

# Education and Social Inequality of the African Americans through the History of the United States of America

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UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
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**EDUCATION AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICANS  
THROUGH THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and History

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## **ABSTRACT**

African American history provides an interesting subject for research, and that is the progress of education of African American people. This thesis will include major social and political changes that had an immediate effect on the social status of the African Americans, and will closely focus on how these changes influenced the educational system. The period that will be covered is the post-slavery period during which the African Americans establish educational institutions for themselves, followed by a paragraph concerning their involvement in the World Wars. Additionally, it will touch upon the subject of the Civil Rights Movement, and its positive influence on organized education in the African American community. The thesis will end with a paragraph on today's perspective on racial discrimination, especially regarding the status of the African Americans in high school and college campuses.

## Introduction

Social inequality between the races in the United States of America has been a topic for the public discourse for a long time. There are many aspects of social life which prove that inequality does exist, education being one of them. The African Americans were not given the same opportunities in education, which then translated into fewer opportunities generally in life. At one point, educating a black person was considered a criminal offense. The period of slavery was the period where the discrepancy between the races was the biggest, as the Blacks enjoyed no civil or voting rights whatsoever. Very few of them managed to get any form of basic education, but most could not even read or write. After the Civil War, the African Americans strived to get better educational opportunities, and so The Freedmen's Bureau was established to help the African Americans with their integration in the society.

The fight was still far from over, as social inequality was still very present. The South did not want social equality, so they took every measure to obstruct the reintegration. The Black Codes, introduced in 1865, promoted the slogan "*Separate, but equal*", but the main focus of the laws was to oppress the African Americans. They were given manual labor jobs and were not treated as equals. Obtaining education (especially higher education) was a big problem for the Blacks, as many schools did not allow black students to enroll. However, the Blacks still managed to organize themselves to obtain at least the very basic level of education, as they realized that without education, they were not given the same employment opportunities. The World Wars proved that even though slavery was abolished many years ago, racism was still an issue in the American society. The African Americans were marginalized and experienced discrimination even during war-time, which served as a wake-up call and culminated with the Civil Rights Movement. The movement dramatically improved social standings of the African Americans, as it allowed them to vote, and also banned racial segregation in the schools.

The path to achieving social equality was long and difficult, but not all problems are gone. Racism is still a major issue in America, and statistics show that the African Americans graduate from high schools and colleges far less than white students. For the last 20 years, there has been a trend where graduation rates of black students slowly rise, but are still

unmatched to the graduation rates of white students, especially in colleges. Racism was and still is present in the American society, and can be observed through the lenses of the educational system that was once based on institutionalized racism, which is still present in different shapes and forms.

## **1. Pre-education era, an era of slavery**

Slavery marked and embedded a deep and profound wound in the character of African American culture. Not only were they physically oppressed, but also intellectually. On no basis were the Blacks considered as a lesser race, meaning that one could dictate what they were allowed to do at all time. Such presumption had no grounds to be established upon, yet imperialism and colonialism flourished throughout the most powerful countries of that time. A whole system of ruling based on the extraction of wealth from the oppressed and colonized people was developed, only to further enrich imperialistic empires. The main idea behind oppression was not only to physically restrain the colonized but to deprive them of intellectual growth to completely eradicate any possibility of an uprising. The same fate followed the African Americans, as they were not able to get a proper education equal to the Whites. It was the master's free will whether he/she would provide basic education in terms of writing and reading to the enslaved, but that was rarely the case. The fear of rebellion was so great that before the Civil War had ended, providing education for the African Americans was considered a criminal offense. Such ideology is not to be taken lightly, and taking away any form of education should be addressed as a serious problem, but also to serve the purpose of understanding the political circumstances of the era. It is worth noting that oppression nowadays is still present, but only in different forms. Even though a lot of progress has been made, American society still lays its' foundation on racism, inequality, and superiority, which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

An amazing breakthrough happened in 1837 when Richard Humphreys established the Institute for Colored Youth, which later became known as Cheyney University. Interestingly, nowadays, no racial, cultural or national restrictions limit the students who want to enroll in Cheyney University, and it could be seen as a sign of progress, better understanding and respect between the races.

