

The African American Experience: How We Got Here

Annotated Notes

Preliminary Thoughts

- This presentation only touches the surface on this topic.
- There are many nuances and different perspectives on the details you will hear.
- Historically, there have been several missed windows of opportunity.

The Beginning (1619-1691)

- The first Africans in the British Colonies arrived in Virginia in 1619, possibly as indentured servants.
- Wealthy planters created income from crops. Enslaved people were a more reliable and better long-term investment than indentured servants.
- In 1662, a law was passed saying a child had the status of his/her mother, allowing slaves to be bred. Until this time, in all western cultures a child had the status of his father.
- By 1691, all free blacks were kicked out of Virginia.

The Beginning (1670-early 1700s)

- Charleston founded in 1670 by island planters with slaves.
- Eventually, 40% of all slaves imported into North America came through Charleston.
- 6% of slaves in the international slave trade came to the United States.
- 1/3 of all slaves that came to South Carolina died within the first year.
- 2/3 of all black children died before their 16th birthday
- Black outnumbered whites in South Carolina from the early 1700s to the Civil War.

* First Missed Window (1786-1800)

- In 1790, out of a total population of 4 million, 700,000 of those were slaves.
- The import of slaves was banned by Congress in 1808.
- There was some movement toward abolition, even some slavery supporters talked this way after “education and training for blacks” (Richard Furman, 1800).

The Cotton Gin (1790-1860)

- In 1790, plantation owners produced 1.5 million pounds of cotton.
- Cotton gin patented in 1794.
- In 1820, with the invention of the cotton gin, plantation owners produced 85 million pounds of cotton.
- By 1860, 2.28 billion pounds of cotton were produced. This was 57% of total export revenue in the United States.
- Rhetoric against emancipation is ramped up. “Now suppose this [the end of slavery] accomplished. Four hundred thousand negroes turned loose. Fields uncultivated, barns empty, hordes of hungry marauders prowling the country. Say nothing of the scenes brutal lust would lead” (James Furman, 1850).
- Of the 3.2 million enslaved people working in the 15 slave states in 1850, 1.8 million worked in cotton.

Population Growth and Migration (1790-1860)

- The population growth of American slaves was unique compared to other countries. 700,000 slaves were originally brought to America. By 1860, the slave population was 4 million.
- In contrast, 4 million slaves were originally transported to Brazil and by 1860, the slave population remained at 4 million.
- The largest forced migration in American history occurred in the early 1800s when more than 1 million enslaved people were sold from the upper south to the deep south to work cotton fields. They were forced to march south chained together in lines.

Family Dynamics (1790-1860)

- As the enslaved population increased in monetary value, 1/3 of marriages in Virginia were broken apart as husbands and wives were separated for profit.
- Stable families were shattered with no support network.



Civil War (1861-1865)

- A second missed window (1865-1876).
- In 1870, the 15th amendment gave African Americans the right to vote.
- During the ten years of the reconstruction, 2000 African Americans were elected to public office in the south including 2 Senators, 16 Representatives, and 1 Governor.
- Following the initial wave, it would be 72 years before another African American is elected.

Post Civil War

- Black codes: Immediately after the Civil War, many Southern States introduced laws that essentially replicated slavery without ownership. This led to the protection of Federal troops during reconstruction.
- By 1907, every southern state created poll taxes, literacy tests, and used intimidation to disenfranchise African American voters for over 60 years.
- Sharecropping and tenant farming: In 1900 the overwhelming majority of African Americans toiled in agriculture on land that they didn't own. Nine out of ten African Americans lived in the South.
- Convict leasing: Traded one type of slavery for another.
- From 1874-1877, the number of black prisoners grew rapidly. Alabama's prison population tripled and 90% of the new convicts were black.
- The percentage of Alabama's total annual revenue generated from convict leasing increased from 10% in 1846 to nearly 73% by 1889.
- The practice of convict leasing extracted a substantial human cost with death rates about 10 times higher than death rates among prisoners in non-leasing states.
- During 1873, 25% of all black leased convicts died while serving their sentences.
- Racial terror/lynchings: By the end of the nineteenth century, Southern lynching had become a tool of racial control that terrorized and targeted African Americans.
- From 1882 to 1889, the ratio of black lynching to white lynching victims was 4:1.
- From 1890 to 1900, the rate increased to 6:1.

- After 1900, the rate was 17:1.
- Between 1880 and 1930, a black southerner died at the hands of a white mob more than twice a week.

Segregation

- Jim Crow Laws and segregation.
- Plessy vs Ferguson, a man who was $\frac{1}{8}$ African-American could not ride in the white train car. The lone dissent on the Supreme Court is noteworthy.
- In 1900, the average life expectancy of an African American was 33 years, about 12 years less than that of a white American.
- At the beginning of the 20th century, 44.5 percent of all African American adults were illiterate.

Education

- In 1915, South Carolina spent only 1/12th the amount to educate a black child compared to the amount to educate a white child.
- In 1932-1933, when the number of white children and black children were approximately the same, expenditures for white children is \$10,147,556 and expenditures for black children only total \$1,366,379 (according to research by Charles Houston).
- Early in the 1930s, segregation began to be challenged in the legal system through schools.
- In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that separate but equal was not constitutional. However, with this important ruling came unintended consequences:
- 38,000 black teachers and administrators in 21 southern and southern bordering states lost their jobs.
- Studies have shown that African American students improve on standardized tests by 10% when educated by at least one African American teacher.



The Great Migration

- Between 1920-1970, six million African Americans left the South for the North and West.
- Created a fresh upheaval for families and social networks.
- In 1910, blacks owned 15 million acres of land in the south and today blacks own less than 1 million acres of land.
- The Civil Rights Movement creates another window for change.
- The largest motivation for the movement was the right to vote (Less than 3% of African Americans in the south were registered to vote in 1940. It wasn't until after the voting rights act of 1965 that more than 50% of black people were registered to vote).

Post Civil Rights and Current Issues

- Mass incarceration.
- Lifetime chance of jail or prison time for white men is 1 in 17.
- Lifetime chance of jail or prison time for black men is 1 in 3.
- Another wave of broken family systems.
- 30% of African American men in Alabama have lost the right to vote due to a criminal conviction.
- Homeownership gap between whites and blacks.
- Redlining - areas where the FHA gave guidance to private banks that they should not have sell mortgages to the population living within those boundaries. Race was one of the factors the FHA took into account in these decisions.
- Life expectancy, poverty rates, and joblessness all carry discrepancies by race.
- Different forms of racism.
- Overt racism - Active (e.g. White Supremacy).
- Overt racism - Passive/Reactionary.
- Structural.
- Systemic.
- New terms to understand, all that can have both neutral

and highly charged meanings.

- White Privilege.
- Intersectionality.
- Poverty as a correlation factor might replace race due to the opioid crisis and other economic burdens.

Thoughts for Grace Church

- The priority of discipling our members.
- Overt racism as a discipleship issue.
- Systemic/Structural racism as a discipleship issue.
- Diversity as a discipleship issue.
- Unique geographic and historical context.
- Unique opportunities because of size and footprint in the Upstate.

