Shonta Turman

Can Laws Change Attitudes

“Things do not change because the law changes” (James Baldwin) this quote is very powerful, can laws change the attitude of men. How do you change the hearts of those who inflict harm to others based on culture differences? Today The United States of America is viewed as one of the most enriched culturally diverse countries. Why are they viewed this way? The United States of America contains a highly diverse population, unlike China a country that is largely incorporated with native people. Many say The United States of Americas diversity is a direct correlation to global immigration. Immigrants who have come to America in hopes of living in a society of equal and fair social, political and an economic culture that demonstrate respect for all. In addition to free-will migration, America now, then known as The New World, engaged in slave trade. They enslaved the natives of the land and imported African for the purpose of slavery. The United States is relatively young by world standards, being barely more than 200 years old. With the United States youthfulness and its ability to accommodate diversity, how could the existence of oppression to those in America deemed “other” occur? The problem is the attitude of the people have not adjusted to the law of the land. I will show how the law have fallen short of its responsibility to its citizens. Laws that have been passed with the intent to protect the people have criminalize them and crippled their faith in the law for justice. This paper will examine the oppression of blacks and women in America by using the statistics to show that changes in the law did not create an equal opportunity for blacks or women.

In order to understand the state of America today we have to explore its foundation. According to American history, in 1492 Christopher Columbus discovered America (The New World). Researchers have uncovered that Christopher Columbus was not the first explorer to make a successful round-trip voyage across the Atlantic Ocean, although he was the last explorer to reach America. Five hundred years before Columbus, a band of Vikings led by Leif Eriksson established a settlement and even before that some scholars say, America have been visited by seafaring travelers from China, and possibly visitors from Africa and even Ice Age Europe. This New World discovery was a land inhabited by a group of people (the Indians) hence “natives”. America foundation was established on the basis of deceit. The settlers in the New World needed to establish a labor force therefore they solicited the natives. Every European nation that colonized North America used Indian slaves for construction, plantations and mining. The slave trade began in the 1500s with the Spanish incursions into the Caribbean and Christopher Columbus’s taking of slaves. As the governor of Hispaniola (the island that house Haiti and Dominican Republic) he forced the Taino Indians to labor in the Spanish fields and mines and bought Taino slaves to Spain on his journey. The Indian population deceased due to European diseases, brutal treatment and lack of reproduction. Due to these elements a new source of labor was required. Spanish born Africans served as slaves, then in 1518 the Spanish king allowed the importation of slaves directly from Africa and the Atlantic slave trade to the western hemisphere began. Between the early 1500s and 1863 African served as a slave work force. The slave was considered property of the slave master just as a piece of tangible property. Something you could buy, sell, and have complete control over. The slave owners made the slave depend on them infusing fear in them by using brutal punishment. They were prohibited from learning to read and write, and their behavior and movement was restricted. Stripping them of their culture and introducing them to divide and conquer. Dividing them into social class (the advantaged house slave and the common field slave) and giving rewards to the obedient slave and inhumanely beating the one considered rebellious.

Americans have been under the impression that the Civil War was fought to put an end to slavery. The reason for the Civil War seems as if it was a battle of political and economic power between the north and south. After a year into the war the North feared they would lose if the South elected help from an outside country. Therefore the north decided to do something radical to ensure its victory. The 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, the abolishment of slavery decree. The emancipation Proclamation decree freed the slaves in the south, although the government of the north did not have jurisdiction to enforce it. Lincoln was careful to write it constructively for the union army as he feared he would lose the favor of his armed forces. He emphasized that the emancipation was a way to shorten the war by taking the southern resources and hence reducing Confederate strength. The emancipation proclamation led to the proposal and ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which formally abolished slavery throughout the land. (ushistory.org)

In 1896 Plessy V. Ferguson made legal that segregated public facilities were constitutional as long as the black and white facilities were equal to each other. In 1954 Brown v. Board of Education, acknowledged as one of the greatest Supreme Court decisions of the 20th century, unanimously held that the racial segregation of children in public schools violated the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, which ended segregation in public places and banned employment discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin is considered one of the crowning legislative achievements of the civil rights movement. The voting rights act of 1965 into law aimed to overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels. Five decades since these provisions were written in to law and not much has changed for the black American.

