

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: THE ORDEALS AND TRIUMPHS OF A BLACK MAN IN WHITE AMERICA

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**Alam Zeb, Mubashir Ahmad, Irfan Ullah Khan. Bridging The Divide: The Ordeals And Triumphs Of A Black Man In White America-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 20(2), 792-804. ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: African-American, Black nationalism, Black Muslim, Religion**

#### **ABSTRACT:**

The study of any aspect of African-American society necessitates an examination of its history, as their unique experiences have profoundly influenced their lives. Literature serves as a verbal expression of a community's thoughts and emotions, making an understanding of the factors that shape their imagination and thinking patterns crucial for analyzing their literary works. According to Houstoun A. Baker Jr., *Black Literature in America* (1971), much like the Black American population, is largely a product of social circumstances. Studies in Afro-American literature often incorporate socio-historic perspectives. A comprehensive understanding of the black community's history is essential for examining any literary trend or aspect. This particular study aims to assess the influence of black nationalism and black Muslim movements on African-American literature. However, to fully grasp the significance, it is crucial to explore the socio-political and religious implications of the Islamic experience and the underlying conditions that contributed to this phenomenon.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The black community in America encompasses over twenty-two million individuals who are referred to by various names such as Negroes, Afro-Americans, and Coloured people. They form a distinct and separate body from the white majority, comprising a significant portion of the American population. Their identity and naming are influenced by the attitudes and respect shown

towards them. With a history spanning about four hundred years in America, their experiences have shaped them into a unique community. They differ from their African ancestors and the white population they have interacted with for centuries. Richard Wright (1957), a renowned Afro-American novelist, emphasizes that the term "Negro" or "black American" signifies a social construct rather than a racial or biological classification. Ralph Ellison in *Shadow and Act* (1995), throws further light on the matter:

“It is not skin color which makes a Negro American but cultural heritage as shaped by the American experience, the social and political predicament; a sharing of that "concord of sensibilities" which the group expresses through historical circumstances and through which it has come to constitute a subdivision of the larger American culture. Being a Negro American has to do with the memory of slavery and the hope for emancipation and the betrayal by allies and the revenge and contempt inflicted by our former masters after the Reconstruction, and the myths, both Northern and Southern, which are propagated in justification of that betrayal. It involves, too, a special attitude toward the waves of immigrants who have come later and passed us by. (136)”

The black American or Negro can be understood as a social construct shaped by the American experience and its social and political circumstances. To comprehend their literature, it is essential to view it within a socio-historical framework. The history of black people in America began in the seventeenth century when African states' vulnerability and the demand for agricultural labor led to their capture and sale as slaves. The arrival of the first ship carrying slaves in Jamestown marked the beginning of a prolonged period of slave trade, resulting in millions of Africans enduring unimaginable hardships and misery in the new continent.

### *African States and the Christian Purpose in Slavery*

The European Christians who embarked on African expeditions and initiated the profitable trade in African slaves held religious motives in their endeavors. They viewed Africa as a dark continent inhabited by uncivilized and barbaric people practicing their primitive religion, devoid of familiarity with Christianity. The explorers sought to extend the message of Christianity to them, justifying the capture and sale of Africans as a means to bring them closer to Christianity. Slavery was seen as a path to liberate their souls, even if their bodies remained in bondage. Thus, early European slave traders received religious sanction and support from the Church for their reprehensible trafficking (Carson, 2016)

The religious motivation behind the slave trade further fueled and encouraged European involvement in this enterprise. However, regrettably, the European colonizers of Africa neglected to appreciate the culture, civilization, and religious aspects of the Africans from whom they forcibly obtained slaves. Driven by religious fervor and commercial interests, they failed to conduct a genuine study of the intellectual, cultural, and religious uniqueness of their African victims, leading them to unjustly enslave and impose Christianity upon them. C Eric Lincoln (1994) observes:

“... the African moral codes were consistent with the notion of One God of all people, a notion which has not always been honored in the breach in the West. The slave trader saw none of this. He understood less than he saw, and cared about less than he understood. After all, "the English errand in Africa was not (the search [or] a new or perfect community, but a business trip: The great civilizations the Africans had raised at Ghana. at Mele, Songhay, and Timbuktu, their art, their religion, their culture meant nothing to the men who came bringing Bibles, trinkets, and chains.” (Race... 30)

A brief examination of the history of African states, from where the slaves were taken, reveals the fallacy in the European perception of Africans during the seventeenth century. The region from which the majority of Africans were brought to the New World spanned over 3000 miles, extending from the Senegal River in the bulge of Africa to the southern tip of present-day Portuguese Angola. Within this vast expanse, there existed significant variations in the physical characteristics of the inhabitants, diverse languages, and distinct cultures (Rawley, & Behrendt, 2005).

