

## **Reflections on African American Experiences**

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### **Reflecting on the Notion of Emancipation**

Despite its promise of autonomy, the emancipation of most enslaved people in 1863 did not guarantee equal levels of freedom for African-descended people and white Americans. Rather, African-descended people had their level of freedom determined for them by whites in positions of political or social power. Ultimately, not all African-descended people were freed (from slavery) by the Emancipation Proclamation, and even those that were suffered at the hands of an anti-integrationist government and their white neighbours. In this . In this . Ied







descended people in search of racial equality from their homes and into northern cities. However, anti-Black racism did not exist solely within the South, but in the North too, in that no racist sentiments are absolutely confined to one set of (regional/state) borders.

### **Reflecting on Black Women Activists' Understanding of Female Identity**

Black women in the United States have been at a double disadvantage since slavery in that they are victims of both racism and sexism. While many Black women activists rejected past female identities (i.e., women as gentle, nurturing, domestic), they also appealed to and twisted the meanings of these traits to assert their capability in activist environments. Ultimately, in reclaiming those outdated understandings of female identities and advocating for female independence, Black women activists created significant change in the fight for gender equality.

Firstly, in accepting these ostensibly feminine traits, Black women



justifying their roles as leaders. However, it is important to recognize that no trait exists solely within the confines of one gender, but that traits such as the ones mentioned in this reflection can exist in people of all genders. Additionally, while, in the above quotations, Black women activists are not equal to that of Black women. Specifically, the latter, who remain at the intersection of racism and sexism, faced (and still face) more discrimination than the former. In this way, Black women, as well as all women of colour, offer unique and meaningful insight into the ways in which American societies can achieve social equality.

### **Reflecting on African Americans' Status as Americans**

Michelle Obama's 2016 inaugural address challenges the meaning of American citizenship which promised all citizens a sense of inclusion within the nation-state's borders. Ultimately, the United States accepted African Americans as citizens insofar as they proved useful to the country, or more specifically could fight on its behalf, but often fell short in protecting them. The speech also highlights how little autonomy the United States granted African Americans.



churches being bombed and little black girls murdered, you j cxgpø i qv cp{ dmqqí ö.<sup>15</sup> Wnko cvgn{, vj g Wpkvgf Ucvguø ugpf kpi Altkecp Ao gtlecpu across seas as soldiers and national representatives suggests that it saw violence as crucial in protecting Americans and that it recognized African Americans as Americans in the context of international war. However, in highlighting this unmet need for self-defence among African Americans, Malcolm X implies that the American government offered them no military protection, despite its eagerness to protect Americans against international threats. Thus, vj g Wpkvgf Ucvguø unwillingness to combat domestic racial terror (such as the bombing of Black churches and murder of Black girls) suggests that it did not consider African American safety as worthy of protection. Furthermore, in claiming vj cv Altkecp Ao gtlecpu õdrggf hqt y j kg r gqr rg,ö Mcræqno Z tglgevu vj g pqvqp vj cv African American participation in international warfare is for the protection of the United States, but for that of white people. In this way, he uses race, rather than nationality, to create a dichotomy between white and Black Americans, and therefore undermines the notion of American identity.

Secondly, Malcolm X touches on concepts of nationalism and land ownership to highlight African Americansø ræm qh cwqpqo { kp vj g Wpkvgf Ucvgu. Specifically, he argues that most African Americans participating in vj g Ckkn Tk j vu Mqxgo gpv õctgpøv cunipi hqt cp{ pction



o kktk cwp wgs wcm d{ hewupi qp j kwtle Ahlecp Ao gtlecp cpf Lcwpp pgi j dqwtj qqf uö.<sup>19</sup>

Essentially, the disproportionate incarceration of African Americans and the installation of police officers in racialized communities reveal





representation remains significant in that western societies have yet to create spaces for people of different Black identities to present themselves in the ways in which they choose.

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