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### **E-Portfolio Assignment**

I believe that out of all the cultures we have studied in this class that African Americans had the hardest time being accepted in America. The majority of African Americans coming to America came as slaves usually from the "Northwestern and middle western coastal regions." (everyculture: African Americans: The first Africans in America) First, they were captured as slaves, then they were brought to Africa's coast, and then finally they were boarded on to slave ships. Just the transportation to America was horrible enough by itself. "Hundreds of slaves were crowded into the dark, damp holds of slave ships for months at a time with little or no exercise, subsistence diets, and no sanitary facilities." (Olson pg. 96) Because of these horrible conditions thousands of African Americans lost their lives before ever reaching America.

In 1619 the first slave ship arrived in America. At first African Americans entering America were indentured servants. They usually worked for landowners as servants for 7 to 10 years and then they were given their freedom. As more landowners needed more labor, the years of working for white Americans it took to be free kept extending. Then in 1661, for certain cases, criminal slaves were required to be indentured servants life. By 1700 life time servitude became standard practice as white Americans became in need of cheap labor and became concerned with the growing African American population. Soon after, "the law viewed slaves as property, people subject to the absolute legal control by their masters." (Olson pg. 97)

Slavery boomed in the Southern America and most African Americans slaves resided there. African Americans were settled on white landowner's property. "They justified slavery as a source of cheap labor and as a means of controlling African Americans." (Olson pg.101) Slaves were usually uneducated and kept illiterate so that they would be more reliant on white slave owners. Children had to work on the land at a very young age working long, hard hours of labor. "African American children went to work in the fields and would perform back breaking tasks all their lives unless part of a tiny group of skilled workers or domestic servants." (Olson pg. 102) It was a very difficult life.

Although many African American traditions survived, their culture was deeply sacrificed as a result of slavery. Their language was sacrificed and very few African words survived in America. Religion was sacrificed as many slaves converted to Protestantism. Sometimes slave families were sacrificed as they were separated and sometimes sold to other masters. Also, slave children had to grow up quickly because at a young age they were required to obey their masters and work in the fields.

It wasn't until 1863, 244 years after the first slave ship arrived in America, that the Emancipation Proclamation order was issued that gave freedom to slaves in ten of the rebellious states. This gave freedom to a majority of the slaves but not all. It wasn't until 1865 that all slaves were freed. African Americans now had their freedom and were given equality and the right to vote but many white Americans did whatever they could to make sure that African Americans were not given equal rights or treated equally.

Even after African Americans were given their freedom they were still heavily marginalized against. "White Southerners regained enough power to control former slaves, and the imperatives of

slavery if not the institution itself persisted.” (Olson pg. 206) White Americans used many techniques to exclude African Americans from their constitutional right of voting. Physical intimidation was used. There were White Primaries. Poll taxes and literacy tests were used as a method to keep African Americans from voting. It wasn't just in voting that they were marginalized. White Americans used “threats and injury to keep them from skilled jobs and joining trade unions.” (Olson pg. 207) Because of this discrimination many African Americans lived in poverty and poor living conditions. As long as African Americans were poor then they would still be dependent on white Americans.

In the late 1880's African Americans had to deal with Jim Crow laws which involved segregation in transportation, public facilities, education, and even health care. The power structure of this time was white American males. They still held stereotypes towards African Americans. Many of them were still concerned about African Americans having any power. They did what they could to make sure that African Americans were marginalized and unable to economically compete with white Americans. The Supreme Court, which was made up of white American males, decided that Jim Crow's laws were legal as long as it was “separate but equal.” This didn't end up being the case though. African Americans conditions in facilities, schools and health care were considerably inferior to white American's conditions.

In 1968, the Civil Rights Act banned racial discrimination in voting, housing, education, and public facilities. Even though legally this was the end of Jim Crow laws and voting restrictions, there was still discrimination and stereotypes causing tension between different races. Many white Americans still considered themselves to be superior over African Americans. Media helped to further these stereotypes. “Prime-time television shows of the 1960s and 1970s often featured blacks in demeaning roles—those of servants, drug abusers, common criminals, and all-around threats to white society.” (everyculture: African Americans: misconception and stereotypes)

Progress was being made in the rights of African Americans though. They were able to overcome many of the obstacles they faced. By the 1990's “more than 40 African Americans sat in the House of Representatives and Senate. Thousands of blacks held public office at state and local levels.” (Olson pg. 261) African Americans were now part of America's power structure and were able to have a say in their own rights. More African Americans were moving up the social ladder as well. “The Civil Rights movement, by breaking the bonds of segregation and widening the gates of opportunity, had allowed more African Americans than ever to surge above the poverty line and enter the middle class.”(Olson pg. 262)

African Americans have had a huge impact in shaping American society. Their fight for Civil Rights gave all minorities a voice and helped them to legally overcome discrimination. Many African American leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks have become icons in America for demanding equal rights and believing in a day when all races would be treated equally. America's holidays also show the impact of African Americans. Our country celebrates Martin Luther King Jr. day and black history month. Politically African American influence can be seen in the Democratic Party and in electing a black Democratic President. African Americans have made a great impact in the culture of America. African American music has blended with American music. “The complex rhythms of African music, for instance, are evident in the sounds of American blues and jazz.” (everyculture: African Americans: revival of other traditions) Also, Clothing and jewelry often have a traditional African style to them. Even much of the food available in America has African influence such as grits, okra, yams, and peanuts. African American's have made their impact in every aspect of American society.

## Works Cited

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