



## African American Movement Against Racial Discrimination in the US

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Pan-Africanism was founded on the belief that the post-slavery black community in the diaspora had to be unified in order to deal with such problems as limited access to social opportunities, minimal representation at the local and national political levels, and many others. African Americans had few civil liberties restricting their ability to progress both socially and economically in a nation where racial division and discrimination prospered. Pan-Africanism presented a forum where the ethnic group could get together and agitate for inclusion in social decision-making and equity. A century after the movement's formation, black people are still struggling with the same socio-political issues as over 100 years ago albeit some conditions have improved significantly. Black feminism has emerged as one of the key political aspects of the fight against racial discrimination and one that continues to define the African American political landscape.

As Dennis and Dennis (2020) mention, "The history of black social movements in the United States is a history replete with organizations created by blacks, including in some cases white supporters, crafting programs, tactics, and strategies to address the pressing problems confronting a black dispossessed and oppressed population" (p.12). The end of slavery marked the beginning of a new socio-political journey for Africans in the diaspora who were confronted with a new reality of having to adjust to a system so skewed against them that they had no civil rights or liberties enjoyed by

other residents of post-colonial America. The community was forced to adjust to a 'new normal' full of systemic racism and widespread economic disenfranchisement. As Rogers (1955) notes, "the number of lynchings mounted. There were thirty-eight in 1917, sixty-four in 1918, and eighty-three in 1919; and if it was disturbing to note the increase in number, it was even more disturbing to note the increasing sadism of the mobs who conducted them" (p.154). The political system was unwilling to offer suffrage to the newly freed slaves; the economic and legislative structures would not grant them the right to be gainfully employed. Pan-African sentiment began to develop as enlightened diaspora of Africans fought back against systemic discrimination: the community had to find common ground and organize itself to agitate against political oppression.

Collins (2007) explains that the history of the practice "completely revised African and diasporic history by focusing on the masses" but, despite the efforts, the discrimination persisted.

Opportunities were scarce, and the movement was then widespread. The white majority leadership adopted strategies meant to oppress the blacks and nullify their upward mobility. Jim Crow laws were passed to prevent the community from getting the same opportunities available to the whites. The school and public transport systems were desegregated on the basis of color and those used by whites were vastly more advanced than those given to minorities. Public service delivery was immensely discriminatory and administered on the basis of race. Buses and trains had designated areas for minorities and they were legally allowed to sit in those areas only. Taking up public seating meant for a white person was considered as an act of civil disobedience and was punishable by a jail term and a flurry of fines. Signboards forbidding minorities from entering certain neighborhoods were common and the punishment for trespassing as a black person was often severe regardless of the age.

In 1944, George Junius Stinney Jr, a 14-year old African-American, became the youngest ever victim of the capital punishment. As Goff et al. (2014) explain, Stinney was "electrocuted without the benefit of a lawyer, witnesses, or recorded confession." The trial was marred by irregularities from police officers who gave vastly contradicting comments on how the suspect committed a crime to a reverend who was guided by divine powers to identify Stinney as the perpetrator. The suspected offender was not cross-examined or given a chance to offer his statement. There was no physical evidence against George, and there was no way he could be linked to the murders. The all-white jury found him guilty in 10 minutes and Stinney was sentenced to death via

electrocution as he frightfully pleaded his innocence.

Emmett Till, a 15-year old boy, was dragged from his bed in his parent's home at night in 1955 for allegedly whistling at a white woman weeks earlier (Goff et al., 2014). Till was mobbed, disfigured, and lynched by a vigilante as he pleaded for mercy, indicating that he was misidentified. Emmett's cry for justice was not heeded as he was set ablaze and killed without due process. Law enforcement did not find anybody culpable for Till's extrajudicial killing. Emmett and George's cases may be some of the best-known instances of the systemic persecution of black people, which have never been reported. African Americans all across the country have suffered historically from state-sanctioned law enforcement mistreatment that was a part of discrimination by the majority. The civil rights movement was a response to the indiscriminate denial of liberties by the state. Racist individuals in the country's top leadership positions were opposed to the prospect of blacks being equal to their white counterparts, so they established elaborate legal systems to limit the access of African Americans to key social institutions.

The confinement and oppression of the community became a major point of conflict between black people and the government. African Americans were not permitted by many local authorities to live or own property in certain areas. The fight and agitation for civil rights quickly morphed into politics following the government's concession to the demands of the movement. Prominent black activists joined the ranks of the local leadership to ensure that the sociopolitical infrastructure of the country is based on the nondiscriminatory principles. Numerous people of color have occupied the most important positions, from Hiram Rhodes Revels as a senator from Mississippi in 1870 to Barack Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> U.S. President.

