

Experience of freedom for euro- american (the white american) from 1865 to 1900

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Teacher What is freedom? The former Confederate General Robert Richardson once remarked that the emancipated slaves from the South own nothing because nothing except freedom has been given to them. This brings to mind the question what freedom actually means and whether the emancipated slaves deserved it. Freedom meant differently for each party because came from a different perspective. The white Americans interpreted freedom from the point of view of slave owners while the blacks interpreted it from the point of view of slaves. What is freedom really? What does it constitute and do the emancipated slaves deserves it.

It is important to note that slavery ended not because of the charitable heart of white American slave owners. Slavery ended after a bitter and bloody civil war that cost hundreds of thousands of American lives. Slavery only ended after a struggle both in military and political terms (passing of the Thirteenth Amendment). Majority of the white slave owners did not even wanted to end slavery and so, from their point of view emancipation is already enough for the former slaves. For the white Americans, freedom meant the emancipation of the slave African Americans and that is already more than enough freedom for them considering that they were once slaves before.

The definition of freedom is articulated by Garrison Frazier, a black minister who responded what freedom means because it includes not only the political aspect but also the economic aspect of freedom. Freedom is “ placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, and take care of ourselves.” The way to accomplish this was “ to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor” (Foner 1983: 586). Freedom also includes not only freeing from the shackles that the state formerly sanctioned but also the

equal protection of the laws and the equal provision of opportunity in all spheres of life.

The White Americans however disagreed to this definition considering the previous of Black Americans as former slaves. To them, emancipation is already enough for the African Americans as freedom exactly meant the removal of the bondage of force servitude. Thus, efforts by White Americans still continued to disenfranchise the White Americans in other forms such as denial of the right to vote, segregation and discrimination.

The first few aspects of freedom such as “ reaping the fruit of our own labor, and take care of ourselves [by having] land, and turn it and till it by our own labor” was relatively easier to accomplish because it only requires owning a land and earning the fruits of its labor. The other political aspect of freedom such as unrestricted access to politics, education, just treatment took a very long time to take effect. White Americans such as General Richardson and other former slave owners believed that the blacks only deserved emancipation from slavery and nothing more. Thus, oppression among the African Americans did not stop with the abolition of slavery but continued with another form of legalized oppression with the passage of the Segregation Law which was also popularly known as Jim Crow Laws after the abolition of slavery. While slavery ended at the end of the century, segregation came in the dawn of the new century with the passage of the Segregation Law in 1880. The southern states, particularly Tennessee first passed the segregation law prohibiting the mingling of races in all public places particularly in public transportation. Another law was also passed which is the Disenfranchisement Law that deprived Afro Americans of their

right to vote.

It took decades and another form struggle through the civil rights movement of Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and others before the segregation ended and for the Negro to become really free.

Reference

Eric Foner (1983) Give Me Liberty! Volume II: From 1865, Seagull, 3rd ed.