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The Civil War

# Introduction

The voices against state-endorsed racial discrimination and suppression of rights of particular groups have taken centuries to bring about fruitful results. The black populace remained enslaved for over 200 years (Sundstrom). After the civil war, slavery was abolished by President Abraham Lincoln, however, the misery of the blacks was nowhere near its end. Freedom achieved after a number of campaigns was denied with subtle laws. Although the disparity between the lives of the black and white populace has significantly reduced in contemporary times, the differences of the past still haunt the racial relations of today. The economic condition of African Americans was worse as compared to that of the Whites (Sundstrom). By a retrospection of archives, an analysis of historical perspective is necessary by traversing through the events for establishing their impartiality.

**Discussion**

Prior to the Civil War, the majority of the African Americans were experiencing slavery. They used to work on the lands and farms of their White masters. It is notable to consider that African Americans were living in poverty before the civil war (Sundstrom). With the end of the Civil War, African Americans were finally freed. After the Civil War, African Americans gained a perfect opportunity in terms of economic advancement (Braudel). However, a number of facts hindered the progress of African Americans towards economic advancement. Regardless of getting freedom after the Civil War, African Americans were compelled to live in the Southern States that were undeniably poor. Per capita income in the South was nearly half as compared to the per capita income of the Northern States after the Civil War (Ciccone). In addition to this, African Americans had to experience oppression and violent crimes at the hands of the Whites (Braudel). They were constantly discriminated against and oppressed in every aspect of life. Whites considered themselves superior to all other nations of the world. Due to that particular reason, they always tried to control African Americans.

After the defeat of the Confederates in the American Civil war (Apr 12, 1861 – May 13, 1865), African Americans who were slaves to the Confederates, were freed. The Southern states, in an attempt to keep the freedom limited, enacted the controversial black codes. Mississippi was the first state to devise and enact the laws which precluded the black population, termed as freedmen, from attaining the same rights as their White counterparts (Sundstrom). The unemployed apprentice was held liable under the law (Rogowski). The corporal punishments by masters to the apprentice were kept intact and the apprentice was held responsible to serve the master in return for the food and clothing. Penal laws were defined too which restricted the White population from trading with the Blacks and banned firearm use for Negroes (Rogowski). Thus, freedom is cosmetic and portrayed as a triumph for the Black populace. They are exhibited dancing and singing to recognize the victory. However, analyses of the times that followed the codes show that the victory was exaggerated.

It is noteworthy to consider the fact that per capita income in the South was nearly equal to the North before the Civil War. However, after the Civil War, there was a sudden fall in the per capita income of the South. Economic Historians suggest that the Civil War is the cause of poverty in the Southern states. After the war, the majority of African Americans entered the labor market in order to get daily or monthly wages for their work. Agricultural distress in the 1890s worsened the situation for African Americans in the South. The cost of living fell in the Southern states, which resulted in further erosion of Southern wages (Sundstrom). To investigate further, the letter of Martin Luther King Jr. from Birmingham Jail is vital. The letter was written almost a century after the Black codes were implemented and shows that the population faction was still under intense suppression even after a hundred years of struggle. King responded to the huge criticism of interference and incitement to violence. He shared his legal position in working for civil rights as he presided over the Christian Leadership Conference in the city. He pledged to voice against the injustice be it anywhere in the world. On the objection of holding protests for enforcing his decisions, King rebutted with the argument that the local political leadership left no other choice for them even after grave violation of rights. He further appealed to his group to wait for the logical end of negotiations with the rival group and justified the breaking of the local laws. King has indicated the two types of Black people, based on their socioeconomic statuses, both of whom faced intense racism (Braudel). One radical type used peaceful demonstration to protest the inequality and the complacent type was too suppressed that they were unable to rise for their basic rights. King extended the message of peace and hoped to meet his people soon.