The initial European arrivals on the West Coast of Africa were primarily concerned with trade and financial gains, often overlooking the richness of native cultures. Their perspective was influenced by a Western bias that equated cultural differences with inferiority. However, as more historical materials became available, a more balanced understanding of pre-colonial Africa has emerged. Ethnologist Leo Frobenius, as noted by Fishel and Quarles (1970), approached the study of Africa without preconceived notions of native cultures' inferiority, leading to valuable insights and information. According to Leo Frobenius (1913), who extensively studied African civilizations, the civilizations present in African states during the sixteenth century were not inferior as believed by Europeans. Frobenius discovered information about fifteen Negro kingdoms that showcased the flourishing medieval Muslim civilizations in the western Sudan. These kingdoms boasted imperial organizations, trade networks, arts, temples, priests, and religious rituals, demonstrating a level of civilization comparable to their European counterparts. Notable African kingdoms such as Ghinea, Melli, and Timbuktu thrived before Europeans captured their citizens for the slave trade. The slave trade, supported by the church and driven by the demand for agricultural laborers, established a highly profitable triangular trade route involving England, Africa, and the Americas. The thriving trade in African slaves was built upon the foundations of world trade, which was influenced by factors such as the expulsion of Moors from Spain and internal conflicts within African states. While the epic story of black men in America traces back to the early sixteenth century, their settlement in America as slaves began in the second decade of the seventeenth century.

### ***The Transition: From Indentured Servants to Permanent Slavery***

The forced migration of Africans to the New World began in 1619 when twenty individuals arrived in Jamestown, Virginia. Initially, these early arrivals were treated more like white indentured servants and had the opportunity to gain their freedom after a period of labor. However, as the slave trade grew in the late 17th century, primarily driven by the Royal African Company of England, the

treatment of slaves became increasingly severe, marking a shift towards harsher conditions and permanent enslavement. Wayne Charles Miller, the author of *A Comprehensive Bibliography for the Study of American Minorities* (1976), points out:

“By 1708, there were approximately 12,000 Blacks and 18,000 Whites in the colony, and by 1758, those numbers had increased to approximately 120,000 Blacks and 173,000 Whites. In 1661, Virginia made statutory recognition of slavery, preceded only by Massachusetts in 1641 and Connecticut in 1650. Maryland followed in 1663, New York and New Jersey in 1664, South Carolina in 1682, Rhode Island and Pennsylvania in 1700, North Carolina in 1715, and Georgia in 1750. By that year, the "peculiar institution" had been introduced and recognized throughout the colonies. In part, it had been created out of the white man's fear of the growing number of Blacks in America, and, in fact, in the Carolinas, Whites saw themselves outnumbered by 90,000 to 40,000 in 1765. While the actual reasons for slavery were economic, the white man's rationalization often expressed itself in the argument that Blacks were "heathens" and needed to be enslaved in order to come in contact with the Western world culture and Christianity.”

### ***Slavery in the North and the South***

The conditions of slavery in the southern states differed from those in the northern states. While slavery diminished in the Middle Atlantic area and New England due to humanitarianism and a lack of economic need, the South experienced a radical transformation. The industrial revolution and the cotton gin led to a shift from an agricultural economy to one dependent on cotton production. According to Hawthorne (2010) the increasing demand for cheap labor resulted in a significant rise in the importation of slaves, reaching over two million by 1830, particularly in the South Atlantic and Deep South regions.

### ***Slavery in the Early Period: Understanding the Status of the Slaves***

During the era of slavery, black individuals had no rights except for the right to work without earning money or making progress. They were prohibited from socializing with whites or freed blacks, assembling without white supervision, defending themselves, leaving the plantation without permission, testifying in courts, and owning firearms. Crimes committed against black women or slaves by white men were treated as violations of property rights. Slaves who violated the rules set by white slave owners faced severe punishments, either through regular courts or specially established slave tribunals. Runaways were common, leading to the creation of quasi-militia systems to prevent escape. Slave owners considered lost slaves as financial losses, and the high prices of slaves led to extensive breeding practices. The system of slavery disrupted African family life by separating family members and causing immense suffering (Franklin & James, 2015).