Many would argue that blacks have just as many opportunities as whites, therefore the black situation is due to laziness. Where did this notion of laziness stem from? The image of lazy black man is something that dates back into the time of slavery. White slave owner or overseers depicted the black man as lazy to ensure that black men would carry out the tasks that they were given. These slave owner looked at black men as savages who were equal to animals and needed to be controlled. This was one way they used to dehumanize blacks. The understanding was blacks are lazy, deeply unintelligent and violent these attributes would portray these unassuming, mindless men are in need of guidance. In the eyes of white America, blacks lack self-reliance because the black race was unintelligent, therefore would need help from the privilege whites for their very survival. On March 12, 2014 Rep. Paul Ryan appeared on Bill Bennett morning radio show, during the interview, Paul Ryan spoke about the “inner city” he said, men do not want to work they are lazy, these men come from generations of men whom do not think about working. These men have to learn the value and culture of work. Paul Ryan referenced the writing of Charles Murray in his interview, whom is a white nationalist. Charles Murray is a scientist in America, using racist pseudoscience and misleading statistics to argue that social inequality is caused by the genetic inferiority of the black and Latino communities, women and the poor. According to Murray, disadvantaged groups are disadvantaged because, on average, they cannot compete with white men, who are intellectually, psychologically and morally superior. (SPLC) This remind me of something James Baldwin said in an interview “whatever you see in other people is what you see in your mirror what you try to do is isolate what you see in the other person-which is you”. When you have well educated individuals such as Charles Murray whom is considered one of the most influential right-wing ideological architects of the Reagan era say shocking, dishonest and racist accusation towards blacks, latinos and women it shows that they are cowards. “The hardest thing for someone to do is to forgive someone they know they wronged- white people have to have the nigger to justify the crime- so they don’t see the person”. (James Baldwin) But when you know who you are, you are not confused, Emersons Self Reliance stated, Trust thyself: every heart vibrates to the iron string. Accept the place the divine providence has found for you, the society of your contemporaries, and the connection of events. Great men have always done so, and confided themselves childlike to the genus of their age, betraying their perception that the Eternal was stirring at their heart, working through their hand”. As an oppressed people there is a need to want more to know more to push yourselves pass what is considered the limits. “ not cowards fleeing before a revolution, but redeemers and benefactors, pious aspirants to be noble clay under the Almighty effort let us advance on Chaos and the dark”. (Emerson)

This country is filled with injustice, some say it was built on inequality. Portraying the propaganda in which this is the home of the brave and land of the free. In the case Plessy v. Ferguson, Homer Adolph Plessy who was seven- eighths Caucasian with a light skin complexion was arrested when he sat in the white section of the train in the state of Louisiana and refused to move. The question raised were Louisiana’s law mandating racial segregation on its trains an unconstitutional infringement on both the privileges and immunities and the equal Protection clauses of the Fourteenth Amendment? The conclusion was 7 votes for Ferguson and 1 vote against. The courts finding was that the state law was within constitutional boundaries. The justices based their decision on the separate-but-equal doctrine, that separate facilities for blacks and whites satisfied the Fourteenth Amendment. Separate but equal, may have worked if the facilities was equal. This law created inequality and marked one race as inferior to the other, due to the run down conditions of the black facilities. These conditions were to ensure blacks, that they were second-rate citizens.

On May 17 1954 , the U.S Supreme Court ruled unanimously that racial segregation in public school violated the fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which says that no state may deny equal protection of the laws to any person within its jurisdiction. The law has changed but what was the aftermath? Monday May 17, 1954 the same day as the Supreme Court decision white citizens’ council’s formally organized throughout the south to preserved segregation and defend segregated schools. The white citizens’ council movement in Mississippi was led by Thomas Pickens Brady, a circuit court judge. The decision was from Supreme Court, the highest court of the land, yet someone whom swore to uphold the law was inciting the citizens to disobey. Autherine Lucy the first black student to be admitted to the University of Alabama in 1956. She enrolled on February 3, 1956, but was expelled for her own safety three days later. This case went to court but was forced to be withdrawn due to lack of support. Lucy’s expulsion was finally overturned in 1988. In 1963 was the first year other black students was allowed to attend. In 1957 seventeen black students were selected to attend an all-white high school. The day before school opened the Governor called the National Guard to surround the school he declared blood would run in the streets if black students attempted to enter. Upon the students arrival they were greeted by angry white mobs who screamed obscenities and racial slurs at the students. This behavior took place at a number of schools after this ruling. Today all people have the right to attend the same public schools without being publicly harassed. Today in New York City, the public school system is divide into social class, the school are broken into zones based on the child’s address to ensure the same social class of children attend the same schools. The public school that are based in areas of poverty is inferior to the schools that are considered middleclass areas, inferior based on the available funding and social activities that are distributed.

The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, integrated business, public facilities and grated blacks a stunning new power. No longer could blacks and other minorities be denied service simply based on the color of their skin. The act also barred discrimination by The Civil Rights Act sparked fear and more turmoil. Black American remain unreasonably impoverished, imprisoned and under educated. Outraged by police brutality coupled with corrupted trials against blacks, black citizens violently lased out in protest, burning and looting buildings and businesses. This response has occurred over a span of decades as the injustice suffered by the system in which swore to protect and serve. Do you recall the 1965 Watts riot, Newark 1967, Los Angles 1992, Ferguson 2015 and Baltimore 2015? Countless black lives have been lost due to the authorities, the very institution that we rely on for help are the ones bringing destruction to the people. The Voting Right Act, allowed voting registration without restrictions from local states that required voter to pass a literacy test, pay poll taxes, and the Mississippi law requiring all prospective black voters have their name published in the new paper for two consecutive weeks before registering to vote. Today the felon is restricted in most states from voting. Some may argue they may not have respect for the law, they lack trustworthiness or they are just criminals. The facts, this is a way to keep the black vote uncounted for. When we have 1 in 11 black males go to jail in his lifetime, the odds are millions of black men would not be able to vote throughout his life. Over the years, a number of inmates have been released from prison because of the results of DNA testing proving their innocents. This test have proven the justice system is flawed. This country could possibly charge, trial and sentence an innocent person and when they are released from prison they find out that they are not allowed to vote, because voting is not a right it is a privilege that they no longer have.

