

Introduction era),
characterized by
vengeance against
african



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Introduction

This paper is aimed at showing the understanding and application of American history by bringing out historical concepts that played a major role in shaping America as it is known to day from 1865-2011.

This paper will look into some of the social, cultural, economic, literary, political, and religious challenges that brought about the changes that have occurred in American History over this period. The historical progression of African Americans during this period in America is a keystone historical event that greatly impacted the United States, in all areas socially, culturally, economically, literary, politically, and religiously. The proclamation for emancipation in 1865 by Abraham Lincoln was a stepping stone for African Americans to rise up and fight for their rights.

This also set in motion different aspects that shaped America during the period between 1865- 1976. This paper will look at American history through the years and the study of its history has been grouped into five areas: 1865-1876 (post-civil war), widely known as the reconstruction era (implemented by congress with an aim at restructuring the southern states by outlining the means by which whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society; 1877-1920 (post-reconstruction era), characterized by vengeance against African Americans by the southerners as a result of the reconstruction era; 1921-1945 (Harlem Renaissance period), emergence of strong civil rights; 1946-1976 (post world); and finally 1976-Present. This paper is aimed at describing the historical progression of African Americans since the end of the civil war up to the present period. African Americans have experienced a

lot of changes in terms of political, economic, religious, literary, and socially, all this influenced by a number of prominent figures.

Historical Progression of African Americans

Unit One (1865-1876)

In unit one, the life for African Americans was one characterized by oppression inequity and ironically, with triumph. This covers the years 1865-1876 and is filled by a huge sadness over the distant memories of homelands left behind. Life was not that easy for them, as they were slaves and theirs was not the classic history of earlier immigrants who embraced and got integrated into the American lifestyle. Their sweat, tears and blood is what built America. These actions are a contradiction from the values and principles (equality and freedom) that the founded the United States of America (Weiner & Knopf, 2004). Samuel Adams in his book, *A Dream Deferred: African Americans from 1865*, clearly brought out the situation at that time and what Americans went through. Sundquist (1995) quotes, “ If men, through fear, fraud, or mistake, should in terms renounce or give up any natural right, the eternal law of reason and the grand end of society would absolutely vacate such renunciation.

The right to freedom being the gift of Almighty God, it is not in the power of man to alienate this gift and voluntarily become a slave.” One Social/cultural issue Americans faced was slavery, which was first witnessed at around 1619 when the first African slaves were taken to Jamestown, Virginia to work as servants. This was a major cultural and social issue due to the fact that, Africans were made to give the impression they were lesser than the whites, for slavery to work and was carried out through religious racism. When <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-era-characterized-by-vengeance-against-african/>

slavery hit the south, it was characterized by, Africans working on huge plantations, planting and harvesting crops; they also did other chores and were not paid for any of these jobs (Davidson et al., 2008). Punishments which were usually harsh, such as branding, whipping, mutilation, chaining and sometimes the harshest punishment of all cold blooded murder were common in the plantations (Braude, 2002). In response to these issues they chose to run away from the plantations and oppressions by their masters.

Few revolts were witnessed but runaways were frequent, and were harshly punished if a slave happened to be caught. The end of the civil war which had the northern states against slavery fighting the southern states which were white supremacists, in 1865 was meant to bring a revolution in the treatment of African Americans. This was the beginning of the reconstruction era and urgency by African Americans to engage in politics so as to have their own voice and fight for their rights. This is because, despite the end of slavery, former slaves within the southern states saw it as a ' false dawn'.

The freedom bureau was created at the end of the civil war, to supply means of support to former slaves in terms of food, shelter and medical aid (Sundquist, 1995). The outcome of this emancipation and enlightenment among African Americans created vigor to be their own voice, and have their own representatives in the political arena to articulate their own issues (Davidson et al., 2008).

