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Fairness, Right?

The American Dream is surely something everyone strives for, but it is not something everyone can get, nor has it ever been. The idea of living one's life with love, safety, wealth, freedom, and stability is a goal anyone logical would want. This same goal is so simple that even one hundred and fifty years ago, the constructs were valued just the same. Though, for some, this dream was unattainable. No matter how hard they tried, the system was against them. The legal system, society, their peers and neighbors, more often than not, were all against them.

Racism has always been an issue. Even if it is or has not been stated or treated as such, racism is always an issue, and it is still prevalent today, even with movements and sentiments such as Black Lives Matter, feminism and equal women's rights movements, movements for the LGBTQ+ community, or Martin Luther King Jr.'s Civil Rights Movement. Racism specifically is the largest part of this. The word is defined, officially, as "prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism by an individual, community, or institution against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized." Many people define it, and accompanying problems such as sexism and homophobia, conceptually, as a tragedy. As difficult as this ongoing problem may be now, it was significantly worse in the past. In much of the post-reconstruction era, minorities were specifically and forcefully targeted. Despite the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments being passed, most societies and people, including people in lawmaking and authority positions, struggled to drop the ideas and habits of being against minorities.

The post-Reconstruction era, loosely marked as 1877 to about 1929, was a time of white supremacist groups controlling the United States' government. The Reconstruction era was a post-Civil war time in which the United States tried to integrate about four million African Americans, who were formerly enslaved, into a white-dominated society. Though the Reconstruction era was making progress in leaps and bounds for equal rights, opportunities and freedoms for black people, aside from some certain laws, it was soon all taken away. The Reconstruction Era, now in its third section of reconstructing, officially ended with the Compromise of 1877, when the government officially pulled the last of their federal troops out of the South, and these African Americans were left vulnerable. The white supremacist groups were formed just before the end of the Reconstruction, and these same groups are the ones who soon subtly controlled the South.

One main attribute of the discrimination people in the post-Reconstruction era was the Jim Crow Laws. This unofficial set of laws was any laws that enforced racial segregation between 1877 and the 1950s. The Jim Crow Laws enforced the well known "separate but equal" propaganda, disenfranchisement through poll taxes, literacy tests, and grandfather clauses, and restricted access to jobs, fair legal treatment, and housing. A supreme court case, Plessy V Ferguson, came up when a man of mixed origin sat in a whites only area, challenging Jim Crow Laws. This case ultimately ended with These laws allowed severe segregation and very inferior amenities, treatment, education, medication, and rights for people of color. These laws were heavily protested against closer to the Civil Rights Movement. These societally and legally backed laws preventing people from living their life to the fullest don't seem to be supporting the "available for everyone" American Dream. African Americans were subjected to "separate but equal" schools, waiting rooms, restaurants, businesses, transportation, fountains, parks,

cemeteries, and hospitals, facilities which were rarely equal. Jim Crow Laws also implemented loopholes against the fifteenth amendment; this included poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and intimidation tactics were even used. These loopholes were collectively called disenfranchisement. Poll taxes targeted African Americans struck with poverty; literacy tests were white-controlled and unrestricted; grandfather clauses allowed anyone whose ancestors could vote before 1867 from other voting requirements. Since almost no black people were allowed to vote before 1867, this only further protected the poor or illiterate white people. Another main thing that shifted black people away from voting were the paramilitary groups such as the red shirts or the Ku Klux Klan. These groups were racist and believed in white supremacy, so they attacked any black people they saw voting, destroyed their houses or families, or downright killed them, called lynching, though the KKK was much more structured about this cruel task than most mobs or gangs ever would be. These tactics unfortunately worked very well; the black voters in states plummeted. During the Reconstruction, some states that had over one hundred thousand black voters had, at most, a few thousand post-Reconstruction.

Not only was the government against African Americans, their white counterparts and supposed superiors were too. The KKK grew to have approximately four to five million members in the 1920s. This group escalated to public executions, beatings, kidnappings, flogging, acid branding, or even tarring and feathering. At about this time, the Tulsa Race Massacre occurred. The Greenwood district in Tulsa was, at the time, being regarded as a black wall street. This was soon destroyed. Over a two day period, white supremacist groups and individuals shot, burned, and mauled the entire area. The groups' military style attacks, organized and brutal, broke down thirty-five city blocks, over twelve hundred homes, second of

black owned businesses, two hospitals, multiple churches, and over ten thousand people were left homeless and horrified.

Though the racism against African Americans was the most prominent, there were other minorities being discriminated against as well. Chinese faced the Chinese Exclusion Act, being thrown out of cities, and systemic violence. The Jim Crow Laws sometimes applied to Mexican and American Indian people, who were also facing societal racism and violence. The American Indians didn't only have to fight to vote, though. They were being actively cheated and killed out of their well earned money.

Around 1929, the Osage Indians happened upon large amounts of oil in their land. This oil funded the tribe about thirty million dollars, then the US government assigned them white men to control them financially because societal racism provided the average mindset that American Indians are not intelligent, and therefore would not be able to use their wealth appropriately. These white men, supposedly controlling finances well and legally, were stealing funds or outright killing the Indians to take their wealth. Some, specifically William Hale, schemed so heavily that they had a friend marry the daughter of a rich Indian family, then killed off all her family members and then her, so that their friend would inherit the oil wealth. These murders, taking place primarily between 1921 and 1926, were violent and obvious, but covered up because white people's voices meant more and were trusted more. Some Indians were blown up, shot in the head, or went missing. A total of about 60 wealthy, full blood Osage Indians were killed. These white men were ultimately not convicted until other white men came clean or started investigating the case.

Everyone has setbacks, and we were getting better, but in the end, the American dream is like any other; open your eyes and it's gone.

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