African-American ethnic group in the United States

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**Introduction**

African Americans have an exciting storyline about their influx in the United States. In the United States, these African Americans are referred to as Afro-Americans or Black Americans due to their skin color. They are an ethnic group of Americans exhibiting partial or total ancestry from any of the African nations. They emanated from enslaved black people into the United States, who make up about 14% of the total United States Population. According to Mayeda, Glymour, Quesenberry, & Whitmer, (2016), African Americans are ranked to be among the third largest ethnic and racial group found in the United States following the White Americans and the Hispanic and Latino Americans. Their emergence into the country dates back to the 16th Century, where individuals from the West African countries were taken as slaves into the English Colonies, one of them being in North America. Therefore, this paper will explore the Ethnic group, its culture, and involvement in politics, their religion, and overall assimilation into the United States Culture.

**Historical Overview**

African Americans arrived in the United States as slaves from long ago. During the Colonial era, Santo Domingo was the entry point for the first African American slaves in 1526. However, even in the earliest days of slavery, their owners tried hard to exercise some degree of control over their slaves, hence attempting to strip their African culture soonest possible. As an indentured servant, the blacks taken into the United States would work without having any wages, and the servants could be sold, leased or physically beaten if they did not abide with the regulations provided by their owners. The slaves would be subjected to physical isolation, societal marginalization, and lack of freedom as slaves in the United States. In the Southern United States, African American slaves had developed rebellious behaviors due to the lack of wages and other issues, and the slave owners deliberated with the political organizations to deal with these rebellions.

The founding of the United States, however, did not resolve the issue of slavery, and it was common for people to be shipped from the African Countries into the United States as slaves. The African American slaves had a significant impact in helping to secure America’s independence in the 1770s, but this did not lead to their slavery being terminated. The slaves were given tasks within the nation and constituted a substantial investment within the country, producing valuable products for export such as cotton. The African Americans built the White House and other District of Columbia buildings during their time as slaves in the United States.

Slavery in the United States was ended by President Abraham Lincoln, who signed a proclamation in 1863 that declared all the slaves in the Confederate territory to be free. This assured the African Americans could have their lifestyles and were given the right to vote as other United States Citizens. This was particularly commemorated with the 14th Amendment of the United States in 1868 which gave African Americans citizenship, and the 15th Amendment gave the African American males only a right to vote, and not the women in the United States. According to Fredrickson, (2015), the reconstruction Era led to the African Americans quickly developing congregations for themselves, learning institutions, and civic associations that would help in revolting against the control of the whites. However, by the late 1890s, the renowned Jim Crow’s laws in Southern State was enacted, and it enforced the racial segregation and disenfranchisement of the blacks. As a result, the segregation led to slavery, and the blacks were vastly affected by how they would live and interact with each other. The African Americans would be shown where to walk, what to eat, where to rest, and what to drink and when to talk, among other perspectives.

While the majority of the African Americans continued to abide with the Jim Crow Laws, others migrated north while others continued to build schools, banks, churches, and businesses that would help to maintain their dignity and self-esteem. Racial segregation and racial violence continued to develop in the United States continued even in the 19th Century, and cases of voter suppression, disenfranchisement, denial of economic opportunities, private acts of violence and other issues were experienced in the Southern State. Halfway in the 20th Century marked the great migration to the Northern and Western United States. The influx, however, of these blacks in these states caused significant imbalances, hence exacerbating hostility among the migrators and the whites. Race riots occurred during the Red Summer in 1919, marking the death of many persons due to racial riots in cities such as Omaha and Chicago. Furthermore, discrimination in employment opportunities, economic practices, and other aspects was experienced by African Americans.

The civil-rights movement gained momentum in the 1950s advocating for equal rights among the Africans Americans and the Native Americans. It was during this time that African Americans developed an interest in rebelling for their rights, claiming for equal treatment as their counterpart whites. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was passed, and it banned the discrimination of people in public, accommodations, and employment, among other aspects. Furthermore, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the Labor Unions Act were also passed to ensure the blacks had shared participation in political activities in the United States and were protected during elections. Such legal interventions helped the blacks to get more jobs and hence raising their family income significantly. Moreover, the level of education for blacks was also improved in the United States.