### *The Plight of Africans in Slavery*

The Plight of African Americans in America has been one of enduring hardships since their arrival. Against their will, they have contributed significantly to the development of modern America, shaping its agriculture, industry, and overall progress. The prosperity enjoyed by present-day America owes a great deal to the four hundred years of relentless efforts by the black community. However, beneath America's superficial image of an ideal state lies a society riddled with internal conflicts and unresolved tensions, particularly in Black-White relationships. Racism has permeated institutions, laws, and culture, defining the black man's predicament throughout American history. Richard Wright (1957) describes the history of African Americans as a struggle against a world that systematically oppressed them. Despite their immense contributions, the genuine response of America to its black citizens raises questions of gratitude and recognition. Understanding the diverse changes and transformations that African Americans have undergone over the years is crucial in comprehending their story.

The Africans, forcefully uprooted from their native lands and brought to the unfamiliar surroundings of seventeenth-century America, would have felt completely displaced. They were subjected to the cruel experiences of slavery in a foreign world, torn apart from their families and accustomed way of life. The Africans experienced a profound loss of their cultural identity, religion, language, and civilization. Life in America became a gradual process of erasing their African heritage, leading to a loss of their native languages as they were forced to adopt English. They also had to relinquish their cultural practices, myths, folklore, and history. Their names were changed, and they were compelled to abandon their religions and embrace Christianity. Many enslaved Africans were Muslims or adhered to various African tribal religions (Mbiti, 2015). However, their white masters saw them as property rather than human beings, disregarding their religious and spiritual beliefs. The African slaves fiercely resisted the attempts to Americanize and Christianize them, as it meant losing their true African identity. Despite their resistance, their efforts to preserve their Africanness were brutally suppressed by the white slave masters. The three centuries of slavery endured by Africans in America were characterized by the denial of justice and basic rights. Ironically, the development of the new world in America was built upon the unpaid labor of slaves, while simultaneously destroying the rich and ancient African civilization of its black inhabitants.

After a period of resistance, black people in America were compelled to suppress their feelings and protests, accepting the realities of their new world. Over time, they passively embraced their new roles and suppressed attempts to protect their faith, culture, and identity. The process of reconciliation was largely complete by the second and third generations of slaves, as they had relinquished their African identity and adjusted to their circumstances. According to Eyerman (2001) this new identity was neither African nor that of their white slave masters but was marked by moral and cultural degradation, a loss of purpose in life, and a mechanical existence focused on survival. They were molded into a new race with a deep-seated sense of inferiority, culturally,

morally, and intellectually. The loss of identity eroded their self-respect, and the harsh experiences of slavery and low living standards intensified their feelings of inferiority. As a result, black men gradually became "Negroes" with a distinct mindset and thought patterns shaped by their new roles. Occasional acts of resistance and violence were not driven by a desire to preserve their African identity but rather as reactions to the injustices inflicted upon them and the denial of their rights as human beings.

### *The Concepts of Black Inferiority and Arguments Supporting Slavery*

According to Richard Wright (1957), being a Black American is a social construct that emerged in the United States. The term "Negro," used by White people, does not refer to the entire race but to a specific group that developed under the unique circumstances of life in the United States. One of the key factors in shaping this group was the forced removal of Africans from their homeland and the subsequent loss of their identity through slavery in America. The white slave owners propagated various doctrines, both religious and scientific, to establish the inherent inferiority of black people. However, these doctrines lacked true scientific or biblical support. Instead, the profit-driven slave owners twisted science and religion to suit their own interests. Scientists and church officials misused their influence to justify the institution of slavery. Over time, slavery underwent a significant transformation, evolving from a small-scale, quasi-domestic system associated with manual farming and manufacturing into a vital component of an expanding agricultural economy that utilized machinery and supplied raw materials like cotton to fuel capitalist industries in the northern states and England.

In the late 1830s, following Colfax's theory, a body of scientific literature emerged aiming to prove that black people belonged to a separate and permanently inferior species. This culminated in the theory of polygenesis in the early 1840s, with scientists like Dr. Samuel George Morton (1854) attempting to establish that black people did not descend from Adam but were a distinct and subhuman species originating in southern Africa. During this time, as slavery thrived and became a prominent institution, it attracted numerous defenders. Leslie H. Fishel Jr. and Benjamin Quarles (1970), in their documentary history of black people, provide evidence of this. One prominent defender was George Fitzhugh, a Virginia lawyer who wrote books and articles justifying the South's way of life. Fitzhugh (2009) advocated for strict control over education and literature, aiming to prevent any criticism of slavery. He based his viewpoint on a so-called universal law of slavery, stemming from his belief in the inherent inequality among people.