After the Civil War, the slaves were free, but their social circumstances were still unfavorable. Social segregation was a problem, as the Blacks were still seen as unequal citizens with little to no rights. New laws, the so-called Black Codes were introduced in order to oppress the Blacks yet again, but with different methods. Black Codes forced the African Americans to work hard labor manual jobs and live below the normal standard. It was a way for the government to keep the Blacks "in check".

Black Codes soon became known as Jim Crow laws, which deepened the segregation even further. Under the false claims that education will be available to the black community, but only if they were to be segregated from the white community, Jim Crow laws yet again put the African Americans in a marginalized position. These laws highlighted the slogan “separate but equal”, but the law was not put in to practice. Only the “separate” part was true, as the African Americans had to face a new struggle. They were denied the rights to attend white schools and had to self-organize institutions for educational purposes. The fundings for these institutions were significantly lower compared to fundings reserved for white people's institutions. The result was a discrepancy in the ability of black people to pursue higher-achieving careers, as they were given no opportunity to do so. A glass ceiling was put above the African Americans, but the community persevered. They did not surrender but rather organized themselves to help young black African Americans attend educational institutions.

The most prominent achievements for the education of the African Americans after the Civil War were the establishment of Howard University’s law school in 1868. It was the first Law school for black students. Soon after the law course, the university opened new courses for young black people, such as pharmacy and medicine, a theological department in 1871, dentistry in 1882, and so on. These efforts greatly improved the chances of the African Americans to get a higher education, which the Crow laws did not condone. This was not the only institution, and soon enough, in 1876 the first Medical school for the African Americans, The Meharry Medical College, was established.

Another major milestone in the education of the African Americans happened in 1881 when Atlanta Baptist Female Seminary was founded (renamed to Spelman College in 1924). Of course, there were many more women’s colleges being established in the post-Civil War period, but some of the more prominent ones were Scotia Seminary (Concord, North Carolina, founded in 1867.), Bennet College (Greensboro, North Carolina, founded in 1873.), Mount Hermon Female Seminary (Clinton, Mississippi, founded in 1875.), and Tillotson College ( Austin, Texas, founded in 1881.).



Even after the Civil War, there were many instances of the Union and the South disagreeing over the handling of the freed African Americans. As already mentioned above, Black Codes implemented in the South continued to disempower the African Americans, whereas the Union disapproved of it. Many freed slaves were now jobless, without land, and without any education whatsoever. In 1865, the Congress created The Freedmen's Bureau, in order to support the Blacks in their struggle to integrate into the American society as equals. The Freedmen's Bureau offered jobs to the Blacks but also worked on enabling them to manage to get a higher education. The Bureau helped fund the Howard University and was one of the most important institutions for the African Americans after the Civil War.

Attempts of the Union to unify two races through the work of The Freedmen's Bureau were met with the disapproval of the South. The Southerners opposed the idea of the slaves considering their former owners as enemies, thinking that this only caused social instability. Furthermore, they did not condone the promise of a land being given to freed slaves, since that would ruin the way they ran their businesses. One could argue that because the war had ended, and because the South had lost, the economy of the South was rapidly deteriorating. The fields were left untouched, as they could not extrapolate the black man so easily anymore. The whole economy was based on slavery, and that was the biggest reason why the South opposed The Freedmen's Bureau so much. By obstructing the education of the African Americans, Southerners wanted to continuously exploit them. The mentality of the South was in a fragile state, as they could not exploit and feel superior in the process.

## 2. Booker T. Washington and William E. B. Du Bois

This section will concentrate on two great orators for the African Americans. Both men fought for the equality of the Blacks, but it is important to note the way they imagined the future of black people. There is a discrepancy between their ideas, which makes for an interesting subject to add on to the topic of the fate of the African Americans in a very turbulent period of their history.

Booker T. Washington was born as a slave and experienced oppression first hand. His journey to get educated was hard, but he managed to do so nonetheless. After teaching in the Hampton Institute and inspiring many African Americans, he was appointed to lead the newly formed Tuskegee University in 1881. The university focused on practice in various crafts and had a major influence in enabling the African Americans to get educated. Booker T. Washington envisioned a future where the African Americans would not be stripped of their right to get educated. However, he insisted on educating the African Americans in the fields of agriculture and industrialization. Tuskegee University provided education for many African Americans and focused primarily on these two fields of work.

