Are people of African origin better off in Europe or America?

Chadé Darby

The history of people of African origin has been plagued with colonization, exploitation, and prejudice. These issues are most often not location specific meaning that as a Black person you may experience similar things in different places. When posed the question of ‘Are people of African origin better off in Europe or America’, I began to compare and contrast my experiences in those locations. While my experiences varied, I researched other perspectives to better come to a conclusion about this question. In this paper, I will use class material and additional sources to provide an overview of the similarities and differences of the Black experience is Europe and America and then conclude with a discussion on which area is better for people of African descent.

Despite what many may think, Europe had just as much of a part with slavery as the United States did. European nations began the Atlantic slave trade by bringing slaves from Western Africa to their colonies in the New World. Europe continued their imperialism with the ‘Scramble of Africa’ where major nations in Western Europe divided the continent into colonies. Today, many of the African European colonies are still seeing after effects from the imperialism. The colonization also influenced the migration of people of African descent to Europe. Major European cities are known for their large African immigrant populations. On the other hand, due mostly to slavery, there is a large population of people of African origin in the United States. With the similar descent, African Americans and African Europeans have similar yet different experiences. I will lay out the treatment of these populations within the next paragraphs.

In the United States, slavery set the stage for the hatred and prejudice against Black Americans. Once slavery was abolished, there were policies and practices put into place to continue to exploit and subjugate Black Americans in society. One example is the Jim Crowe laws that were prevalent in the south and did not allow Blacks to have the same privileges as their white counterparts. In modern day, it has evolved into police brutality, the school-to-prison pipeline, and racism exacerbated by the current political climate. The United States historically poor treatment of Black people has only evolved to become less blatant but still with the same disenfranchising effects.

In Europe, the Black experience has also evolved. Black people have been in Europe since before slavery but that history is typically looked over and focused on ‘whiteness’. Depending on the nationality of people migrating to Europe their Black experience may vary. African Americans tend to have more privilege than migrants from African countries. African migrants are harassed, denied jobs, and face a level of discrimination that African Americans may not have to deal with. But that does not mean, racism does not affect African Americans in Europe. Black American travelers frequently blog about the subtle microaggressions, touching of hair, and fetishization by Europeans (White 2019). Across the European continent, the Black experience may vary however there is one main characteristic that differs from the United States. The gun culture is completely different than the United States. European countries regulate gun usage more tightly than in the United States and European police officers do not use deadly force as often as American police officers. More specifically for people of African descent, police brutality in America is far worse than Europe.

In conclusion, racism is prevalent everywhere for people of African descent. Although I’ve had more positive experiences in Europe than America, I don’t think there is necessarily a better place for people of African descent to be. I think people of African origin are naturally resilient despite the potentially negative historical implications of our presence in Eurocentric societies. George Younge said it brilliantly in a Guardian article, “Racism is bad everywhere. There is no ‘better’ kind” (Younge, 2020). Until people in Europe and America can be anti-racist, anti-capitalists and realize the deep-rooted history of oppression by their nation-states, then maybe there will a better location for people of African origin to be better off in.

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