This period was very instrumental in the development of African American civil rights movements across the United States. Blacks were now able to vote, especially with help from congress which passed the First Enforcement Act (meant to protect black voters); Second Enforcement act (specifically for <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-era-characterized-by-vengeance-against-african/>

supervising elections); and the Third Enforcement Act that had powers to suspend habeas corpus and arrest suspected KKK members. This was due to the rise in white supremacist violence against African Americans.

Unit Two (1877-1920)

In unit two, life for African Americans saw a transformation from slavery to emancipation during this period, famously declared by Abraham Lincoln. African American life was beset with violence and intimidation from white supremacists. They were constantly harassed, troubled and attacked by white supremacists widely known as the Ku Klux Klan.

African Americans lives were characterized by lack of economic dependence, and real freedoms (Black, 2005). Constant massacres, mob violence which led to thousands of deaths were a constant feature of this period. One political issue they faced was reform for the support of white supremacy. Voter registration and turnout decreased rapidly due to the constant violence against African Americans. In response to that issue they chose to protest against segregation, discrimination, and disfranchisement. This led to formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) which came together, uniting for a common purpose in a common cause, and call on people to do this for need of equality in terms of rights and privileges of blacks as those accorded to white Americans (Davidson et al., 2008). In response to the issues above, African Americans chose to achieve high literacy levels, build their own churches as religion had been used by white supremacists as a tool of racism on them.

Ironically they opted to continue working in white owned land despite being emancipated. On the political front they chose to carry out protests against discrimination and segregation. This period witnessed the creation of the Niagara movement and other secret civil rights organizations which “ called for an end to racial discrimination, full civil liberties for African Americans and recognition of human brotherhood” (Black, 2005). The outcome of this was establishments of black churches with free slaves heading them, the decision to acquire the ability to read and write to a competent level by blacks resulted to them being trained as teachers, white land owners made sharecropping agreements between themselves and the blacks (Brinkley 1995).

Unit Three (1921-1945)

In unit three, the life of African Americans had begun to improve with the increasingly growth in strength of the civil rights movement.

The twenties were fondly referred to as the Harlem Renaissance period which came about as an outcome of the great migration. African Americans moved from the south to the north (was opposed to slavery and wanted slavery to be abolished). The north was not as oppressive as the south, consequently, their numbers in the northern states swelled immensely due to the opportunity they had to enjoy and exercise their rights (Harley 1996).

One economic and social/cultural issue they faced was the economic crisis of the late twenties to thirties. This greatly drew back on the gains and progress done by African Americans. They constantly struggled for economic advancement and social gains (Weiner & Knopf, 2004). In response to this

issue, remarkable artists for example: Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes among others chose to support the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights movement as a whole (Alexander 2010). The outcome of this was an American community that comprised of both African Americans and white Americans. The African Americans were able to realize achievements as evidenced by their contribution to the US army in World War 2. Another outcome observed during this period is the formation and spread of the Harlem Renaissance, a cultural movement, known as the Harlem Renaissance, spread countrywide (Lincoln & Mamiya 1990).

Unit Four (1946-1976)

In unit four, this period was referred to as post world war 2 and life for African Americans was characterized more vigor in civil rights and calls for equality, this was due to the exposure and stories that soldiers had come back with from their sojourns around the world during the war (Weiner. & Knopf 2004). One Social/literary issue they faced was the portrayal of the African American culture in a biased way. This saw them, become very significant in the American television and film industry and also took up writing on freelance basis and freelance photographers (Davidson et al. 2008). In response to this issue, they chose to undertake boycotts, marches and sit-ins to pass their political messages and calls for equality.

This saw the emergence of Martin Luther King Jr. and other prominent leaders such as Malcolm X, leading the civil rights movement which had reached its highest point and could no longer be ignored (Sundquist, 1995). They organized the movements which led to the white majority being forced

to give in to their demands and make available opportunities for African Americans to exercise their rights. The outcome of this was an African American community that was substantially socioeconomically and politically sound.