In his work "*Up from Slavery*", which is an excerpt on "*The Atlanta Exposition Address*", Booker T. Washington calls upon both the white community and the black community to overcome the social differences that have been brought upon them forcefully. He believes in a future where both races can coexist and function in harmony, without supremacy of any kind. He thoroughly believes that the Blacks have proven to be hard-working and loyal workers, and as such should be treated equally. The key to a healthy social relation of two races lies within the fact that both races should accept a form of compromise and show the willingness to overcome any obstacle which may arise in the process. He goes on to address the times when the Blacks had proven themselves loyal and willing to work, and because they now comprise one-third of the whole population of the South, their economic stability is what will ultimately lead to social justice. Of course, he advocates the education of the African Americans as another key component, stating that investment in education will, later on, be so beneficial, that the "interest" rate would be in thousands. Washington takes a very peaceful and friendly approach, and is an advocate for cooperation, and attempts to lay the foundation of a society where both races can coexist, but more importantly, be tolerant and achieve great things.

Another prominent intellectual and civil rights activist gave a critique on Booker T. Washington's work. William Edward Burghardt, later known as Du Bois highly criticized Washington's approach on a very delicate subject. In his work named "*The Souls of Black Folks*", published in 1903, Du Bois introduces the notion of double-consciousness, a mentality of the African Americans to always look and evaluate themselves through the lenses of other people's perception of them.

Du Bois believes that the African Americans should not compromise when it comes to education, and limit themselves only in the industrial and agricultural fields of work. The opportunities in every field should be equal to every race, and by limiting themselves, the African Americans actually continue the cycle of inequality and racism. What is also interesting is the approach Du Bois takes when deconstructing Washington's work. Du Bois marks three most important aspects of life that Washington is willing to give up on in order to secure economic stability of a black man, and those are the following: political power, insistence on civil rights and higher education. These aspects are fundamental if equality wants to be achieved, and Washington insisted on industrial education for the African Americans. Du Bois advocates a sharper approach, stating that no compromise should endanger equality both in economic, social and political aspect. Du Bois states that these results are not what Washington had in mind, but rather that this discrepancy was an aftermath of Washington's teachings.

Both Booker T. Washington and Du Bois realized how important education for the integration of the African Americans in the society is, but each insisted on a different approach. They also helped in raising awareness of all the injustice which the African Americans had to go through, and how their rights were so limited for so long. The similarity between them was that none condoned any kind of hate crime and that America was racist which had to be addressed. Racism greatly affected education, and while disagreeing on the fields of work the Blacks should give more attention to, both men stressed the importance of education in the development of a socially equal society. However, problems with inequality of races are present even today, and even though the situation is immensely more positive, there still are major flaws in the American society concerning racial segregation and discrimination.

### **3. The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

A statistic shows that by the end of 1865, only 10% of the African Americans had any kind of education. The African Americans had organized themselves after and even during the Civil War to create better circumstances for themselves. Many black schools started sprouting throughout the South, as the Blacks realized that limitation of education for the African Americans significantly dictated their role in the American society. They strived to organize educational facilities as quickly as possible. Many of the teachers were the Whites from the North and the South, but one third was of African origin. The black community went around the Freedmen's Bureau and established many schools which provided basic education for black people. Some teachers were barely literate themselves, which goes on to prove how unreachable education was for most former slaves. Having recognized that they could take action by themselves, anyone who had any basic form of education started passing on their knowledge to these new organized school facilities. For many African Americans, being able to get educated was their definition of freedom, as they were deprived of this right for the longest time. Despite attempts at self-organized education, the state of oppression continued. The Southerner Whites confronted the idea of the African Americans getting free education immensely, fiercely protesting against The Freedmen's Bureau. The North very quickly realized that nothing is going to change if some sort of action was not taken. Even though the African Americans started to teach themselves many things through many schools in the South, the discrepancy between the conditions in which they were teaching (and being taught) and where the Whites were teaching was vast. Newly established schools had almost no funding and therefore could not provide education of equal quality compared to the white community schools. At the same time, their efforts to better the school system were met with the disapproval of the South, and the Union had to take action. The year 1867 was a year of change for the African Americans in the South, as they gained much more civil and political rights.

