us/live-news/atlanta-area-shootings-03-17-21/index.html>.

²⁶ Horsea-Small, B., Layne N., McKay R. [April 5, 2021] "Police, communities across U.S. fight back against anti-Asian hate crimes" *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-race-policing-idUSKBN2BS0RR>.

²⁷ Horsea-Small, B., Layne N., McKay R. [April 5, 2021] "Police, communities across U.S. fight back against anti-Asian hate crimes" *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-race-policing-idUSKBN2BS0RR>.

²⁸ Galvin Gaby, [April 8, 2021] "Nearly 3 in 5 U.S. Asian Adults Say Reports of Racism, Violence have Affected Their Mental Health" *Morning Consult* <https://morningconsult.com/2021/04/08/asian-americans-mental-health-racism-violence-poll/>.

Border expulsions

The United States, alongside most countries, closed its borders in March 2020 to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus and infection rates. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) ordered to refuse and send back migrants at the border without affording them any legal protection.²⁹ Nonetheless, one year and one president later, the practice continues to be in place. A report stated that the United States is expelling migrants back to Mexico, not only at the borders but in their places of residence in the U.S.³⁰ According to these reports, families caught in Texas were held in custody and then escorted by U.S. officials to the bridge to Ciudad Juarez, already in Mexico.³¹

These testimonies have come as a surprise in light of President Biden’s campaign promise to restore the right to seek asylum.³² Carrying out border expulsions does not only conflict with the right to seek asylum and the obligation of non-refoulement but also places these vulnerable people in risky situations, as criminal organizations target them at the border or in their country of origin.³³



Photo: Reuters

²⁹ Human Rights First, [April 16, 2020] “Illegal Expulsions by the Department of Homeland Security under the March 20, 2020 Order by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention” <https://www.humanrightsfirst.org/resource/illegal-expulsions-department-homeland-security-under-march-20-2020-order-centers-disease>.

³⁰ Gonzalez, Jose Luis; Rosenberg, Mica; Hesson, Ted [March 19th, 2021] “Biden steps up family expulsions as U.S.-Mexico border arrivals keep climbing” *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-mexico-idUSKBN2BB2HI>.

³¹ Gonzalez, Jose Luis; Rosenberg, Mica; Hesson, Ted [March 19th, 2021] “Biden steps up family expulsions as U.S.-Mexico border arrivals keep climbing” *Reuters* <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-immigration-mexico-idUSKBN2BB2HI>.

³² Human Rights Watch [April 8, 2021] “US: End Misguided Public Health Border Expulsions” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/08/us-end-misguided-public-health-border-expulsions>.

³³ Human Rights Watch [April 8, 2021] “US: End Misguided Public Health Border Expulsions” <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/08/us-end-misguided-public-health-border-expulsions>.

Ethnicity and wealth effects on vaccine rollout

As the United States picks up on vaccinations, people belonging to ethnic minorities are still behind white Americans on the vaccine rollout.³⁴ According to figures published by the CDC, roughly 70% of White Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine, while the number is under 10% for Black and Hispanic.³⁵ This and other reports show that vaccinations for people belonging to minorities are lagging. However, it is important to mention that only half of the people who get vaccinated have their ethnicity recorded. Additionally, Black and Hispanic populations are younger, and therefore, might not be eligible due to age group prioritization.

Some experts argue that this lag could be due to the distrust in government and healthcare systems.³⁶ Moreover, wealth has also been an indicator of disparities. People need internet access to sign up for appointments, transportation to get to the clinics, and flexibility in their schedule. These factors could indicate that wealthier people have more resources to get vaccinated first.

Advances in the Slavery Reparations Bill

A congressional committee vote on a slavery reparations bill on the 14 of April may represent a crucial step towards justice for Black people in the U.S. Amid state and local initiatives to provide reparations, and Congress has reached a committee vote for the first time since 1989, which often represents the first step to pass legislation.³⁷

This bill aims to offer reparations for the centuries of injustices of slavery and its consequences to the Black community, who have suffered from persistent, racial, (and consequently, socio-economic) inequality.

The first reparations program for Black residents was approved in Illinois last month. This program focuses on repairing discriminatory housing policies which have affected Black and African American residents.³⁸

³⁴ Horton, Jake [March 18, 2021] "Covid: How ethnicity and wealth affect US vaccine rollout" BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56405199>.

³⁵ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention "Covid Data Tracker" <https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#vaccination-demographic>.

³⁶ Horton, Jake [March 18, 2021] "Covid: How ethnicity and wealth affect US vaccine rollout" BBC News <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56405199>.

³⁷ Human Rights Watch [April 9, 2021] "US: Congress Advances Slavery Reparations Bill" <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/09/us-congress-advances-slavery-reparations-bill>.

³⁸ Treisman, Rachel [March 23, 2021] "In a Likely First, Chicago Suburb of Evanston Approves Reparations for Black Residents" NPR <https://www.npr.org/2021/03/23/980277688/in-likely-first-chicago-suburb-of-evanston-approves-reparations-for-black-reside>.

Concluding remarks

In March, there was continuity to the wave of Anti-Asian hate following tough months of violence against Asian Americans and increased awareness of the issue.

Border expulsions, which systematically took place at the beginning of the pandemic, continue to worry human rights experts, as some urge President Joe Biden to change policies on this front in accordance with his campaign promises.

As the vaccine rollout started, longstanding consequences of racism and economic inequality have become apparent. Black and Hispanic Americans have been considerably less vaccinated, despite being more likely to suffer from the side effects of the Coronavirus.

Despite media coverage, abuse of rights in the United States is often underestimated, and many cases do not gain repercussions in the international scene.

Recent measures indicate an improvement in how the federal government deals with human rights violations against minorities, especially concerning the Black population, which has been affected by the negative and unjust consequences of slavery. However, since many of these issues are rooted in the social, political, and economic tensions within American society, there is still a long way to go.

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