James Henry Hammond, a wealthy plantation owner from South Carolina, presented the "mudsill" theory in a Senate speech in 1858 (Faust, 1980)). According to this theory, society is divided into two groups, with one group exercising superior functions and the other inferior ones. Hammond's articulation of this theory received significant attention and criticism from Northern opponents of slavery. John H. Van Evrie, a reputable physician from Washington D.C. and a pro-slavery advocate, considered black people to be of a lower order of humanity (Baynton, 2013). He believed that they constituted a

different species from white people, leading him to support the "plurality" theory of human origin, which suggested that mankind did not originate from a single center of creation. Overall, these scientific theories and defenders of slavery propagated racist ideologies and sought to provide intellectual justification for the subjugation and inferior treatment of black people.

### *The Christian Perspective on Slavery: Exploring Religious Views and Practices*

Throughout history, compelling evidence has demonstrated the active involvement of Christianity in promoting and supporting the enslavement of Africans in America. The coastal regions of West Africa, where the captured natives were sourced and transported to the New World, were predominantly influenced by Islam and ruled by Muslim kings. These areas naturally became targets for Christian missionaries who sought to convert these Muslim states of Africa to Christianity (Adogame, 2010). It is important to note that Portuguese Christianity was not the sole instigator of slavery in Europe. During the late fifteenth century, under the rule of King Enrique III of Castile, gold and African slaves were traded in Seville. Queen Isabella, the influential patron of Columbus, attempted to curtail this practice, but her efforts were unsuccessful due to the prevailing pro-slavery sentiment within the Church. The Church's perspective was that it was more favorable for a heathen to have physical bondage and a free soul than the other way around. Consequently, in 1501, the Spanish crown even issued an edict allowing the sale of Africans, both newly captured and those who were already converted to Christianity, in America. These Christianized black individuals were even employed for the purpose of converting the indigenous populations (Wa Mutua, 1999).

In their zeal to Christianize Africans through the institution of slavery, the Catholics outpaced the Protestants. Catholic missionaries did not consider enslaving Africans as sinful. On the contrary, they viewed the slave trade as a benevolent means of introducing black barbarians to Christian civilization. The Protestants, in contrast to the Catholics, relied more on racism than religion to justify slavery. They were less enthusiastic about Christianizing black Africans compared to their Catholic counterparts (Gerbner, 2018).

As previously mentioned, Christianity's missionary interests were used to rationalize the enslavement of Africans. Even after the black slaves were baptized on American soil, the doctrines and arguments of Christianity continued to be employed to defend the perpetuation of slavery. C. Eric Lincoln (1994) sheds further light on this issue, stating that Christianity in America had been adjusted to pacify and control black individuals in the interest of upholding the immoral institution of slavery. The Church taught the black slave that he should not complain, as his entire existence depended on his white master. It was presented as God's will. Escaping slavery would be seen as an unforgivable sin, tantamount to stealing the master's God-given property—namely, the slave himself. Taking one's own life was likewise prohibited since it involved destroying property that did not belong to the slave. A slave who committed suicide would not receive any Church rites and would be condemned to eternal damnation. However, if the slave accepted their situation with love and

patience, remaining loyal and obedient to their masters in this world, they would be rewarded in the afterlife. It was believed to be God's will, and it became the white man's burden to ensure that this will was fulfilled.

The addresses made to them by the Church, in the words of Gilbert Osofsky (1967) in his *The Burden of Race*, were as follows:

“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters ..., with fear and trembling ... as unto Christ ... Remember, God required this of you ... There is something so becoming and engaging in the modest, cheerful, good-natured behavior that a little work done in that manner seems better done ... It also gains the goodwill and love of those you belong to ... Besides ... your murmuring and grumbling is against God who hath placed you in their service. (40)”

In summary, Christianity played a significant role in upholding and perpetuating slavery in America. Its influence had profound psychological and spiritual effects on the enslaved individuals. However, throughout history, there were notable individuals who, driven by their humanitarian values and commitment to truth, critically observed and vehemently opposed the institution of slavery. Figures such as Frederick Law Olmstead, Harriet Martineau, and Alexis De Tocqueville used their writings to shed light on the deplorable and heartbreaking conditions endured by enslaved black people.

