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## The Extent to What America Was a Land of Freedom for Afro-Americans from the Years 1871 to 1965

At the end of the civil war 1865, America was left with many problems. Emancipation Proclamation had been granted two years prior to this which freed all slaves. This was seen as a great step in history as it presented the opportunity for a new life for black Americans, but it was not that simple and came with many consequences. Although “Lincoln came to see the Proclamation as the only alternative God left to emancipation being swept off the table entirely”<sup>1</sup>, but freedom, as we know it, did not exist for black Americans for a very long time after.

In fact, racism increased and black lives were put in jeopardy. Once the slaves were freed in 1865, they became lost. They could stay in the south, where racism had not improved, it had only got worse as the white Americans still viewed them as slaves and not as equals. They could travel north where their lives would be marginally better, with less racism, but starting a new life there would also be difficult.

As ghettos were they're only option for places to live an unsettling place for children but a growing community. Just as black Americans began to see a positive impact on their lives, the Jim Crow Laws were passed which enforced racial segregation in all southern states. These laws contradicted the 15th Amendment – decreeing any man of colour a vote – and even this constitutional right was not able to stop south American states from effectively removing black voting rights.

Between 1871 and 1965 there were many freedom fighters supporting the cause of the black America, including key individuals such as Rosa Parks – who showed how brave she was by disregarding the law, which lead to a mass movement that involved hundreds of other black Americans wanting change which resulted in desegregation on buses; and groups such as the NAACP, CORE and SCLC who marched in non-violent protest and some organisations even hand predominantly white and middle class memberships.

But, even with changes in the law, improving race relations and activists leading the charge for equality was the birth place of black Americans really a land of freedom for them? To help argue this point and to draw a conclusion the focus of this work will be on three topics: education, freedom and legislative rights.

Freedom: Slaves were given their liberty in two acts of law. The first, on 1 January 1863 when

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Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation giving freedom to slaves in the south of America and; the second in 1965 when freedom was extended to all black Americans with the 13th Amendment. Freedom can be defined as “the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants”. But clearly, this definition does not apply to black Americans during the period 1871 to 1965 given that “The struggle for equality argued that abolitionists remained active and militant after emancipation to crusade for equal rights”<sup>2</sup>.

In fact, from the initial act of law freeing slaves, further laws developed rapidly, but not in favour of black Americans. Between 1887 and 1891 the Jim Crow segregation laws developed rapidly. These laws resulted in black Americans having separate amenities including hospitals, schools, restaurants, and public places. For example, In Georgia blacks and white Americans would have their own parks, Louisiana had separate medical facilities and in Alabama blacks would have separate restrooms within the workplace.

There was segregation in jobs with whites being skilled and better paid and blacks being unskilled and lower paid. Eight American states had introduced formal segregation between whites and blacks on trains, in waiting rooms and toilets. The rules were even extended to schools and to outlawing the marriage between two different races. The effect of these laws restricted black Americans from doing many things that would allow them to live normal lives – in fact, it meant that opportunities were taken away.

In 1896 the Supreme Court passed a law that was to shape race relations in America for the next 60 years. In 1892 Homer Plessy, a black American from New Orleans, Louisiana, refused to move out of a seat designated for whites only. Plessy’s case went to court, and his main argument was that his rights had been infringed and that the Jim Crow Laws went against the Constitution.

Plessy lost the case and the Supreme Court ruled that it was acceptable to segregate black and white people, if the facilities being provided were equal. This key decision was known as “separate but equal”: the ruling said: “laws which keep the races apart do not mean that one race is better or worse than another”. What resulted for the black Americans was a life of contradictions. In Plessy’s defence he said “ the Fourteenth Amendment could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon colour, or to enforce social... or a commingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either”.

Although Plessy lost the case his actions helped with the creation of the NAACP, and the NAACP did incorporate Plessy’s 14th amendment arguments before the US Supreme Court in 1954 in the case of *Brow v. Board of Education*, which overruled the ‘separate-but-equal’ laws. Supporting the actions of Plessy, historian Michael J. Klarman a Professor at Harvard Law School who has written four books about civil rights argues that: “There is no direct evidence

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that Plessy led to an expansion of segregation. ”

From Jim Crow to Civil rights: the Supreme Court and the struggle for racial equality. Meaning that on the contrary, he did at least start to apply the brakes and begin to turn people's opinion. Black Americans live by the laws passed and tried to carry on with their everyday lives. However white groups in the south wanted to prevent them from doing so.

