Discrimination has greatly impacted societies throughout all history. It's an uncomfortable but unavoidable truth that it has shaped our communities, economies, and political beliefs, causing divisive growth. In this essay, we will dig deep into the history and development of discrimination to understand its many forms fully.

Simply put, discrimination is when people are treated unfairly based on their characteristics, like race, age, gender, or religion. It has shown up in countless ways since the beginning of time, often twisting societal rules. From ancient fear of foreigners to modern sexism, society's discrimination has changed within the power politics, economic differences, and cultural norms. We need to spend time understanding this history.

Tracing the Roots of Discrimination

Discrimination has deep roots going back to ancient civilizations. The caste system in ancient India is a profound example. It started around 1500 BCE and has had a significant influence on social stratification in Indian society, with people classified into four varnas, or social hierarchies, each performing specific duties. The untouchables, or Dalits, were considered so low that they were placed outside the system. The system was hereditary, and movement was impossible, enforcing severe discrimination based on birth and occupation.

In ancient Rome, society was divided into patricians and plebeians. Patricians belonged to the ruling class, enjoying political and social privileges, while plebeians were common working-class people, largely excluded from power structures.

Understanding the Concept and Prevalence of Discrimination in Ancient Civilizations

This concept was often seen in class structure, where a person's social role was decided by family background and wealth. Remind yourself that in Ancient Rome, slaves, commoners, and nobles were the levels of power. Besides classism, sexual discrimination was seen too. Ancient Greeks famously belittled women, seeing them as lesser and hence unfit for leadership roles.

Racial discrimination was also widespread, especially in societies associated with slavery, such as Egypt and Rome. In these cultures, foreigners, especially those from conquered territories, were frequently made to do slave labor and were severely mistreated. The discrimination played a role in societal power structures, allowing those at the top to keep their authority and control.

Examining the Impact and Persistence of Discrimination from Ancient Times to Present

Discrimination has always been a part of society, even in ancient civilizations. Various types of discrimination—from gender and race to class, religion, and sexuality—have always been there. These have been kept alive through bias, stereotypes, and social systems that give certain groups an advantage over others. While strides for equality and justice have been made over time, discrimination still exists. This is often because of ongoing biased attitudes and inbuilt prejudices in our societal structures. We need to promote awareness and fight discrimination. Movements like Black Lives Matter and LGBT+ rights campaigns are examples of this push for an inclusive society.

Discrimination in the Middle Ages

It took many forms, such as discrimination based on gender, social status, and religion. The privileged, including the rich, religious leaders, and royalty, often had power and advantages, while the less privileged, such as the poor, women, and religious minorities, faced hardship and exclusion. Take a look at the religious discrimination faced by Jews during the Middle Ages as an example. They experienced severe persecution, often blamed for big problems like the Black Death. They suffered from violence, expulsions, and mass killing. This sort of discrimination grew into social bias that lasted for centuries, ending with the Holocaust in the 20th century.

Let's not forget the societal structures of the Middle Ages, which favored the noble and religious leaders over the common people. The poor lived on the edges of society, with few resources, rights, or chances for advancement. This kind of bias against the poor didn't disappear but just changed forms over time, like class or caste systems. In the Middle Ages, women also faced discrimination based on their gender. They were seen as less than men and mainly had roles as wives, mothers, or nuns. They didn't have the same education, rights, or opportunities as men. Different forms of discrimination from the Middle Ages have significantly impacted how modern society operates.

Industrial Revolution and Colonial Times

Wealthy people owned the industries and became richer, while their workers, stuck in awful working conditions and paid very little, suffered. This caused a significant gap between the rich and poor, leading to discrimination. Let's look further back to the Colonial times, where discrimination was mostly related to race and ethnicity.

Western European countries took over non-European lands and viewed the local people as less worthy, causing racism and discrimination. The slave trade that brought people from Africa to the Americas is a clear model of this racial discrimination that lasted for hundreds of years. When we look at how discrimination has evolved through history, it is clear that whether it was about social class in the industrial times or about race in the colonial era, these harmful attitudes have always existed.

Racial, Ethnic, and Gender Discrimination in the 20th Century

This was because of misguided beliefs that certain races, ethnic groups, or genders were better or worse than others. This happened a lot in societies that spread wrong ideas about different groups. Racial discrimination was a big problem, shaped by segregation laws and rule by foreign powers. In the U.S., rules like the Jim Crow laws encouraged racism. In South Africa, the bad treatment during Apartheid did the same. These were based on the wrong idea that some races are better than others.

Ethnic discrimination was also a problem, especially in countries with different ethnic groups. It led to fights, unfair wealth distribution, and even genocides. A well-known example is the Holocaust during World War II, where Jews were wrongly targeted. Discrimination based on gender was deeply rooted in how society and laws worked, causing inequality. Women usually didn't have voting rights, equal pay, or were able to do certain jobs. Society expected men to be workers and women to focus on home tasks.

The 20th century witnessed a big push for equal rights for women, leading to movements like women's suffrage. So, stop these kinds of discrimination. This is a call that echoes from social reform movements around the world. These include the civil rights movement and feminist movements.

The Civil Rights Movement and Laws Against Discrimination

It began in the late 1800s, during a time of legal racial separation known as Jim Crow laws and strong racial bias. But it reached its height in the 1950s and 1960s. During this time, African Americans, tired of ongoing racial discrimination and unfair treatment, started to push for their rights. Take notice of key figures like

Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, who rose to prominence during this time. They led peaceful protests, civil disobedience, and rallies to put an end to racial separation and unfair treatment. These acts challenged a landmark case in 1896 known as Plessy vs. Ferguson that supported racial separation under the "separate but equal" principle. The government's response to this push for equality came with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law banned all kinds of discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, or origin and greatly altered American society. It made discriminatory practices in work and public areas illegal, dismantling legal hurdles that kept African Americans on the fringes.

Even so, the struggle for equality did not end with the Civil Rights Movement. The introduction of the Affirmative Action policy widened the fight against discrimination. This policy encouraged efforts to include people from sidelined groups like ethnic minorities and women who had been left out due to systemic bias. Despite the Civil Rights Movement making significant strides toward racial fairness, discrimination is still a part of society. It has just changed its form, integrating into new societal standards rather than disappearing entirely.

Summing it All Up

It comes from the human habit of categorizing and ranking people based on their looks while past social systems made these biased views seem okay. Fight against all kinds of discrimination, using the experience from leaders, social movements, and laws creating different results. Despite this, the history of discrimination shows society's ability to survive and change. It serves as both a challenge and a chance, pushing us to constantly check our biases, develop understanding, and aim for a fairer society.