
An In-Depth Look At The American Civil War Era

The Free State of Jones (TFSOJ) provides the viewer with an in-depth look at the American Civil War era, as well as some periods up until the reconstruction period. The film depicts various scenes in which it is evident the people of this period both Caucasian and African American struggled in various ways through a battle they had no desire to fight. As stated in TFSOJ by the lead character "Newton Knight" (Newt), it is clear, the war is not necessarily a man on man conflict but a deeper, supremacist and classist battle in which those who may benefit do all in their power to not only maintain riches, but also gain additional riches in the process.

This short paper will examine various factors that contributed to the mid-late 19th century American identity depicted in TFSOJ. Such factors to be discussed include: patriotism and nationality, slavery and conflicts of interest, as well as activism and the granting of civil rights. The Free State of Jones delineates the struggle and journey of many individuals on the road to achieve respect, and citizenship in America. Between 1862-1876 issues regarding class, racial equality, nationality and patriotism were especially present in the southern states of America. During these times plantation owners relied heavily on the service of slaves to plant, grow, and harvest vital crops that would lead to their success. Land owners with slaves were envied by many, given that in some instances they were pardoned from military services.

The introduction of the "20 negro rule" provided some form of protection for those rich enough to own at least 20 or more slaves. Given the above, it can be seen how the 1808 congressional ban on importing foreign slaves caused several issues in the southern states, which ultimately attributed the Civil War. The American Civil War was largely a classist battle in which the impoverished fought for the interests of the rich who predominately had influence on political matters at this time. Many children and men were taken away from their families and forced to fight in the war, which eventually came with its price. Given the nature of the war many realized their potential fate, which lead them to desert or even rebel against confederation such as Newton Knight did in TFSOJ. As deserters, homeless women and children, and runaway slaves came together, the upheaval against confederate soldiers was enough to unify these diverse people with common patriotic interests.

As mentioned at the Confederate headquarters in the film, the company created by Newton Knight contained approximately 250 men (including runaway slaves) who had little to lose in life. Many of those who ended up fighting along side the unionists were already commissioned to death, held little to no rights, or had very little to lose in a sense of property, it is assumed they would die for their cause while actively pressing for their statement to be seen and heard. As the Civil War was coming to an end and the Reconstruction period commenced, the struggle for African Americans to gain civil rights was apparent but was also becoming more feasible. Groups such as the Union League, were supporters of president Abraham Lincoln who began the movement towards civil rights in America, for the African American members of society.

During Lincoln's time in office and shortly after, the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth Amendments were passed which: rided slavery/involuntary servitude, granted citizenship rights plus protection from the law, and allowed African American men voting rights all of which were

immense steps forward for African Americans. Even though rights were introduced for African Americans during the mid-late 19th century, the segregation, maltreatment, and white supremacist actions present in Antebellum America were still existing, but in new ways. Post-war white supremacist groups became popular outlets for those wanting to continue dominating minority groups in America. In TFSOJ an example of a white supremacist group in action could be when Moses Washington whom had been registering other African American men to vote in the upcoming election, gets violently beaten and hung for his kin to find. This is a good example of a sickening nationalistic ideal where one group does not want to include another group into their nation, and as a statement they inflict fear and harm to deter these people from exercising their rights as citizens under the 14th and 15th Amendments.

With the above information in consideration, many factors clearly contributed to the commencement of the American Civil War, the Reconstruction period, and ultimately the granting of citizenship to African Americans in 19th century America. The battle to gain citizenship for certain groups in America was a long and harsh battle, consisting of many injustices. Many individuals were removed from their families and their native lands, only to be dehumanized for years, due to the normalization of slavery in America, and other groups were forced to give up their lives for the benefit of others. When looking at the sides of the battle it is clear both have something in common: Nationalism. However, each side carries a very different definition of nationalism; one side is willing to give up their lives to achieve their rights, and the other rather have others give up their lives in the name of 'patriotism'.