

# Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America

## Documentary Overview

Jeffery Robinson's documentary "Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America" takes the audience through the United States' history of anti-Black racism from 1619 to present, showing how the legacy of slavery and the myth of white supremacy impacts every aspect of our society.

From the historical connection of slave patrols to local police departments, through the massacres of communities of freed slaves, to showing that many practices of modern-day slavery continued long after the Civil War, Jeffery Robinson challenges us to think about where we started as a country, where we are now, and where we want to end up.

He shines light on our all-but-forgotten past and leaves us with a shared responsibility to create a better country in our lifetimes.

"Who We Are" was created by Jeffery Robinson and [The Who We Are Project](#) with three guiding principles in mind:

1. **Reconciliation requires truth-telling, even if the truth contradicts our assumptions about our past:** American author William Burroughs described a "Naked Lunch" as "a frozen moment when everyone sees what is on the end of every fork." The United States is in desperate need of a Naked Lunch moment with our racist history. For our country and its people to heal wounds from our racist past, it is vital that we honestly address that past, no matter how disturbing or difficult.
2. **The truth has been hidden, but it has been hidden in plain sight.** The truth about the United States' history has been deliberately hidden from all of us. Instead of acknowledging and understanding the impact of anti-Black racism, we are taught the "myth" of America – a story of democracy, equality, and greatness that leaves out the fact that Black people (and other people of color) faced oppression and subjugation and were not afforded equal rights under the law. The fact that generations have been taught the myth of the United States instead of the facts is at the root of our problems today. Fortunately, the truth is preserved in original source documents, state historical societies, the Library of Congress, and other resources.
3. **Solutions based on the truth have a chance at success, those based on a false history are doomed to fail:** The failure to continue progress toward racial justice in the United States is rooted in solutions that have never honestly addressed the impact of our racist past. In the novel "1984," George Orwell wrote "Who controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." Failure to reckon with our past – whether based on racist intent or literal ignorance – is a major cause of racial injustice in the United States today and will have continuing repercussions for future generations if we do not change course.

Through primary documents and first-person accounts, "Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America" seeks to bring awareness of historic falsehoods and an understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Black Americans to the nation and the world.

**Things to Consider**

**Connection to Now:** What are the “myths” this documentary is exposing?

Reflect on what you have seen, heard, and learned. Use the chart below to capture your thoughts.

Topics you can reflect on (but are not limited to) include:

- Enslaved people in the United States
- The ideal of democracy vs. the reality in U.S. history
- The experience of Black Americans before and after the Civil War
- Systematic oppression (past & present)
- Present day social movements
- Your feelings about this documentary and its content in general

Before this documentary, I thought...	Now I understand...

**Mindful Moment.** Based on what you have viewed and discussed, what are you feeling at this moment? About this documentary in general? Why?

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