

Midterm Questions Of Social History Of America: Native American And African American

America has always been a pluralistic society, broken into small groups with symbolic boundaries separating different sects. Positively, the pluralistic society allowed certain immigrant groups to remain affectionate and loyal to their ancestral religions and cultures, and also to actively participate in American political life. A civic culture developed in America, under the guidelines of republicanism:

“Government through elected officials, the eligibility of all citizens to participate in public life, and the freedom to differ in religious and individual life
“(Miljkovic-Gacic & Ferrell, 129-133)

European immigrants could become members of the polity on a basis of equal rights with native born citizens regardless of the country they came from or the religion they believed in. While European immigrants were enveloped in the American myth, and all this vast land had to offer, two other groups: blacks and Native Americans were not allowed the same opportunities. The myth did not apply to Native Americans (Indians). Indians were not encouraged to remain in touch with their cultural and religious roots the way other groups were. The American government did not want the heathens to continue with their uncivilized lifestyle.

Consequently, several programs were developed to help the Indians assimilate to the American way of life. Once the Indians were pushed onto the least fertile land in the country, tribes were divided up and individuals were given their own plots of land in order to become self-sufficient. Indian children were taken away from their parents to be educated about the civilized life and the white man's laws. This separation was another attempt, by the white man, to discourage the continuation of the heathen traditions. Unlike the European immigrants, the majority of the Native Americans did not care to assimilate, nor did they wish to participate in the American government. The Indians just wanted to continue with the tribal pluralism that they practiced in the time before the white man's arrival. The Native Americans wished to remain self-governing, independent nations.

As tragic as the story of Native Americans is, there is another story: that of African Americans (blacks), that some would consider even more tragic. While Indians were constantly being encouraged to assimilate against their will, black: who often believed in American ideals, were forced to live in a segregated society. Blacks were never believed to be equals of the white man. From the time the first twenty blacks were brought to the United States as indentured servants in the 1600's; until the 1970's, blacks were considered to be inferior to whites (some would argue that this belief still prevails). Many believed, as did our great leader: Thomas Jefferson that blacks were intellectually, spiritually, and physically inferior to whites. Accordingly, the majority of our nation's history is plagued with pluralism caste.

This pluralism has been accompanied by all the aspects of a caste system: social indignity, physical brutality, educational deprivation, and political exclusion. Unlike the Indians, however, the torment and exclusion of blacks only strengthened their belief in the ideals of the Constitution and the American myth. African-Americans and Native Americans were all affected by laws passed between 1865 and 1900. Some, like the child labor laws, were beneficial to these groups, but mostly the laws were unfair and unbeneficial. Whether they were federal, state, or local laws, they all had a big impact on the lives of these people.

Works Cited

Miljkovic-Gacic I, Ferrell RE, Patrick AL. Estimates of African, European and Native American ancestry in Afro-Caribbean men on the island of Tobago. ISSN: 0001-5652, 2005; Vol. 60 (3), pp. 129-33

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