The state of black politics is changing, with conservative views being balanced alongside the traditional liberal perspectives. The future of African Americans is maturing and the system is slowly caving to the demands of change. New-age civil liberty movements such as Anti-fascism (Antifa) and Black Lives Matter have gained traction in the recent past. The organizations belonging to the movements have been condemned and demonized by the great part of the ruling elite, who have labeled them a public nuisance. Marches organized by the blacks are regularly disbanded by law enforcement authorities under the guise of civil disobedience. Secret police and other unidentified paramilitary groups have commonly been deployed to brutalize and detain American citizens, often without cause or clear reason.

The unification of the oppressed laid the groundwork for the achievements in terms of civil liberties and equality in America. Pan-Africanism, for example, foresaw the creation of a unified black community that could effectively agitate for its rights and liberties in the face of mounting opposition from the white establishments. Over the decades, the principles advocated by the supporters of the ideology have been steadily achieved. While there is still plenty of systemic racism, black people are significantly less discriminated against as they once were. The community has gone through integration into the American socioeconomic framework. The public has become increasingly sensitive to the plight of African Americans and the level of racial sensitivity has risen remarkably. However, the systemic challenges that were agitated against 100 years ago are still persist today. For example, blacks are still immensely discriminated against in the acquisition of real estate. There are numerous instances when tenancy is denied to African Americans on no reasonable grounds other than their racial identity.

In terms of employment, people with black-sounding names are significantly less likely to receive call backs than those with white-sounding ones. The stereotypic portrayal of African Americans as under-inspired and lazy is prevalent in many predominantly white workplaces. Public education facilities in African American neighborhoods receive far less government funding than those in "whiter" areas. As such, the struggle for liberation as espoused in the antiracist agenda more than a century ago still persists today.

Incidents of police brutality still continue to occur over 100 years after the formation of the movement. The murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor reinvigorated the fundamental motivation of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) and highlighted their primary objectives. The political

elite's insistence that BLM was a violent fringe group was dispelled as the entire world began to appreciate the suffering that black people were going through in America. The murders highlighted the plight of African Americans and the persecution they go through when dealing with law enforcement. The events have positioned BLM central to the country's political reform agenda. The reformation of the criminal justice system is one of the most pertinent issues that the community cares about as the discrimination and oppression of one race is institutional and deeply entrenched in the different aspects of public system.

The BLM movement has brought to the fore female activism and championed for the expansion of women civil liberties and an end to the historical discrimination of the group. African-American feminists have been central to the agitation for women's rights as early as during the suffrage movements in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Women of color were instrumental in applying pressure to male-dominated ruling class who were adamant in suppressing the discourse of change (Mirza, 1997). For millennia, the woman's place had been in the household, and most men were comfortable with the status quo. The lack of female representation in key aspects of the economy and society at large meant the abandonment of their affairs. However, black feminism was commonly shrouded in dysfunction and a lack of structure. As Carby (1982) explains, "the immediate problem of the black feminists was whether the framework could be used to analyze their history of oppression." The group suffered from multifaceted discrimination. Taylor (2017) posits that "She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both" (p.3). As women, they were ostracized and discriminated against on the basis of their gender. Additionally, the gender was targeted by racially-charged politics on account of their ethnic identity. The black culture was patriarchal and male-centered as the primary source of authority and direction was man. African-American women had to challenge the narrative and upstage the social order in their community before attempting to seek change on the national stage.

The past few years have seen a marked increase in black feminism and women's involvement in politics. For the first time in history, a non-white woman will hold the office of the Vice President of the United States. There are many other key contributions that colored feminists have made in the past few decades that have improved the welfare of women, including the fight for marriage equality and pro-choice agenda. The media has been at the forefront of the movement. Anderson

(2008) explains that the portrayal of women of color in powerful positions has normalized the idea of the gender being included into key decision-making institutions of society.

Black Feminism continues to have an immense impact on the political landscape in the United States. The increased representation of the minority group will ensure issues affecting the women are discussed and solutions provided. The agitation for equal treatment in the law enforcement infrastructure is increasing in vigor and enlisting the support of individuals from all ethnicities. The concerns faced by people of color are being discussed in the highest echelons of power and the community is becoming optimistic that systemic change will occur.

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