According to a study in Toinay and Beck, some 2,805 people were killed by lynch mobs between 1882 and 1930 in 10 southern states – around 2,500 of them were black Americans. As a way of fighting back, the construction of the NAACP began in the early 1900s. This group formed in 1909 partially in response to the Springfield Riots – where two black men were held in Springfield jail for alleged cries against white people.

This spurred a white mob to burn down 40 homes in Springfield's black district and the murder of two black Americans. The NAACP was an influential group as it included black and white Americans, some of which were Mary White Ovington, Henry Moskowitz, W. E. B Du Bois and Ida Wells-Barnett. Once formed, NAACP began to lobby to increase freedom for black Americans. In just one year after formation, the state of Oklahoma passed a constitutional amendment allowing peoples whose grandparents had been eligible to vote had to register without passing a literacy test.

This was passed with the help of the NAACP. Even though some of the NAACP's battles were not won, such as when they called for a boycott of the film Birth of a Nation which portrayed the Ku Klux Klan in a positive light, it still helped to raise this new group's profile.

The two world wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 gave black Americans were a catalyst in providing a sense of freedom by connecting them with their country and white countrymen, aligned under a common cause. Some 350,000 black Americans served in the First World War and this experience widened their possibilities on the question of a sense freedom and racial equality. Black Americans saw this as an opportunity to win the respect of white Americans.

From being involved in the World Wars Black Americans believed their lives changed from an equality point of view as by fighting in a war to protect their country their believed they gained more respect from white Americans. In fact, it did not change as Morris said: “After the world wars, black Americans expected the government to deliver democracy in the Harlem's and Montgomery's of America” ... “It never happened, and blacks began to understand the nature of society they were up against”. (The origins of the civil right movement, Aldon D. Morris).

Legislative rights: While black Americans were imprisoned as slaves, they had no rights whatsoever. However once they were freed, they thought that would change. Gone from their

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lives were the brutalities and the indignities of slave life but the denial of education, marriage and homeownership took their place. After slavery the government in the South instituted laws called the Black Codes.

These laws granted some legal rights to blacks, the right to marry, own property and sue in court, however it made it illegal for blacks to serve on juries, testify whites, or serve in state militias. Many black Americans lived in rural poverty, denied education and wages, under slavery, ex-slaves were often forced by the need of their economic circumstances to rent land from former white slave owners. During reconstruction, which lasted from 1865 to 1877, black Americans took up the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Driving change was the NAACP which challenged the law and won legal victory when the US Supreme Court ruled *Guinn v US* that grandfather clauses were unconstitutional. Also, the NAACP created an anti-lynching campaign and it became a central focus for the group during its early years, even though the NAACP was unable to get federal anti-lynching law passed, the efforts increased public awareness of the issue. It was clear that direct action had a greater effect, which was argued by in the *Origins of the Civil Rights Movement* by Aldon D Morris, African American-American Professor of Sociology and an award winning scholar with interests including social movements, civil rights and social inequality.

He was a professor of sociology at the university of Michigan for 10 years, when he argued that: "The black organisers of the NAACP maintained that aggressive action was required if blacks were to attain their full citizenship rights." During this time seven hundred Black Americans served in elected public office, two of them were US Senators, and fourteen of the US House of Representatives.

The reconstruction Era was not all good news though, as during this time there were plans to end segregation, but prejudices that had existed and white views made this process so much longer. In 1875 the first Civil Rights Act passed, this banded discrimination in public accommodations and on public transportations on land and water.

The Slaves chose to flee to the North, as legal slavery was removed from there. However the population of slaves between the first emancipation and the end of the civil war doubled from 1.8 million in 1827 to more than four million in 1865. So it was hard for southern slave and farm owners to give up a lifestyle where slaves worked for them on a daily basis. A later act that was introduced for black Americans was the Civil Rights Act, this Act ended segregation in public places and banned employment on the basis of race, colour and religion.