They were able to realize the equality they were calling for. School segregation was also eliminated and a ban on discrimination against anyone on basis of race was put in place. This period also saw a decrease in violence against African Americans. All this came at a cost, with the African American community and the civil rights movement suffering a huge blow the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

in 1968. Apart from this they became very talented individuals in the television and film industry.

Unit Five (1976-Present)

In unit five, life for African Americans was characterized by an increasingly huge percentage of African Americans in political positions, for example Douglas Wilder was elected the first African American governor in 1989; 1992 witnessed the first election of an African American woman to the US senate- Carol Moseley-Braun (Franklin, 2001). African American way of life was also scoffed at during this period due to an increase in teenage pregnancies. The change in perception of African Americans was due to a number of influential persons such as Martin Luther King Jr., the colorful Jesse Jackson who was frequently on news programs.

Oprah Winfrey was the one black person who not only gained entry into millions of living rooms but also was welcomed warmly One political/
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socioeconomic issue they faced and are still facing is a predominant white majority in positions of power. African Americans still make up a huge percentage of poor people in the United States. “ Moreover, even modern public schools return to the epoch of segregation since often the share of non-white students in some public schools exceeds 99%” (Braude, 2002). In response to that African American took up being railroad porters and the automotive industry. They also took up politics with zeal with an aim of acquiring local, state, and federal legislation through lobbying groups and organizations such as National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The outcome of this was a better life than what was witnessed some decades ago for the African Americans.

This was as a result of the determination of the civil rights movement. African Americans opted to seek for socioeconomic justice as a relief from narrow-mindedness of white supremacists by way of endeavoring to discover opportunities in the developing industrial segment of America. For years, Black Americans gained recognition for their ability in baseball, basketball, football and tennis. But it was Oprah who changed the viewpoints of millions of Americans who identified with the compassionate woman. She not only became a household name, but a woman whom viewers held in high esteem regardless of their race. Her political agenda transcended party lines.

She wanted to make a difference for black people, and to make this world a better place. She is respected for her ethical and moral approach to the issues of today. “ Her style reached out and connected with what every woman was thinking because she asked the questions and said the things that they understood” (Davidson et al., 2008).

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Conclusion

American history relies heavily on African American history and their historical progression over the years as far back as 1619 when the first blacks were brought to America as slaves. Despite African Americans being slaves, they have come a long way, as they are now citizens of the United States of America enjoying the rights and privileges accorded to every American citizen; and are no longer slaves.

The black race has proved to be a very influential, powerful and significant in shaping of the US in all areas of the society; politically, culturally, religiously, socially, literary, and economically, to what it is today. African Americans can now be found holding major political offices, for example President Barack Obama (first black president), vote in any election, enjoy all rights available to any citizen, and can also be found running huge conglomerates. This did not just come to being, but had to be fought for. Many of them shed their blood so that they could be emancipated fully and enjoy equal rights as their fellow white Americans. Over the years, African Americans have been constantly and unjustly treated, discriminated upon, segregated and murdered, just because of their skin color.

They were treated as property belonging to someone; therefore the achievement of civil freedom is a very vital concept in American history to learn from. It is difficult to actually comprehend the life and oppressions African Americans had to undergo for so many years and living in constant fear of what may happen to them. The emergence of civil rights movements enabled African Americans to fight for equality, get education, call for an end to segregation in schools and be able to participate in elections. Despite <https://assignbuster.com/introduction-era-characterized-by-vengeance-against-african/>

there being various discriminatory laws that heaped restrictions on the lives of African Americans during this period, freed black slaves who were now American citizens, especially on the northern states, became more active in politics and matters of American society, leading to an influx of African Americans in the northern states as a result of migration from the southern states. African American men enrolled as soldiers for the United States army and took part in the war of 1812 and the American Revolution. The right to vote, owning property, land, homes, businesses and paying of taxes, which was all a dream now became a reality for African Americans.

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