

## Eastern Winner Essay

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“All children borne in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother,” are the words of a Virginia law in 1662 regarding the descendants of slaves. This law was the mandate that kept the vicious cycle of subjugation that was slavery alive. It is also the birthright that has been continually ignored, for the mother of all children born within this country is the benevolent matriarch of liberty. The unrelenting devotion to liberty is the fuel that has incensed countless generations of Black people to challenge America to live up to its ideals.

The history of Black people within America is complex and difficult to comprehend, because for four hundred years they continue to defy a system meant to break them in every aspect. The Black struggle is characterized by perseverance. That perseverance is the most American virtue, because while some have grown indolent in maintaining the ideals of the Constitution, it is Black people who have never wavered. To study the Black struggle is to study what it means to be truly American. The strength of Hercules is required to endure four hundred years of atrocities, but the strength of Atlas is required to endure such horrors and fight for the justice of one's self and others.

It is enlightening to see a people who have been reduced to chattel continue to smile. Throughout the four centuries of strife, there are numerous revelatory examples of beauty being born out of anguish. This lesson is vital to America, because even though Black people have been brought to levels of inhumanity, they continue to march forward. Their lamentations became the sweet, doleful sounds of jazz and blues. Their ire became the impetus for the Civil Rights Movement. Their jubilations became the blueprint for American expression in fashion, theater, and the culinary arts. Their pride became the resilience to never cave from the pressures of a society that loves their culture but hates them.

American history and culture are forever entwined with Black people. The only way to forget this undeniable fact is to willfully ignore it. To preserve the impact of Black people is to stamp out all ignorance and give appropriate credit for the originators and innovators of the culture. Education is a powerful tool that was used to oppress Black people; let it instead be the tool used to exalt Black people.