

## ARE AFRIKAN AMERICANS OPPRESSED?

By

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We often hear the refrain that Black folks are oppressed in this country. When that is stated, there will be some people who agree with the statement and others who will disagree saying that black folk are playing the "victim game". Let's look at the question.

First, before deciding whether black folks are oppressed in this country, we must define what oppression really is. There are several ways to define oppression according to most dictionaries. On one hand, oppression is "*cruel, unfair and unjust treatment of a person or group while preventing them from having opportunities and freedom*". This was obvious for much of the history of America but some people believe that those days are over. They believe that AUSA (Afrikans from the United States of America) can achieve whatever they want if they just work hard, as if AUSA haven't worked hard all during the time that we've been here. Some whites actually believe that they are being oppressed (they just don't realize that sharing privilege or loss of privilege is not the same as oppression). This might be easier to accept if it weren't for the statistics that show that AUSA lag behind every other group in terms of health, education, and economics. AUSA get harsher sentences for the same crimes as whites. That can't be an accident. Something is going on. Could it be oppression?

Another definition of oppression is, "*abuse of power using actions to reinforce inequity of relationships*". This can certainly be seen in recent interactions with the police (thank the Creator for cameras, Facebook and Instagram). It is also seen in the encounters with "Karens" (male and female) who obviously feel that they have the authority to challenge any black person whenever they feel like it.

A final definition of oppression is "*The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic and political benefit of the more powerful social group.*" This mouthful of a definition is

probably more accurate and truthfully descriptive of everything that has been said so far.

Now that we know what oppression is, the next question to be asked is what are the types of oppression. There are three main types.

1. Interpersonal oppression occurs when a person is singled out to be oppressed. Although this happens very frequently, that just ain't what we're talking about here.
2. Institutional oppression occurs when the laws, establishments and general society support mistreatment of people within a specific group. Certainly, the examples already given would be prime examples.
3. Internalized oppression refers to individuals who have no confidence in themselves. Back "in da day", when playing "pick-up" basketball, a player with a low skill level was said to be "self-checked". This was described by the "Father" of Black History, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, when he said, "*...If you make a man think he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one.*"

The political theorist, Iris Young said that there are five faces of oppression:

1. Exploitation- *treating others unfairly in order to benefit from their work*. It could be said that this is the basis for successful Capitalism. How often have we seen people being taken advantage of at work? One example that comes to mind is a person doing good work for many years, yet being expected to train their own supervisor after not even being considered for the promotion.
2. Marginalization- *treating others as insignificant*. When it is said that Black Lives Matter, many people will counter by saying all lives matter. If they really believed that, they would be quiet because black lives do fall under the category of all, don't they?
3. Powerlessness- *lack of influence or power*. In the overall scheme of things, few, if any black people in America have had true power. President Obama probably had as much power as any black person

in America ever had and I would wager that his power was not as extensive as any other president. Black military officers probably come closest to true power, yet there is almost always someone above them in rank who can negate everything that they do.

4. Cultural imperialism- *manipulating reality in order to make one's own rules the norm*. This also relates to a definition of power given by the brilliant psychologist, Dr. Wade Nobles, "*Power is the ability to define reality and have others respond to your definition as if it were their own definition.*" For those who doubt this, I have one question. What kind of music do you think of when the term "classical music" is used? I'd bet a dollar to a doughnut that you would think about European music, even though other cultures have had their own classical music.
5. Violence- *intentional use of force/power, threatened or actual, that results in death, injury, psychological trauma, etc.* To me, this is a no-brainer. If we define a generation as 20 years, the 16+ generations of enslavement were physically, culturally and psychologically violent. I start the period of enslavement in 1526 when the Spanish brought enslaved Afrikans to South Carolina and end in 1865 at the end of the Civil War. The year 1619 was when the British started their mess. Reconstruction was a lull in the violence but when the formerly enslaved AUSA were betrayed by the Hayes Tilden Compromise, this started what Howard University historian Rayford Logan called the Nadir (lowest point) of race relations since AUSA were enslaved. Hundreds of AUSA were lynched and thousands of AUSA were killed in dozens of race massacres (of which Tulsa, Black Wall Street was only one). Although the worse periods of the Nadir occurred in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, violence persists to this very day, frequently perpetrated by those who are charged to protect us .

So:

Have AUSA been treated unfairly, cruelly and unjustly?

Have AUSA been exploited (labor, sexually)?

Have AUSA been marginalized (what is our position in American society)?

Have AUSA been rendered powerless (are we able to keep our children safe or punish those who harm them)?

Have AUSA been subjected to cultural imperialism (what do we know about our ancestors' history and culture)?

Have AUSA been victims of violence (physical, emotional or psychological)?

What is your answer?

Now, let's talk about victimhood. An accusation of playing victim frequently means that that person is excusing mediocrity or feeling sorry for themselves. Again, let us go to the dictionary. What is a victim?

According to most dictionaries, a victim is *someone who is acted on and usually adversely affected by a force or agent*. This makes perfect sense when you really think about it. Someone who is oppressed is a victim. Again, this is no excuse for mediocrity but we should also not allow ourselves to be gaslighted (manipulated in order to get us to question our reality or perception) into denying what actually happened to us and is happening to us. As one of my esteemed teachers once said, if we deny that we have been victimized, we will become our own greatest victims.

Food for thought?