The United States and the Effects of Slavery

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In the United States, racial inequality has been and remains to be a hot button issue. Racial violence in the United States throughout its existence has been shocking, from before the country was founded up until today. The institution of slavery was the backbone of the colony's economy, especially in the agrarian South. After American independence, the economy continued to depend on slavery up until after the Civil War, when slavery was abolished. This, however, did not spell the end of racial tension. In fact, racial inequality remained pronounced with the establishment of segregation and the widespread violence of acts such as lynching. To this day, racial inequality remains a part of American society and a focal point of movements for change. The institution of slavery, which as a practice had been around for centuries, received a large boost with the discovery of the New World. At first, African slaves were brought mostly to the Caribbean islands to help with the production of sugar. The practice of indentured servitude was also widespread and the distinctions between owners and slaves or employees were less dependent on race. However, according to Louis Filler, a scholar of American history, the year 1700: [marked] a turning point in its American history, since slave trading had been controlled by a monopoly, the Royal African Company. The ending of this monopoly in 1698 quickened a free enterprise impulse in slave trading: one which brought new thousands of Negroes to colonies from the Carolinas to Massachusetts… (Filler 12) After this point, the distinctions between African slaves and their white equivalents grew and racial differences became an integral part of enslavement in the Americas. The enslavement of Africans in the Southern United States was normalized and considered by many to be necessary to the South's economic success. Around the American Revolution, the majority of slaves working in the United States were in the South, working with crops such as rice, tobacco and cotton. Slavery was a larger part of the Southern economy than the Northern economy, leading to an economic and social division that would fuel unrest and eventually lead to the Civil War, when the Southern states

formed the Confederate States of America and attempted to secede from the Union. As such a large part of the developing United States' economy, many laws came into play regulating the lives of enslaved African Americans. The goal of such laws was "to preserve the individual slaveholder's right in his slave as property and to ensure the slave's helplessness in conceiving or furthering insurrectionary actions" (Filler 23). When this system was challenged, bloody events such as the Nat Turner uprising in August of 1831 occurred, leading to the deaths of 57 white people and the slaves who had attacked them. However, abolitionist sentiments continued to grow around this time, gaining power from African-American orators such as Frederick Douglass, who was a former slave. He was not the only slave or former slave to resist in both open and covert ways, including but not limited to escaping and singing spirituals. These methods of resistance and the growing division between North and South led Southern politicians to seek secession as a way to uphold their goals and an economy dependent on slavery. This attempt at secession was the cause of the Civil War from 1861 to 1865. In 1865, the North was declared the victor and the long process of Reconstruction and the reintegration of freed former slaves into Southern society began. Reconstruction was a difficult period for the United States that contributed to the presence of violent racial conflict. Though amendments to the Constitution protected the rights of African American citizens, new Black Codes were created and "intended to control the Negroes' privileges, [as they] were formulated by southern whites seeking to reassert their supremacy in the new social order" (Filler 60). Though these codes were suspended, informal methods of reinforcing the status quo became prominent, including the formation of the first Ku Klux Klan that was designed to commit hate crimes. Reconstruction formally ended during the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876, with the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. However, this did not in any way signify that racial equality had been reached. In fact, Jim Crow laws stepped in to replace the former Black Codes. Public services were segregated, leading to separate schools, restrooms and drinking fountains based upon race. Though 1896's Plessy v. Ferguson reinforced the opinion that racial segregation held the races to be

"separate but equal," this was hardly the case. The quality of resources that students received in schools for African American children were blatantly subpar compared to those of their white compatriots. Despite obvious inequality, these regulations would continue to stand until Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, halfway through the next century. The legacy of inequality was addressed in the Civil Rights Movement throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The goal of this movement was to stop racial segregation and discrimination using civil resistance, which was made up of nonviolent protest and civil disobedience. The first of these goals came to pass, but the second goal is still a work in progress. Systemic racism lingers in the economic and social pillars of America's people and perspective, including in the highest law of the land – the 13th amendment of the Constitution intentionally contains a loophole for racial criminalization to continue says Khalil Gibran Muhammad. Racial bias exists in every facet of society, including law enforcement. The murder of George Floyd by a cop kneeling on his throat brought out demonstrators across the United States and the world. Lynching was just officially outlawed in 2022, an extremely delayed reaction to last century's torture. Today's American society is still struck with ingrained racism, born out of the institutionalization of slavery on the plantation system. Modern American society is still reverberating from the injustice of the plantation.

Endnotes:

Filler, Louis. Slavery in the United States. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998. Print.

Khalil Gibran Muhammad. "The Foundational Lawlessness of the Law Itself: Racial Criminalization & the Punitive Roots of Punishment in America. *Daedalus* 151 (1) (2022): 107-120.