**African American Culture**

**Literature**

Oral Traditions of the African Slaves are outlined by one of the renowned African Americans, Langston Hughes, who was a poet in the Harlem Renaissance. The author was able to use the fables and stories in a similar way they used music during these times. According to Fredrickson (2015), these stories were used to influence the early African American writers and poets, especially during the 18th Century. Some of these writers and poets are inclusive of the Olaudah Equiano and Philis Wheatley, and they reached high points by telling slave narratives to the people. The authors grappled on ways that they could respond to the African-American discrimination that was experienced during this time. During the Civil Rights Era, authors inclusive of James Baldwin, Richard Wright and Gwendolyn Brooks wrote books about the racial issues such as oppression, segregation and lack of equal treatment that other African Americans had to go through before the legal mandate was passed. In the current days, authors accepted as an integral part of America continued to provide details about the African-American Ethnic groups, offering works such as *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family,* by Alex Haley and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved,* among others.

**Art**

Art plays an integral role in guiding society and educating them about their lifestyle and culture. The African Americans have had a vibrant interest in art, with the oldest being the Sand Dunes at Sunset in Atlantic City that was painted by Henry Ossawa Tanner (Molnar, 2015). The African-American art has had vital contributions to the art in the United States since its early origin among the salve communities through to the 21st Century. During the 1800s, art took the form of quilts, ceramic vessels, small drums, and wrought-iron figures, particularly in the Southern United States. The artifacts, which can quickly compare to the West and Central Africa’s crafts, were used in the era as tools to showcase artworks of the African-Americans. Harriet Powers made quilts while living in Georgia, which is considered as one of the most excellent examples of quilting practiced in the 19th Century in the south. In the 20th Century, a sophisticated, bold quilting style was developed by the Gee Bend Women. The style was based on the traditional African-American quilts, but with a simple geometry revealing Amish quilts and modern art (Farkas, 2017). The works of the African-Americans have displayed in most of the United States Museums after the Civil War, and thus cultural expression in mainstream venues was practiced. However, European aesthetics guided by racial prejudice led to a limitation of African-Americans artwork. Among the notable African-American artists include Eugene J. Martin, Kara Walker, Charles Tolliver, and David Hammons, among others.

**Music and Dance**

African-American music is exciting, and in today’s world, it is among the most dominant mainstream in the various music genres. African-American musical forms emanated from black communities, and they have influenced the music genres, especially in ethnic vernacular traditions in America. In addition to the National Anthem, many African Americans sing the Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing, the Star-Spangled Banner, and other songs. The trend has continued and is not adopted in many genres of music, with Hip Hop Music being the most common form in which African-Americans have excelled in. According to Flores, Brown, & Herman, (2016), African-American music has also influenced America’s dance, which has been introduced in major themes of various choreographers. Groups such as the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater continually contribute to the growth and development of the African-American dance forms. Furthermore, dances in hip hop are highly perpetuated by the African-American dances, which have become renowned in the United States.

**Language**

The African-Americans were exposed to various hardships in the course of their development in many generations within the United States. As a result, the community developed distinctive language patterns. The slaves were mixed with people from other countries, and thereby, there was discouragement in speaking a common language other than English. Prohibition against education and lack of speaking in other languages led to the development of pidgins, which was a simplified mixture of two or more languages that speak of different languages as one in the communication process. Creole is one of the pidgins that became fully developed languages in the United States and is familiar to Haiti and Gullah, among other communities in South Carolina and Georgia. However, there is an African-American Vernacular English spoken among the people. It is a different dialect of the American English Language that is closely associated with speech, and not exclusively used by the African-Americans. It is more of a slang language due to the poor command of Standard American Language but is however recognized by the AAVE as a legitimate dialect because it has a logical structure. It is thus common to find students who speak the native dialect of the African-Americans facing challenges in tests with Standard American English.

**Cuisines**

The African-Americans have their cuisines traced into agricultural products such as okra, sorghum, watermelon, cotton, indigo dyes, peanuts, and rice, among others. The meals reflect a creative response to the racial and economic oppression that the people had received during their slave period in the United States. The African-Americans, during the slave times, were restricted such that they would not eat better cuts of meat. After emaciation, most of these individuals remained poor not to afford any of the expensive meals. Traditionally prepared meals would often contain high fat, starch, and sodium as they are vital requirements to offer these persons with energy and strength over time. Vegetables and fruits are also fundamental essentials that are taken by the African-Americans.

