

Final paper



The Progression of African American History: From 1865 to Present

Throughout the 18 and 19 hundreds, the relationships between blacks and whites were, and in many cases, still today remain intense, primarily because it seems for most African Americans, the rules, although not commonly revealed, have never really changed financially, socially, culturally or politically. The historical progression of the African American population was accompanied by the struggle for equal opportunities and civil rights for the minority race.

The historical concepts and issues of African Americans are interrelated and bridged through time; from 1865 to present day, life has changed greatly and incessantly for Blacks. During the nineteenth century, radical change occurred throughout the political and legal rank of African Americans. Blacks were freed from the slavery they had endured for years, and were finally able to enjoy life. Despite the developments and changes, many fiscal and visual (how they were perceived) characteristics of African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century did not differ from that of the mid-1800s.

Unit I, life for African Americans during 1865 to 1876, was a lot better than the previous years before. A lot of things started happening for the African American people, in their favor, but still didn't make everything easier for them right away. They still struggled to find their place and to fit in with society. Even though slaves were free to be citizens of the United States, they still struggled for the same rights they were trying for in the first place. The period of 1865-1876 proved to be a time of change that offered limited possibilities disturbed by the "mental illness" of racism that often caused pain and despair.

Depending on one's perspective, perhaps the Reconstruction period was the best or the worst time in history, especially for the progression of those that called themselves African Americans. This was the Reconstruction period that focused around slavery and cotton. Reconstruction seemed complicated, especially where Blacks dominated the population. The ruin that concerned the economy and a new social structure allowed change to peak through and into the minds of others.

The 54th was organized in March 1863, since it was an all black regiment except for its leaders, and being the first black Regiment to be organized in the northern States all eyes were on its progress. If the performance turned out to be adequate, it would be the deciding factor if Blacks could be used in Battle. The Men of the 54th Regiment was made up of mostly free blacks from the Massachusetts and Pennsylvania areas, among them was two brothers Lewis & Charles Douglass whose father was a famous ex-slave Frederick Douglass.

After intense training and soon after arriving at Hilton Head, South Carolina on June 3, 1863, the Men of the 54th saw their first action at James Island. The regiment earned its greatest fame on July 18, 1863, but not to the adequate, for their unsuccessful attack on the Confederate soldiers at Battery Wagner, cost them the lives of nearly 54 men from the regiment and about 200 men wounded. Among them were around 48 men that were never accounted for.

Their Leader died there shouting "Forward, Fifty-fourth! Later the 54th fought along with the 35th United States Colored Troops at the battle of Olustee, although entering the battle late in the day the Union was saved

from total disaster by the men of The 54th Regiment. As the men rushed into battle they shouted " Three cheers for Massachusetts and seven dollars a month". Before being mustered out in 1865, the men of The 54th regiment fought in a few more battles one of them being the Battle of Honey Hill.

Now more than a century after the war The 54th Regiment of Massachusetts still remains the most famous black regiment of the war , made well known even today by the movie Glory which recounts The 54th Regiment prior to and including the attack on Battery Wagner. At the peak of 1865, Abraham Lincoln signed the 13th Amendment, outlawing slavery and aiming for the chance to aid slaves with an easier life. This was one political issue that was faced; Blacks still had to face the fact that they were surrounded by many hostile whites.

One freedman, Houston Hartsfield Holloway, wrote, " For we colored people did not know how to be free and the white people did not know how to have a free colored person about them. " Even after the Emancipation Proclamation, two more years of war, service by African American troops, and the defeat of the Confederacy, the nation was still unprepared to deal with the question of full citizenship for its newly freed black population. The Reconstruction mplemented by Congress, which lasted from 1866 to 1877, was aimed at reorganizing the Southern states after the Civil War, providing the means for readmitting them into the Union, and defining the means by which whites and blacks could live together in a non-slave society. The South, however, saw Reconstruction as a humiliating, even vengeful imposition and did not welcome it. In many parts of the South, the newly

freed slaves labored under conditions similar to those existing before the war.

The Union army could offer only limited protection to the ex-slaves, and Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, clearly had no interest in ensuring the freedom of southern blacks. The new president's appointments as governors of southern states formed conservative, proslavery governments. The new state legislatures passed laws created to keep blacks in deficiency and in employment of service. Under these "black codes", ex-slaves who had no stable employment could be arrested and ordered to pay expensive fines.

Prisoners who could not pay the amount were hired out as copycat slaves: they were forced to act as slaves without actually being referred to as slaves. In some areas, black children could be forced to serve as apprentices in local industries. Blacks were also prevented from buying land and were denied fair wages for their work. In many cities and towns, African-Americans were not allowed to share a taxi with whites or enter a building through the same entrance.