The Union saw the efforts of the white Southerners to obstruct any progress of the African Americans, and so in the year 1867. , the plan was to reconstruct the political life of the South, which was heavily influenced by the Black Codes mentioned earlier. The North wanted to enter the South with military forces to regain order of the region, and also to establish a reconstructed set of civil rights for the African Americans.

The South, yet again, answered with disapproval, and so many riots took place. It was obvious that nothing will be easy when reconstructing the South, but the progress that The 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment brought was very visible and alive. The statistics presented by the University of Pennsylvania, state that between the years 1870 and 1876, one thousand and five hundred African Americans held public office, and two were even holding the title of a senator. Fifteen of them bore the title of US congressmen, and 633 of them were state legislators. Such tremendous incorporation of the African Americans in the political life greatly influenced their status in the society. Not only were there being integrated faster than ever, but these newly obtained positions helped them pave the way for social equality. They were being given the opportunity to abandon mediocrity and oppression, and to be seen as equals. By having high and influential positions, the African Americans could fight for bringing their educational system to a higher level, and to achieve the same conditions the white race enjoyed.

## **The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment**

The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which was adopted in 1870, had a tremendous role for the African Americans, just as the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment did. The Amendment goes as follows: “*The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.*”<sup>1</sup> By gaining the right to vote, the African Americans pushed the limits of social justice and moved closer to becoming recognized as equals. Through voting, they could influence the person in charge of their fate and their prospects, and the right person could very well greatly improve the conditions in black schools. For women, however, these two amendments were not applicable, which only goes to prove that democracy was just a utopian idea at that time and that a lot more had to be done in order to achieve equality in both race and sexes.

As already mentioned previously, the Blacks were not allowed to attend schools intended for the Whites only, as racial segregation was in full swing. Even though slavery was abolished, there were many prejudices and racist politics which obstructed the progress in many aspects of social and civil rights for the African Americans. Many southern countries, such as Tennessee, incorporated in 1881 Jim Crow laws, which required the African Americans to ride in separate railway cars. The denial of education was a serious struggle that Blacks had to endure, and so was the segregation of public transport.

The African Americans did not let this go by without reaction. A statistic shows that by the year 1865, between five and ten percent (some sources state five and some ten) of the Blacks could read or write, but by the end of 1900, over 50% were able to do so. The community gathered yet again, and promoted family businesses, churches and schools never to lose the privilege of education ever again. The African Americans were discriminated against in every aspect of their lives, and yet they managed to endure all the disadvantages.

Many civil rights activists rose and demanded equal constitutional rights, and fought against discrimination. The Southern morale codex was very much present and active. The

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<sup>1</sup> Norton et al, 2010., vol1, Appendix A-14

battle for appropriate education was fought linearly with battles for civil rights, voting rights and many more. Even though they were promised plenty, that “deal” was only being conducted in theory, not in practice. It is important to address the issues of social injustice because this problem is closely related to the problem of education, and the consequences of these problems can be seen even in today’s society. The next chapters will deal with the said issues in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but in modern time as well.

#### **4. The role of the African Americans in the World Wars**

Even though the education of the African Americans improved after the period of slavery, there was still a huge disparity in the quality of the education available for the Blacks and for the Whites. The most transparent difference was achieving higher education and their options to do so. It was very rare to see a black person enrolled in college due to the segregation, but nonetheless, some individuals graduated from college. The first ever African American to do so was Alexander Twilight. It was the year of 1823 when Alexander graduated from Middlebury College and became the first ever African American to obtain higher education. Before the World War I, the number obviously increased, but it was still extremely rare and difficult for the Blacks to do so. For instance, Edward Jones was the second ever African American to graduate from Amherst College in 1826; John Brown Russwurm (Bowdoin College in Maine in 1826.) is believed to be the third and so on. The period of social unrest ensued after the World War II when the Civil Rights Movement started, and that period marked a historic breakthrough in overcoming social inequality. It was an extraordinary progress for the African Americans, especially in obtaining higher education. Before that period is covered, it is very important to address the role of the African Americans in the two World Wars and how exactly did their involvement in the said wars influence the Civil Rights Movement, but also to pinpoint the way racism was present in the military.

The World War I brought along an opportunity for the African Americans to prove themselves worthy of being seen as equal American citizens, thus improving their social, economic and educational situation. However, the war had proven yet again that racism and inequality was still an issue, and African American soldiers were marginalized even in the most horrible moments such as wartime. Even though they were faced with turbulent circumstances, the community as a whole managed to seize political momentum and fight hard to achieve more social rights.

