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HIST 4033- American Slavery
12/2/2010

Final Written Assignment

Documents

A Black Soldier Writes to President Lincoln

The letter written by a black soldier to President Lincoln in 1863 immediately brought to mind a scene from the film, *Glory* about black soldiers during the Civil War starring Denzel Washington. There was a poignant scene where the soldiers were lined up to be paid and they realized they were getting less than what they were promised and everyone tore up their paychecks in a show of solidarity.

I think this letter not only shows courageousness (and intelligence) on the part of the soldier to write directly to the President, but it also illustrates his integrity because he basically states in the letter regardless to anything else—he is a soldier who signed up to serve his country as a free man. He insists that just like white soldiers, he and his comrades are entitled to the same pay because they are all laying their lives on the line and their families will also suffer when they die, and need the extra money while they are serving.

A Letter to My Old Master

I had to read the letter written by a former slave to his old master twice just because I found the underlying sarcasm hilarious! I believe Jourdon Anderson wrote the letter entirely in jest because who in their right mind would consider returning to a slave status? I think that is why he mentions that his former master couldn't offer him freedom because he got his "free papers in 1864". I think he also knew there was no way in hell his former master would (or could) send him a check for eleven thousand dollars plus interest.

Also asking his former master to protect his daughters and find a school for them sent a clear message that his children's safety and education were important to him. But the best part of the letter was the last line where he tells his former master to tell George Carter 'thank you' for taking the pistol away when he (his former master) was trying to shoot him.

I wonder if Colonel P. H. Anderson thought for one second that it would ever be possible for Jourdon to return to him as a slave. Did he even get the irony and mockery in the letter or did he just think Jourdon was being ungrateful? The fact that the former slave master would even think a slave would want to return to him speaks to just how delusional slave masters were because they really believed their slaves were better off with them and wouldn't know how to take care of themselves.

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It seems to me Jourdon and his family lived an exceptional life after slavery. And I loved when he said people call his wife 'Mrs. Anderson'. Respect, safety and fairness—all of the things they never had nor would they be guaranteed as a slave.

The Black Code of St. Landry's Parish, 1865

The new laws that were enacted after the abolishment of slavery in St. Landry's Parish (Opelousas, LA) was just another way for white people to keep black people in a position of subservience. The idea that "free" black people could not roam around the parish freely without a special permit from their writing was just another form of captivity.

The Black Code made it somewhat impossible for black people to really gain any type of independence by preventing them from renting or owning a house in the parish, making a white person "responsible" for their conduct and enforcing a law that said they had to basically be in the regular service of a white person.

I think the lawmakers probably felt they were being charitable by allowing black people to meet if they were attending church however they could only attend services conducted by white ministers. I think the most asinine clause of this law is where it stated it "shall be the duty of every citizen to act as a police officer for the detection of offences". That sentence gave whites carte blanche to openly discriminate and profile blacks under the guise of the law. The Black Code was one of the many reasons race relations in this country continued to worsen in the aftermath of slavery.

Reconstructing the South

The reconstruction of the South after the Civil War was difficult mainly due to of some white Southerner's opposition to racial and other changes. Many of white's felt they should be compensated for the loss of slave labor while others felt former slaves would never be productive citizens. To make the 'American Dream' more attainable for newly freed blacks (as well as blacks who were born free) several amendments were made to the Constitution.

The main three Amendments were:

- 13th Amendment effectively abolished slavery in 1865,
- 14th Amendment guaranteed due process of law for all persons born or naturalized in the United States
- 15th Amendment gave citizens of the United States the right to vote.

In addition to these amendments, slaves were given the right to a legal marriage to allow them to establish households independent of white interference and they could petition for custody although to gain control over their children they often had to use the courts.