**Family Setup**

The African-Americans have the father as the leader of the family, who acts as the sole breadwinner for the family. However, with the recent feministic uprising, the women in African-American communities have developed their roles such that they are empowered with education and skills to work in professional sectors and hence helping to provide for the family. The females are also mandated with the task of rearing the children while handling the domestic chores within their homes. Most families have an average of 4 children, with others exceeding this number depending on their liking. The children are subjected to the regular system of learning, and education is taken as part of the critical factors for success for both genders. Core values for the family are inclusive of love, care, patience, and sense of responsibility.

**Politics and Social Issues**

On the onset of having voting rights for the African-Americans in the United States, the number of African-Americans voting and being elected in state office continued to increase in number. Within the first ten years of enacting this policy, more than 9,000 African-Americans were elected as officials in the public offices within the United States. Their engagement in public offices was integral, and the officials were democratic in many ways. Their involvement in the political sphere was evident in many years, and the election of Barack Obama backed this as President in the United States. Social issues inclusive of racial disparity in sentencing, racial profiling, institutional racism, rates of poverty, and limited access to healthcare facilities were reduced once African-Americans were involved in the political space. The prominent African-American leaders in the United States helped the people to have a healthful lifestyle and social integration with the European Americans.

**Religion**

African-Americans subscribe to a variety of religions, but Christianity is the prevalent religion, followed by Islam and other religions as discussed below.

**Christianity**

Collectively, the African-Americans Christians and their religions are termed as the Black Church. The slavery period led to the African-Americans to be stripped of their African belief systems and was denied of having any free religious practices. However, on the onset of their release, the slaves integrated their religious practices into Christianity and secret worship meetings. According to Belgrave, & Allison, (2018), shouts, African Rhythms, dance, and enthusiastic singing characterized the Christian meetings that the African-Americans had in the early times. The central teachings that were proclaimed by the African-Americans Churches were that all people are equal in the eyes of God, factoring the doctrine of obedience and patience as part of the essential aspects to portray as a Christian. The African-American pastors played a crucial role during the Civil Rights movement as they helped to bridge the gap between the European American Communities and the African-American communities. One of the Christmas plays that have for long been renowned for telling the Classing tales of Christianity in Christmas is the *Black Nativity* by Langston Hughes.

**Islam**

Islam is the second largest religion among the African-Americans in the United States. Islam had been a thriving religion in West Africa owing to the Trans-Saharan trade treaty that brought peace in the countries. As a result, some of the first slaves and their early descendants were able to retain their Muslim identity. The older descendants, however, were either forcibly converted into Christianity or Catholics as slaves in the United States. According to Harff, (2018), the Islam religion reemerged as a controversial heterodox movement among the African-American communities. It is evident from surveys that about 30% of the Sunni Mosque attendees are among the African-Americans, with the rest being filled by other ethnic communities. This, however, is seen as a challenge on the African-Americans Muslims since there are stereotypes and assumptions about them.

**Other Religions**

Other than Islam and Christianity, religions such as Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions are followed by African-Americans. According to Smedley, (2018), a small group of African-Americans subscribes to the African traditional religions inclusive of the Ifa, Santeria, Vodou, and diasporic traditions such as the Rastafarianism. A large group is seen to abide with the Black Hebrew Israelites, which is a collection of Jewish religious organizations that have African-Americans involved. The organizations essentially indicate that the African-Americans are descendants of the Biblical Hebrews. However, due to the religious practice inclusive of animal sacrifices that are uncommon among the African Religions, the other religious practices are often viewed negatively and hence victimized and harassed in the United States.

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the African-American ethnic group, their involvement in politics, religion, and other factors in their culture, and how they have been assimilated into the United States. The blacks suffered through many years as slaves in the United States, whereby they had to work for long hours without any pay. Moreover, they were subjected to segregation and lack of equality within the South before they developed a resistance to fight for Civil Rights. Currently, the African-Americans make up much of the immigrants in the United States as ethnic groups. Their culture has been assimilated into the United States to offer a mix and blend of new ways of life, music, and dancing. Therefore, despite having a hard time in the United States as slaves, the descendants of blacks have a positive impact in modern society within the nation.

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