The Blacks were first and foremost considered a supporting aid in the military workspace, and so they were given positions of cooks and cleaners in the military bases. As the war progressed, they became more and more involved but were still not seen as equals. In the Navy and the Coast Guard, they could not be elected to hold certain positions. It was a



clear sign of segregation even during the war, but that did not stop the Blacks from volunteering to serve as soldiers on the battlefield.

Nothing changed during World War II as well. Still oppressed, marginalized and segregated, the Blacks were not given the same treatment as white soldiers. War had just proven the social status of the African Americans in the USA, but their willingness and perseverance led to a greater success. It is also important to note that the African American women also wanted to contribute during wartime. Their efforts led to the development of the second wave of feminism, in which African American women predominantly protested against racial discrimination and inequality of sexes. Women mostly worked as nurses, or in factories producing guns, or in the department of communications. They were not paid equally, even though their contribution was visible.

Shortly before the World War II had ended, the U.S. Government issued the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, which enabled numerous benefits to the soldiers returning from the war. The benefits ranged from college and high school tuitions, as well as reduced interest loans and mortgages. The law was issued to combat unemployment of 15 million returning soldiers, and this was a great opportunity for the Blacks to better their opportunities in the future. Southern states, however, still openly promoted racism, as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act could not be applicable to every school for the Blacks in the South. African American soldiers were furious to experience that kind of racism yet again, and so the reaction to this culminated with the Civil Rights Movement. The World Wars definitely paved the way for the Civil Rights Movement, but also positively and negatively influenced African American education because of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944.

## **5. Civil Rights Movement**

Even in the military, as mentioned above, the Blacks were given less paying jobs and positions. This practice was common even after (and before) the World Wars. The Blacks were not given the same opportunity to obtain higher education, and so they were stuck doing jobs that could not provide a normal standard of living. Educational prohibitions and segregation were the factors that contradicted the so-called democracy of the United States of America. Nation founded on discrimination and racism is bound to have deeply rooted social problems that are ever-present even in today's world. A great progress brought along changes to the African Americans when the Civil Rights Movement began. The World Wars proved that the African Americans should be seen as equal citizens of the United States of America, without restrictions and limitations of their civil and political rights. The society realized that action is necessary for the change to be made. The states of schools for the African Americans both in the South and in the North were terrible, and could not even compare to public white schools. Not only did this affect the possibility of getting a higher education, but it also translated into a public world.

Upon returning from the war, black soldiers endured racist remarks and began to wonder why they ever put their lives on the line only to be treated as second-grade citizens. The segregation was in full swing, affecting both the education of the Blacks, but their right to vote as well. Public transport was also divided into seating areas for the Whites and for the Blacks. Tensions grew higher, up until the point where something had to be done. Social inequality affected their lives in every aspect. An example of an educational obstacle was the fact that some schools were still excluding black students from enrolling. What ensued were protests across the nation to put an end to social, racial and sex inequality. But the fight for equality did not only happen in the streets. The fight moved to courtrooms, where the Blacks sued schools that openly promoted segregation. This ultimately led to a number of court rulings in favor of the families that sued the schools. The two most important cases were the cases of 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka*, and 1957 Arkansas court case.

The face of the lawsuit was Linda Brown and her family. Linda was denied schooling in Topeka's elementary school, and so her father, Oliver Brown, launched a lawsuit against the board of education. The prohibition directly broke the Fourteenth Amendment, already mentioned in previous paragraphs. It was evident that the African Americans were not protected by the law the same way white people were. If the situation was as drastic as to negate the African Americans in their effort to attend elementary school, one could only imagine the difficulties when the African Americans strived to get a higher education. The court ruled in favor of Brown family, but they were not the only ones suing the board. There were four more families involved, but the whole case bore the name of Brown vs. Board of education of Topeka.