Undoubtedly, the Civil War ended slavery for African Americans, however, it caused another problem for them. Some of the freed slaves became wage laborers for their former owners and others fled from that neighborhood. The majority of African Americans were struggling in terms of financial stability soon after getting freedom. Regardless of the fact that African Americans could make their own decisions at that time, there were limited opportunities for them to start their own businesses. Due to that particular reason, they started working for their former owners to fulfill their basic needs (Braudel). A critical examination of the entire scenario of African Americans' situation after civil war indicates that they were living a below-average life. They had no other choice than to work for their White owners at minimum wage. It has been observed that African Americans were constantly underpaid by their former owners.

It is important to consider the role of African American slaves during the Civil war. During the Civil war, a substantially large number of slave populations switched loyalty in favor of Union soldiers but some remained with their previous masters (Sundstrom). Retaining slavery under Confederates may be a result of fear of the unknown community in the North (Ciccone). Another reason was the belief of slaves that serving their masters was part of their moral duties. This century-old master-slave relationship is reflected in the contemporary social relations too (Sundstrom). A large number of Americans have grown in the period when racial segregation was not only a norm but a legal obligation too. The laws restricted the housing, schooling, and employment of the Black population to confined areas and under lengthy terms (Ciccone). The legal procedure allowed White people to call Blacks ‘boys’, whereas, the Blacks were obliged to call their White counterparts ‘sir’. Even after the legislation following the Civil Rights Movement, the discrimination continued and still prevails in every state of the United States.

It is critical to understand that agriculture was a source of power for African Americans before the Civil War. Prior to the Civil War, the number of Black farmers was greater as compared to White farmers. Black agriculture was a powerhouse for African Americans as they were controlling and managing 14 million acres of land (Rogowski). However, economic Historians indicated that 90 percent of that land was lost by the turn of the 21st century. The major reason behind that large shift was the Great Migration. The migration of African Americans from South to North is one of the major reasons behind that shift. African Americans experienced systematic oppression in the South even after the Civil War (Braudel). Consequently, they fled from the South to live a better life. “Lack of access to legal resources and distrust of the legal system, African Americans lacked a will transferring the ownership of their property when they died” (Ciccone). Due to these factors, the majority of their property and land were grabbed by the white population.

It is important to consider the fact that the Union General, William Sherman, promised forty acres and a mule for freed slaves after the civil war. Various political figures made it clear for African Americans that they would be given the land in which they worked as slaves (Sundstrom). Many freed people were eager to control their own property as promised by political figures. However, the successor of Lincoln, Andrew Johnson passed a bill in which he reversed these orders. African Americans who were promised 40 acres and a mule were devastated with that decision (Ciccone). In addition to this, the statistics confirm that even today, the probability of poverty in children growing in White settlements is three times less than that of the children in Black families (West). These stats indicate that African American families are still living average-lives as compared to the Whites. The renting and purchasing of property and implementation of the law has seen considerable disparity too (Sundstrom).

Studies show that the number of Black and White criminals on death row is the same despite the fact that the Blacks make only thirteen percent of the entire US population. Thus, traces of discrimination are not rare. Although there is no slavery and Jim Crow laws anymore, yet the race is suffering in terms of lack of provision of equal justice and rights. The mentality of superiority has traveled through generations as the White population was taught that all other races are not eligible for the privileges they enjoy (Sundstrom). Fortunately, the discrimination in schools and workplaces has significantly reduced after the necessary amendments. However, relief from poverty is still a dream for African-Americans as collectively, they remain as the most impoverished race in the US.

**Conclusion**

The studies of primary and secondary sources have confirmed that Black lives have not mattered for centuries. They have fought for centuries in order to get their basic rights in American society. African Americans lost a major portion of their property and land due to distrust of the legal system and lack of access to legal resources. The state-endorsed discrimination is largely eliminated through legislation and amendments, but the superiority complex amongst a faction of the White population still prevails which is keeping the two races from enjoying better social relations. A critical analysis of the economic condition of African Americans indicates that they were constantly underpaid by their former owners. Regardless of various political promises, they did not get the ‘40 acres and a mule’ for their labor when they were enslaved. They had to experience oppression and discrimination at the hands of White Americans due to their color and race. White Americans considered them less civilized and less superior as compared to themselves due to which African Americans experienced violence and oppression. Even though slavery ended a long time ago, African Americans continue to suffer from its aftermath.

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