The laws that served as a protection for women’s rights such as, 1963 The Equal Pay Act, 1964 Civil Rights Act, 1965 Week v. Southern Bell, 1965 Griswold v. Connecticut, 1973 Roe v. Wade, 1994 Violence Against Women Act and 2010 The Affordable Health Care Act, have been written into law, although have they truly served as a protection. Could the American women be oppressed? Women in America have it all. They have the life that many could only dream of. They are looked at as equal to men. They have the power to choose what they want and how they want it. The truth of the matter is that although women have come a long way in their fight for equality it is still an ongoing battle. American women have struggled with the notion of having a strong voice without being labeled a bitch. It seems as if it is easier for men to label women then to listen to the issues. The laws are created to protect its citizen yet for women it has criminalize the victim. Could you imagine being a victim of rape and have to pay for your own rape kit, but it gets worse what if you have to purchase a separate insurance rider in cases of rape and abortions. This insurance nicked named rape insurance initiative, because it would force some women to anticipate the possibility of being raped by purchasing the extra insurance ahead of time. (huffingtonpost.com) Do all women need to purchase this type of insurance or just the women who is the stereotypical bad girls or slut? Naomi Wolf the author of The Making of a Slut, illustrated how society will criticize and label women more if they appear to be comfortable with their sexuality. Wolf, wrote about a young girl name Dinah who she described as a slim white girl whose body changed faster than many of the other girls. Her breast were large and high by seventh grade- but that visitation had come to other girls, too. It was how she decided to carry it that did her in. But there was no visual language in our world for a poor girl with big breasts walking tall except “slut”. The idea that women are reduced to shelter their sexuality to avoid being a slut, and the way you are label by others is how you are treated in society is illogical. “It will not be safe for us to live comfortably in our skins until we say: You can no longer separate us out one from another. We are all bad girls”. (Wolf) This statement from Wolf is powerful because women have to stand up for each other in order to change the way the laws are governed on the behave of women. Women’s sexual past still materially used against them. This can happen in a court of law, place of business, a congressional hearing, or an intimate negotiation. (Wolf)

“I suppose no man can violate his nature. All the sallies of this will are rounded in by law of his being, as the inequalities of the Andes and Himmaleh are insignificant in curve of the sphere. Nor does it matter how you gauge and try him” (Emerson) “Emerson compares character to a mountain range. Individual mountains within a mountain range tend to have many differences, just like a person’s actions can differ from someone else’s. But, in the end, a mountain range comes together as one whole unit, never changing, just like one’s character”. (Emerson Project) Can ones character change? Some say yes, it could be adaptable with the change in society and established laws. You character is something you cannot hide at some point your true self will emerge. It is unfortunate that in today’s society with constant law amendments the United States has keep oppression actively alive. Black citizens and women have to continually battle the government for fair treatment and to be viewed not as a black citizen or a women but as a United States of America Citizen period. There are large gaps between black, white and women income in America. According to a CNN money report there is a large income gap between Black Americans, White Americans and American Women. The median income for blacks are 35,416, women 39,157 and whites 59,754. These income gaps and daily struggles those labeled other in America face show how the law have fallen short of it responsibility to all of it citizens.

**Shonta Turman**

**Research Paper**

**Cite Work**

Civil Rights. Perf. James Baldwin Inteview Mavis on Four. ThamesTv, YouTube. 2015. Film.

Emerson, Ralph W. “Self-Reliance”29 January 2015 <http://www.youmeworks.com/selfreliance.html>

“Extremist Files.” Southern Poverty Law Center. 2015. 15 May 2015. <http://www.splcenter.org>

Haney, Elissa. Borgna Burnner. “Civil right timeline info please. 2000-2007 Pearson education, Publishing as infoplease. 17 May 2015. <http://www.infoplease.com>

History, Art and Archives, U.S House of Representatives, “Historical Data,” http://history.house.gov/Exhibitions-and-publications/wc/Historical-Data/Historical-Data-Nav (May 18, 2015)

Loewen, James W. Lies My Teacher Told Me. New York: Touchstone, 2007. 65-66 Print

Luhby, Tami. "5 Distrubing Stats on Black-white Inequality." *Www.ney.cnn.com*. Cable New Network, 21 Aug. 2014. Web. 9 May 2015.

“The War Behind the Lines.” The Emancipation aproclamation. N.p., 2015. Web. 16 May 2015 <http://www.ushistory.org/us34a.asp>.

Wolf, Naomi. “The Making of A Slut”