The Supreme Court decided that segregation violated the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and the African Americans cheered as they were victorious in securing social equality. However, this victory did not mean that the fight was over. The movement was organized in a peaceful manner, but soon enough, chaos, riots, and violent protests ensued. The most known case of such riots was the 1957 Arkansas court case. Inspired by the victory of Brown vs. Board of education of Topeka court case, nine African Americans enrolled in the Central High School in Arkansas. They could legally do it, but soon after coming to school, the Governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus called upon the security to escort the students out. Enraged by such decision, riots ensued, and the students had to be escorted to school ever since. Even though they could legally attend school, they were still met with brutal racism and degradation. The government had to answer to de-escalate the situation, so they adopted a Civil Rights Act in 1957 to enable black citizens to vote. No other Civil Rights Act was given to them since the period of Reconstruction.

There were many more incidents that were not focused on segregation in schools, but in public life as well. Rosa Parks protest marked a historic event in which the bravery of a single person initiated a volcanic eruption of reactions, which led to the abolition of public transport segregation. The whole movement worked on every aspect of life that presented inequality between the races, but the hardest obstacle of all was the fact that education was a luxury for the African Americans.

The Civil Rights Movement brought along banning of segregation in public schools and gave the African Americans the right to vote, abolished public transport discrimination, and surely ensured the African Americans civil rights that were not available to them beforehand. It is interesting to observe how exactly did all the efforts of the African Americans translate into today's world. The next paragraphs will focus on the statistics of educational institutions, and also on the social discrimination and racism present today, in order to compare the progressive state of social (in)equality.

## 6. Education in the Modern age – progress and obstacles

Already stated facts throughout this thesis proved that America was founded on discrimination and racism. The question still remains whether America managed to eradicate a deeply rooted racism from the society or not. To answer this question, one must look into the statistics of educational institutions to get a clearer picture. It is undoubtedly true that the opportunities for the education for the African Americans improved greatly, and there is no more institutionalized racism. The numbers portray an everpresent difference when it comes to the success of white students and black students. By deinstitutionalizing racism from the educational system, one could expect the numbers to be much closer than they are now. What social movements lie behind the statistics? The following data is extracted from the National Center for Education Statistics, and it concerns the dropout as well as the graduation rates in American high schools, but in colleges as well. The event dropout rate, and which definition goes as follows: *The event dropout rate is the percentage of 15- to 24-year-olds in grades 10 through 12 who leave high school between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school diploma or an alternative credential, such as a GED*<sup>2</sup>, on average, is 5.2%. White students have an average of 4.7% event dropout rate, whereas black students have 5.7% dropout rate. It is important to state that these statistics concern the 2014 data, as it was the most recent one I could find, but still am of an opinion that it is relevant for the research of African American education in America. The next statistic that I have looked into is the status dropout rate one.

The definition of the status dropout rate goes as follows: *“The percentage of all 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and do not have a high school diploma or alternative credential.”*<sup>3</sup> The numbers of black students exceed the white students in this regard as well, as the numbers are 7.4% for the Blacks, and 5.2% for the Whites. To compare, in 1974, this rate for the African Americans was around 12%, and the conclusion is that things are improving over time. The question still remains whether discrimination has been eradicated completely from the educational system.

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<sup>2</sup> *Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States for 2014.*, March 2018., p20, Webpage for the full pdf: <<https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018117.pdf>> Accessed 4th August 2018

<sup>3</sup> Same, p24

The dropout rates both in event and status cases occur at a much higher rate in the low-income families, which goes to prove that income is the deciding factor in the opportunities available to the students. To draw a parallel between the already pointed out fact that the Blacks were not given the same job opportunities, and lower salaries (especially before the Civil Rights Movement), the today's data prove that there indeed was a direct link between the social inequality of the races with the educational opportunities provided for the African Americans. Even though discrimination was institutionalized before, nowadays it is considered not to be the case. Yet, the numbers still show a disparity between the dropout and graduation percentage of students of colour and of white students. The status completion rate defined as „*the percentage of 18- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in high school (also referred to as “young adults” in this indicator) who hold a high school diploma or alternative credential.*”<sup>4</sup> in 2014 for white students is 94.2 %, while the same statistic for a black student is 91.7%. The difference here is quite small but is hardly sufficient to consider the problem of inequality to be solved. Another interesting statistic to look into is the adjusted cohort graduation rate, where the discrepancy is most visible. The definition for ACGR is: “*The percentage of first-time 9th-graders in public high schools who graduate with a regular diploma within 4 years.*”<sup>5</sup> For black students, ACGR is 73%, while white students have this rate of 87%. In each and every parameter of the statistics for high school, the Blacks are at inferior. Furthermore, a major difference in numbers was apparent once I researched the graduation rates from college for the students who started college in the year 2009 and were expected to finish it by 2015. This data was collected from the National Center for Education Statistics, and the data truly is alarming. This gathered data ranged from 1996 all to 2009, and in the span of 13 years, in every single category (categories being: Graduating from public institutions, nonprofit institutions, for-profit institutions, gender comparisons, race and ethnicity comparisons etc.) were the numbers astonishingly different when comparing white and black students. The whole page of data can be found here<sup>6</sup>, but for the purposes of this thesis, I will just list of some of the numbers. Starting from 2009, 44.2% white students who enrolled in college in 2009, graduated within 4 years of enrollment. Only 20.6% of black students managed to do so. There were 59.7% of white students who managed to graduate from a 4-year institution within 5 years of enrollment, and only 34.3% of black students to do