They had to drink from separate water fountains, use separate restrooms, attend separate schools, be buried in separate cemeteries and even swear on separate Bibles. They were excluded from restaurants and public libraries. Many parks barred them with signs that read "Negroes and dogs not allowed." One municipal zoo went so far as to list separate visiting hours. The association was formed as the direct result of the lynching (1908) of two blacks in Springfield, Ill. The incident produced a wide response by white Northerners to a call by Mary W.

Ovington, a white woman, for a conference to discuss ways of achieving political and social equality for blacks. This conference led to the formation (1910) of the NAACP, headed by eight prominent Americans, seven white and one, William E. B. Du Bois, black. The selection of Du Bois was significant; for he was a black who had rejected the policy of gradualism advocated by Booker T. Washington and demanded immediate equality for blacks. From 1910 to 1934 Du Bois was the editor of the association's periodical *The Crisis*, which reported on race relations around the world.

The new organization grew so rapidly that by 1915 it was able to organize a partially successful boycott of the motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*, which portrayed blacks of the Reconstruction era in a distorted light. The etiquette of racial segregation was even harsher, particularly in the South. African Americans were expected to step aside to let a white person pass, and black men dared not look any white woman in the eye. Black men and women were addressed as "Tom" or "Jane", but rarely as "Mr." or "Miss" or "Mrs." Whites referred to black men of any age as "boy" and a black woman as "girl"; both often were called by labels such as "nigger" or "colored." Less formal social segregation in the North began to yield to change. In 1941, however, the United States Naval Academy refused to play a lacrosse game against Harvard University because Harvard's team included a black player. In December 1943, singer and activist Paul Robeson became the first black man to address baseball team owners on the subject of integration.

At the owners' annual winter meeting, Robeson argued that baseball, as a national game, had an obligation to ensure segregation did not become a national pattern. The owners gave Robeson a round of applause. Although

Baseball Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis remarked after the meeting that there was no rule on the books denying blacks entry into the league, he had stood in way of integration for more than 20 years. His death in 1944 removed a significant obstacle to integrating Major League Baseball. Still, Robeson is credited with helping to pave the way for Jackie Robinson's entry into major league baseball four years later.

In 1945, when the Second World War had ended, black Americans who had been fighting a war against discrimination and racism returned to a country that was overridden with discrimination and racism. Black Americans had neither prospered as independent farmers of the land nor become integrated into the mainstream of American society. Many blacks had no land and as their main skill was farming they were unable to make a living. This was a major problem and “ the solution to this problem was crop sharing” (Vox, 2011). This meant that black ex-slaves were given part of a white farmer's land to harvest crops.

Part of the money generated from these crops would be given to the white farm owner and what was left would be kept by the black ex-slave and his family. The hope of any real unity regarding the African American race seems to have been destroyed during the Reconstruction period and continues to be a defining problem today. The dispersion and spreading of African peoples throughout the world has made it literally impossible for African Americans to belong to one nation, to which they call home and/or experience any sort of common culture, as is experienced by many other races of people.

Even today many of the peoples of African descent are suffering from many of the things done to them in the past and cannot rid themselves of the control of liberty and fortune, often directed and dispersed through and by others. Make no mistake about it, with slavery having been recognized as a prosperous institution, peoples of African descent were the most important trade between Europe and West Africa (King, 1998). It was in that a historian by the name of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, developed the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, known today as the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH).

Only in revealing and defining the history and contributions of African Americans, to a country that spewed hate and dysfunction, can we then begin to understand the struggles, strength, motives, intelligence, ignorance, determination, endurance and most of all the psychology behind the mindset of a particular people of color and candor. In 1975, President Ford issued a Message on the Observance of Black History Week, in an attempt to make all Americans aware of the contributions made by African Americans to our nation's life and culture. In 1986 Congress passed Public Law-99-244 which founded February 1986 as National Black History Month.

In January 1996, President Clinton issued Presidential Proclamation 6863 for National African American History Month and in 2009; our first black president of the United States, a man who would have been deprived of social and political equality just a few decades ago would hold the highest office in America. President Obama welcomed to issue the Presidential Proclamation. In acknowledging the fact that still today there remains intense, relationships between whites and all people of color, primarily the

African Americans, there is still the promise of a brighter future than that of yesterday.

Maloney stated “ When I think of the Civil Rights Movement of the 60? s and the great leaders of yesterday like Martin Luther King, Malcolm X and Nelson Mandela, I can truly believe that there is a God who has his hands on a people that continue to rise in spite of all of the obstacles that are thrown their way and in spite of all of their shortcomings that seem to have derived from an unbelievable and undeniable past, yet to overcome” (Maloney, 2012).

It is slowly becoming not so unusual to see African-Americans in key positions, especially holding high political offices in the United States. When I think of Condoleezza Rice, Thurgood Marshall, Colin Powell, and President Barack Obama, my spirit rises to elevated levels of gratification, honor, respect and hope. But it is not so unusual to witness the constant watchful eyes upon every single thing President Obama says and does which enhances the hate and rejection given to the highest office in this country, our President of the United States because of his race.