

Slavery

Not everything that has to make a mark on the history of African American people is on the surface a positive thing. But we know that there some very terrible things that happened to the black population in America that are undeniably a big part of the history of a people. So any survey of black history could not be complete without a discussion of slavery.

Few peoples of the earth have such a profoundly humiliating event to become such a central part of their heritage and their past. Yes, other tribes and races have endured slavery including the American Indian and the ancient Hebrews. Perhaps slavery is even more pivotal to the psychology of the African American culture because it is the central historical event that launched their start as citizens of this country.

It was not a citizenship born in nobility and honor as many others can point to in America. No to come to America as slaves is to have come to America with little more value to their fellow Americans than common livestock. And to be sure, the lives of slaves in the first decades of American history were very harsh times. Slaves were abused and denied anything that we might call today even basic human rights.

It is hard to gain any perspective on such a heinous crime against humanity as slavery except to put in context that this barbaric practice did not originate in America but came to our shores as part of the background of many people including the Dutch, the French and the English.

In some ways slavery was an evolution of the system of indentured servant hood in which an immigrant trades a certain number of years of service to a master in exchange for payment for their travel costs to come to America. But in the case of Africans who were brought on ships as slaves, there was no desire to come in chains to serve as property until death.

The impossibility of hope in that situation is almost impossible for any of us, black or white, in modern day America to grasp or appreciate. But the efforts of slaves to free themselves and indeed to eventually do so using the Underground Railroad or other means is a testament to human will and that hope is something that is extremely hard to crush out in the human heart.

Has anything good come out of the legacy of slavery in this country? Well, a bond that was formed in the hearts of a people was permanently cemented during those horrible years. The music that the slaves used to keep their spirits alive has been passed to us as a rich legacy of spirituals that we cherish because they were born under inhuman suffering.

One thing that was a permanent out come of slavery in the African American community was the sense of resolve to never go back to such a time and a fight that was burned deep into the soul of a people to fight no matter how long or how hard to gain the civil rights of full citizens in this country. This would

not have happened so profoundly had the peoples who came here and were identified solely by skin color not have endured slavery together. Before the various peoples who became slaves were pressed into service, they were from many tribes and many people all across Africa and beyond. Their nationalities were tribal and they had the normal pride of a people, customs, family relationships and history that any people will have. That all was ripped away when they were taken into slavery.

But in the void left by those crucial relationships, a new brotherhood of African Americans was born. And the pride that has risen up in this new nation is strong and has continued to build throughout the decades. It is built on proud history and proud leadership. There has been much struggle and more difficulties and everything is not perfect by any measure. But the African American people can be proud of how far the culture has come and use that pride to press on toward greater accomplishments in the future.

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