The act was firstly proposed by John F Kennedy, but was later passed by Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B Johnson. Johnson took civil rights to another level, building on what Mary

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L Dudziak, a leading US legal historian, President of the Society for Historians of America Foreign relations and a graduate of Yale University, believed: “Although weak on civil rights, Kennedy had made a name for himself in another areas that many black voters cared about”, while: “Johnson himself, an outcast during the Kennedy presidency, would aid that construction by elevating civil rights. ”

In a way, confirming Johnson’s commitment, another act was introduced for black Americans - the Voting Rights act of 1965, signed by President Lyndon B Johnson. There were many reasons why the act came along, but one of the reasons was because once Kennedy had entered the White House in 1961, there was a march in Birmingham, Alabama, where the police brutally attacked nonviolent demonstrators with dogs, clubs, fire hoses and horses, and this was when Kennedy decided to act. The act banned the use of literacy tests, and provided voter registration in areas where less than 50 percent of the Black population had not registered to vote.

Although this act was a triumph for black Americans, the act was often ignored mainly in the south, and where the number of black people was high, and their vote threatened the political state of affairs. So even though this granted a sense of freedom to black Americans, it did not make it a land of freedom. Education: Black Americans, since becoming freed as slaves had struggled with the provision of education. “Since public secondary schools for southern blacks were almost non-existent before 1895 there were really too few instead of too many institutions for negro higher education.

But in January 1866 Texas opened 10 day-time and six night-time schools for black children. There was an enrolment of 1,041 students and six months later Texas had ninety schools. This was a great start for the education of black children. However in 1896 ‘separate but equal’ came a long which denied black children access to the high achieving white schools.

In the 1920s to 1930s the average length of the school term for black children was around four days shorter than white children’s time at school. In the 1950s there were changes in the school system. There were improvements in school buildings and facilities and equality in teachers’ salaries.

With the help of the NAACP, parents attempted to enrol their children in the closet neighbourhood school in 1951, they were each refused enrolment, and their children could only attend segregated schools. In 1954, a man called Oliver Brown’s daughter, had to walk six blocks to her bus stop to ride to her segregated black school which was one mile away, while a white school was seven blocks away from her house. On 19th of May 1954 the NAACP helped Oliver bring a legal case against the education board.

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The court declared that segregation was against the law and the constitution of the USA. The Board of education of Topeka and every other education board were forced to bring segregation to an end. Many schools however refused to implement this, by 1954, in six southern states there were no black children attending schools where there were white Americans.

The Brown v Board of Education of Topeka case, was important as it meant there was a step closer to ending segregation in schools, and it showed strength in single people trying to make a change, but because so many people disagreed with these changes, it couldn't be done. Another huge education event that happened in the Civil Rights Movement was Little Rock Nine. In September 1957, nine black pupils tried to attend a school for white children in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, didn't agree with it and sent the National Guard soldiers to prevent the Black children from attending the school.

The Black community brought the case against the governor and they won, and the soldiers were forced to leave. "It took military intervention to allow the nine children into Little Rock High School" (The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance by William Riches, page 17, Publisher Macmillan International Higher Education, 2017, first edition)

This meant the black pupils now had the right to go to school, and Eisenhower sent 1,000 soldiers to look after them for the rest of the year. Many of the white students treated the black students poorly. One student Minnijean Brown could not stand being at the school and left, however the other 8 stayed to the end of the year, and one of the students Ernest Green graduated.

Even though the immediate results of the Little Rock Nine's actions weren't as such positive, they helped the de-segregation of public schools to take a huge step forward in the South. Overall believe that America was not a land of freedom for Black Americans, it got progressively better, however it wasn't a simple life.

Black American's started off after being freed from slavery they suffered the worst discrimination and brutalities, they thought their life would be getting better when in actual fact it got marginally worse. Even though they were granted civil rights acts and amendments, the right to vote.

These weren't granted just by nothing, black Americans had to fight for these rights, which no one should ever have to do. This shows that America was not a land of freedom for black Americans as from what I said at the start of the essay freedom is "the power or right to act, speak, or think as one wants". This did not apply to black Americans as whenever they acted in wanting freedom it was denied and they suffered hate and discrimination.

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Histography: Historians such as Keven Verney argued that “ the major civil rights campaigns of the 1950s and 60s were not by product of King's persona, but rather a culmination of growing black consciousness”. This quote suggests that Verney believes that it wasn't just King and his partaking in Boycotts and marches that improved and developed the civil rights movement. Verneys view is reliable as he went to university in Cambridge and was awarded a BA in history.

Verneny completed his PhD on black reconstruction in South Carolina and Mississippi from 1861-1877. Because he has a PhD related to black history, shows that he is more intellectual on the civil rights. Also this statement of Verney's was written after the civil rights period, so Verneny can make a fair and justifiable judgement of important leaders such as King compared to minorities, activists and the country as a whole.

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