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Slavery by Another Name

The film “Slavery by Another Name” portrays the implications of slavery on African-Americans that remains dominant in the form of criminalization of blacks. The film captures the stories of black men who experienced change after criminalization and vagrancy. Most of the black men sent to jails were innocent and guilty of nothing. They were brought, sold or abused that represented their slave status. Majority had to work under strict conditions, often as convict labor. The film highlights the interviews with the descendants of victims and perpetrators for transmitting black realities to the modern audience.

After the reconstruction, violence in the south increased massively reaching to a point where every move of African American individuals was criminalized under the law. The laws used for the criminalization of black people were adopted in states such Alabama, Georgia, the Carolinas. The over exaggerated laws were unfair as unemployed blacks were jailed. Peonage practice was common for the black prisoners. The convicted had to work in extremely horrible environments as they had to drink dirty water and were exposed to deadly disease. Majority of the black convicts were under 16 years of age and made 90 percent of the jail population compared to 10 percent of whites. Blacks were either slaved or forced to work for the private industries. African-Americans even lacked voting rights until the Fifteenth Amendment. Convicts were not only slaves to the peonage system but also many free blacks were working under white employers for varies types of debt. Judge Thomas Jones in his response to peonage in Alabama, declared that the contract labor violates the Federal Constitution. A growing number of blacks nearly two million between 1910 and 1930 moved out of the south.

After World War I, National Accusation for the Advancement of colored People (NAACP) was formed that worked for the rights of African-Americans. NAACP remains one of the prominent Civil Rights organization that raised voice against the social and economic injustices suffered by the blacks. It focused on providing educational, economic, political and social equality to the blacks. The mission was also to eliminate race prejudice by protecting the lives and rights of the African-Americans. The Civil Right activists claimed that the laws are inadequate and must secure the rights of black citizens.

The period of Reconstruction (1865-77) encouraged blacks to enjoy family bonds. Many black people reconnected to their families who were separated and marriages were also legalized for the first time. Reconstruction focused on ending slavery which referred to transition to wage labor. This resulted in acceptance of the blacks right to enter into labor contracts and receive money for their services. Reconstruction also encouraged black activists to raise voice against the exploitative practices such as black farmers were offered credit by the store owners with high interest rates. Such conditions made it impossible for the African-Americans to return the credit that increased their economic dependence. South was readmitted on the terms that were acceptable at North. Sharecropping improved the conditions of blacks as they decided to work on their farms instead of white farm owners.

The analysis of these important historical events depicts that African-Americans have undergone significant struggles for gaining citizen rights. Two common issues that oppressed the black population and their descendants include jailing and conviction as labor. The unfair laws in states like Alabama encouraged white owners to maintain supremacy over the blacks.

Furthermore, massive racial tensions persisted in the southern part of America which were removed only after years of continuous struggle by the activists. De-jure segregation was still going on in American society despite the emancipation proclamation Abraham Lincoln in 1865. It was, undoubtedly, another form of slavery. Finally, supreme court decided to declare it null and void once and for all. This became the underlying reason for the historic movement of Martin Luther King which gave a new impetus to the Civil Rights in America (Payne). Even leading nobles such as Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson favored more integrated America devoid of any civil discrimination. This civil discrimination became the greatest moral issue and a blot on the progressive Americans. The American people and notable dignitaries tried to rectify the situation. Passage of Civil Rights Acts in 1964 and 1965 marked the new beginning of civil harmony. The country really progressed with the efforts and speeches of Martin Luther King-Jr where he expressed his desired vision in famous “I Have a Dream “. The concept of Black Power emerged and black became actively involved in the political process. Colored people were included in the political campaigns and political narrative changed in the country. In this purview, the identity of African -Americans was realized in all important aspects and due attention was given to their role and significance in society. Social analysts divulged different dynamics in this civil rights movement where they gave importance to the ordinary black nationals and their efforts in bringing change in segregated society. This desegregation also highlights the struggle from Montgomery to Memphis framework which finally eliminated the traces of racial discrimination in south. Unlike social analysts, the top-down perspective illustrates that this struggle became fruitful with the help of large-scale massive movement such as the one associated with Rosa Parks and the Martin Luther King-Jr. Nevertheless, the bottom up analysis of this struggle throws that individuals and their little efforts actually helped in eliminating the deeply entrenched racial discriminations from the progressive American society.

Work Cited

Vimeo. Slavery by Another Name (PBS Documentary 2012).mp4. 2015. 30 07 2019 <https://vimeo.com/78437511>.

Payne, Charles. “The View from the Trenches.” *Debating the Civil Rights Movement*, vol. 1968, 1945, pp. 99–136.