### ***Different Roles and Realities: The Contrast between House Slaves and Field Slaves***

When examining the plight of African slaves in America, it becomes evident that not all slaves experienced the same deplorable conditions. There were varying levels of suffering depending on the roles they were assigned. Slaves in urban areas, for example, had the opportunity to interact with free Black individuals and partake in the excitement of city life, leading to a relatively freer and more engaging existence compared to their counterparts in rural settings. Even on plantations, there existed a distinction between house slaves and field slaves based on their responsibilities. House slaves, who resided in the main house and had closer contact with civilized life, enjoyed relatively more comfortable conditions. Over time, they would evolve into a middle-class group within the Black community. On the other hand, field slaves, who bore the brunt of the oppressive system, endured significant hardships and were deprived of the enriching experiences of civilization (DaSilva, 1947). This majority of slaves experienced a high degree of cultural and moral deterioration.

In addition to enduring the cruel and degrading conditions of slavery, African slaves in America were systematically deprived of their basic rights. They were prohibited from marrying their chosen partners and establishing stable family lives. The few family bonds they formed were often shattered through forced separations. Moreover, slaves were denied the opportunity to acquire literacy and education, as teaching them how to read and write was strictly forbidden by law. Their voices and expressions were suppressed, and they were stripped of the comforts and privileges of civilized life. Treated as mere commodities, the African slaves in America underwent a dehumanizing experience that resulted

in a cultural and moral decline over time. Consequently, they became ill-suited for many tasks that are typically undertaken by civilized individuals, despite their rich heritage.

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, as living conditions worsened for African slaves in America, there were widespread outbreaks of violent retaliation and resistance. Several significant rebellions took place, such as the Louisiana slave rebellion in 1811, the Charleston revolt organized by Denmark Vesey in 1822, and the Henrico county insurgency led by Gabriel Prosser and Jack Bowler in 1800. Nat Turner's rebellion in 1831, where more than sixty white individuals were killed, stands out as one of the most well-known instances of resistance. Although these rebellions were brutally suppressed, resulting in the loss for the black population, other forms of resistance emerged, including the Underground Railroad. This secret network, supported by the Abolitionist Movement, facilitated the escape of over 100,000 slaves to the North between 1810 and 1850. These activities heightened tensions between the Northern and Southern states, and when coupled with Abraham Lincoln's election as president in 1860, eventually led to the intense Civil War. The war devastated the Southern states both physically and culturally, and it contributed to the weakening of the institution of slavery in those regions (Stevenson, 1997).

### *Emancipation Proclamation*

By the time Abraham Lincoln won the presidential election in 1860, the Abolitionist Movement, led by both White and Black activists, had gained significant strength and influence. The outbreak of the Civil War shortly thereafter compelled the federal government to address the issue of emancipating the slaves in the Southern states.

Fishel and Quarles (1970) note: "As the war dragged on into the middle of its second year and the death toll rose sharply, there was a growing sentiment in the North to free the slaves of the enemy. With enlistment dwindling and manpower needs becoming more acute, the slaves of the enemy represented a source of strength both as military labourers and as soldiers." (432)

Under the pressure of military demands during the Civil War and influenced by leaders and media figures in the North, Abraham Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation in which he warned the rebellious states that if they did not surrender by January 1, 1863, their slaves would be declared free. When the Confederacy ignored the ultimatum, the president issued the Final Emancipation Proclamation on the specified day. This proclamation not only declared the freedom of slaves owned by rebels but also encouraged them to refrain from violence, work diligently, and join the armed forces.

Although the Emancipation Proclamation lacked the grandeur and moral nobility associated with significant acts, it was driven by the military needs of the government. Slave owners were unwilling to relinquish their valuable property, and the proclamation itself was a formal declaration that did not reflect a genuine acceptance of Black people as equals. Nevertheless, it marked the official end of the institution of slavery, which had persisted for three centuries.

The post-Civil War reconstruction period in the devastated South brought renewed hope for African Americans. They had the opportunity to participate in political processes and were elected to state governments as representatives, senators, and even lieutenant governors in states such as Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, South Carolina, and Florida. However, these political gains and prospects for economic improvement were short-lived. White individuals were unwilling to accept the newfound fortunes of former slaves (Graff, 2016).