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<sup>4</sup> Same, p42

<sup>5</sup> Same, p48

<sup>6</sup>Data collected from the National Center for Educational Statistics, A webpage for the full table:  
<[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_326.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_326.10.asp)> Accessed 4th August 2018

the same thing. That is more than a 25% difference, which is quite alarming. No different results come from a 6-year long graduation process.

The number of white students is 60%, while only 34.3% for black students. These numbers include both male and female students, and one can easily notice that the trend of such absurdly high difference in numbers is not going down. This is an evidence for an argument that there really is a difference in the quality of education between the races. The numbers, however, do not cover the “human” aspect of inequality. A book about race and gender wars on a small college campus in America called “*Forgotten Promise*”, written by Gretchen von Loewe Kreuter goes on to explain the ways how the Blacks are oppressed on college campuses. Even though it is written in 1996, the words and situations resonate with the relevance of today’s point of view. “*One of the professors in the department, well respected for being a distinguished graduate trainer was admired for his ability to turn students who had attended humble undergraduate institutions into first-rate writers and researchers. His measures were harsh, we agreed, but effective. To one black graduate student he shouted, “When are you going to learn to write like a white man?” That professor didn’t take women either.*”<sup>7</sup> The students of colour experience open racism. Undoubtedly, the opportunities for the Blacks rose tremendously in recent years, but there is still an issue with the racial attitude towards the African Americans. A recent movement of political correctness is trying to create safe spaces for all students (well, all citizens), which should be encouraged, but I personally feel like this movement has taken a turn for the worse. There should be a political discourse to sensitive subjects, and certainly open discussions to get to the bottom of the problem. This way, a society where everything is considered offensive is created, and such environment, in my opinion, cannot be a fertile ground upon which a sensible solution to the problems of racism and discrimination can be found.

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<sup>7</sup>Gretchen von Loewe Kreuter, 1996., *Forgotten promise*, p15

## **Conclusion**

Upon researching the topic of the education of the African Americans throughout history, I have concluded that racism and discrimination are deeply embedded in the American society. From the very beginnings of slavery, the African Americans were not allowed to get a proper education and had to organize among themselves to learn. Racism was institutionalized, as schools segregated the Blacks and the Whites. Furthermore, some schools even denied permission to African Americans to even enroll in the school. The discrimination became present in social life as well, as they were being paid less, and were only offered manual labor jobs. Civil Rights Movement has enabled the African Americans many opportunities which they never had, but the question still remains whether enough has been done, and could America be perceived as a non-racist country. In my opinion, if the country has laid its' foundations on slavery and supremacy, there is a very slim chance of racism actually being abolished completely. There are still many shapes and forms of racism present in American society and no exception is college campuses. The statistics prove that racism is still present and that there is a vast difference between the graduation rate of the African Americans and white students. Education opens up doors which improve every aspect of life, and it is unacceptable to deny someone their right to educate themselves. Not only is the educational system affected by racism and discrimination, but plenty of other spheres of life as well. There is a long way to go for social equality to be achieved, and there is still plenty of room for improvement, but in order for such thing to happen, a collective consciousness must admit the problem is still present, and that it is on every individual to better themselves and only then will society be on its way to overcoming social injustice. I believe that the future holds a positive change which will promote cultural diversity to combat racism, but the process will be arduous.



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