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History 1700

**Reading Response #2- Black Codes**

After the official prohibition of slavery, southern whites enacted a series of laws that restricted blacks from living normal, equal lives. These laws were referred to as the Black Codes. During my first time reading through them, they almost seemed like a good thing. “All freedmen, free negroes and mulattoes may sue and be sued.” or “..and fully protect the interest of said minor.” seem like progress for black people, but really these only start problems for the black people in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The black codes addressed everything from marriage laws, to arrest laws, to vagrancy laws, even the handling of orphans. Although they gave a little bit of freedom, the ultimately ended up restricting the black people. Although black were able to be legally married to each other, interracial marriage was forbidden and would result in a felony. Sections 5 and 6 talk about how twice a year you need to prove that you are working with a work contract from your employer or own a house.

Multiple times throughout the black codes, they make reference to “good cause”. Supposedly, if with a “good cause” a black man can leave his service early. My question is, what is “good cause”? I would think of “good cause” as being anything from, not receiving the correct pay, to being required to work inhumane hours, or even to abuse. Back in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, nobody liked black people. This was around the time when blacks began to get equal, but separate rights. So why would a white man stick up for a black man and say that he had a “good cause” for running away. What I would imagine happening back in that time is a black man would run away, he would get caught and taken back because of section 7, when “good cause” is brought up, I don't think anyone would even consider what the black man has to say.

In the second part of the black codes, black orphans are discussed. I feel like when they put this part in, yes they had their corrupt intentions for the long run, but they were concerned about the children. In the fine print, it is said that “... a suitable person to have the charge and car of said minor, and fully to protect the interest of said minor.” The rest of the fine print continues to say that this will happen, but these kids are subject to indenture until the men are 20 and the women are 18. So like I said, these kids in theory have someone to provide them food and shelter, but they have to work for this person until they are older. In reality I see this as being something similar to the foster care program in place today. In theory all the kids in it should be taken care of well, but some don't get the care that they deserve which is what I am sure happened back with the black children.

The last part of the black codes are called the vagrant laws, and these deal with homeless people, or vagabonds. Essentially what they are saying is, any homeless person that isn't working, is fined an amount of money. Because they are homeless and unemployed, they don't have the money to pay the fine. They then end up going into servitude to try to pay off the fine. We don't really have anything in place in our current time that relates to this. This law was extremely unfair to black people, and could ruin their lives. Something like this wouldn’t even be considered in todays time, let alone specified directly towards black people.