### *Seeking Pathways: Black Quest for Equality*

Even after the emancipation proclamation, Black individuals in the southern states faced racial discrimination, social segregation, and a pervasive sense of insecurity. Although they were constitutionally recognized as American citizens with equal rights, they were treated as inferior and subjected to discrimination in various aspects of life, including education, employment, politics, and religion. The prevalent race riots and mistreatment by white individuals further exacerbated their difficulties. In response, notable figures such as Booker T. Washington (1902), W. E. B. DuBois (1903), and Martin Luther King Jr. (1964) emerged to address the challenges faced by Black Americans in their own unique ways. These individuals, along with influential movements and organizations like the Niagra Movement, NAACP, National Urban League, CORE, SNCC, and the Civil Rights Movement, played a significant role in advocating for the rights and addressing the issues faced by the Black community in the post-emancipation era.

Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois had contrasting perspectives on addressing the challenges faced by Black Americans during their time. Washington, through his autobiography and other writings, advocated for Black individuals to acquire agricultural and industrial skills, adopt puritan values of thrift, morality, and perseverance, and focus on developing a skilled workforce before striving for higher goals. He founded the Tuskegee Institute to promote these ideals and became a highly influential figure from 1895 to 1915. On the other hand, W. E. B. DuBois emphasized the importance of gaining respect and dignity for Black people. In his book "Souls of Black Folk" published in 1903, he strongly criticized Washington's approach and presented a sociological and historical argument in favor of broader education for Black individuals and meaningful resistance against discriminatory laws such as Jim Crow that deprived them of political rights and economic opportunities. DuBois's ideas, in retrospect, appear more valid as awareness grew among Black communities across the nation, both in the North and South, that they needed to organize and fight for their rights.

In 1905, DuBois, along with William Monroe Trotter, established the Niagara Movement, a significant protest organization. Their inaugural meeting near Niagara Falls, New York, where Henry Highland Garnet had called for a slave revolt and strike in 1843, led to the issuance of a proclamation demanding an end to all forms of racial discrimination. The following year, at their first annual meeting, they explicitly called for political, social, and civil rights for Black Americans equal to those enjoyed by white Americans.

The NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), which originated from the Niagara Movement, was established in 1909. Led by DuBois as its director of publicity and research, the organization swiftly launched campaigns against lynching and brutality, advocated for legal protection of Southern Blacks, and aimed to expand economic opportunities for Black individuals nationwide (Nahal & Matthews Jr, 2008). The creation of *The Crisis* magazine, the first significant national publication giving voice to Black Americans, was a major achievement of the NAACP. Another organization, the National Urban League, was formed in 1911 with the goal of assisting Blacks in major cities (Gary, R. B., & Gary, 1994). The Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were other prominent organizations that gained popular support in the fight against discrimination (Strecker, 2017). The race riots resulting from white supremacist violence in the early 20th century accelerated the activities of these movements. Martin Luther King Jr. championed non-violent resistance, which became a significant approach in the revival of African Americans during the post-emancipation era. The Montgomery bus boycott, led by King, symbolized a concentrated effort to bring meaningful change to American society through organized passive resistance. The formation of Black churches was another response to the hostile conditions faced by African Americans due to segregation and discrimination in white churches. Although Black churches existed as early as 1778, their significance grew after the abolition of slavery. Black Baptist churches, established during the American Revolution, provided a space where Black communities could gather and contemplate their plight. These churches served as the Black man's government, social club, secret order, espionage system, political party, and catalyst for freedom and revolution, as described by C. Eric Lincoln (1964).

## CONCLUSION

The organizations and movements advocating for African American rights were limited by the constraints imposed by white American society. While they fought for equality and basic rights, they were unable to address the deep-rooted issues of dignity, self-respect, and cultural awareness that were crucial for a genuine revival of the black community. These organizations focused solely on the history of African Americans since their arrival in America, neglecting their rich heritage and the knowledge of their pre-arrival past. Consequently, even those African Americans who enjoyed relatively better conditions suffered from a sense of inferiority and a lack of psychological fulfillment. This led black intellectuals to embark on a serious exploration of their past and a search for a dignified and valuable heritage.

For a considerable period, the average middle-class African American sought assimilation with the white population in various aspects of life. However, these attempts, often clumsy and awkward, were unsuccessful because the white majority was unwilling to accept them as equals. The persistent view held by white society was that a black individual, regardless of their background, was simply "a darky." Consequently, even after the abolition of slavery, the ex-slaves found themselves in a state of crisis, marked by misadjustments and a loss of identity. It was from this backdrop that the quest for true identity and a deeper understanding of their history emerged. The movements of black

nationalism that emerged in the mid-20th century were a direct result of this search and exploration.

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