

Chapter 4 Lesson 5

The Rise of Segregation

Resistance and Repression

After the end of the Civil War, during the Reconstruction period, many African Americans, in the South, were sharecroppers. Being a sharecropper was a difficult life. They owned no land and were trapped in a debt cycle that was impossible to break. Many looked for other opportunities.

One such opportunity was presented by Benjamin "Pap" Singleton. Pap was a former slave from Nashville, TN, who believed that the only real chance for African Americans lay to the west. Singleton encouraged African Americans to move west and settle in their own communities. Thus began a migration known as the Exodus and the migrants were known as the Exodusters. This great movement was pushed by two causes. One was Singleton and a few others who encouraged the migration. The other cause was a rise of lawlessness against African Americans in the South at the end of the Reconstruction period when the military was removed. The Exoduster migration lasted only a few years but around 50,000 African Americans moved west to Kansas, Missouri, Indiana and Illinois.

Other African Americans formed the Colored Farmer's National Alliance. This organization was similar to the Farmer's Alliance. When the Populist Party formed many African Americans joined it. The Populist Party was supportive of farmers and proposed immigration restrictions, a graduated income tax and unlimited coinage of silver. The Democratic Party feared the combination of poor whites and poor African Americans and believed that they would lose elections if this combination was allowed to happen. They appealed to the racism of many white voters and used methods to make it harder for African Americans to vote.

Imposing Segregation

After Reconstruction, the limited rights that had been gained by African Americans were undermined.

The Right to Vote

The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which had been ratified in 1870, stated that the states could not deny the right to vote based on race, color or previous condition of servitude. The 15th Amendment does not prohibit denying the right to vote for other causes. Many southern states began to impose new voting restrictions that were not specifically about race but that were designed to restrict the African American vote.

Methods used:

- 1) Poll taxes: a tax charged for the right to vote, amount varied but would be high enough to exclude many African Americans
- 2) Literacy test: required the voter to read and interpret the state constitution or the US Constitution. This was difficult for many African Americans during the late 1800's because most

had been denied an education during the years of slavery. The passages selected were often the most difficult to read.

- 3) Grandfather Clause: used in some states to allow whites, who also might struggle with the poll tax and the literacy test, to vote. The Grandfather Clause allowed a man to vote if he had an ancestor who had been eligible to vote in 1867. This clause exempted most whites from all other voting restrictions.

Legalizing Segregation

Discrimination against African Americans was common throughout the United States but in the South it was often part of the legal code via Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow laws and Jim Crow etiquette covered nearly every aspect of life. Whites and African Americans were not allowed to mix in society. Separate locations in restaurants (if AA were served at all), bathrooms, water fountains, seats in train cars and public transportation. African Americans were not allowed to testify in court, serve on juries and should curse or speak badly about a white person. There were to be separate schools, sections of prisons and separate waiting rooms and ticket booths for transportation.

In 1883, the Supreme Court had overturned the Civil Rights Act of 1875; this opened the door to a variety of discriminatory actions. In 1892, Homer Plessy challenged the Louisiana law concerning separate train cars for African Americans and whites. Plessy v. Ferguson was a test case, designed to challenge separate but equal facilities. The Supreme Court upheld the Louisiana law and the concept of "separate but equal". This concept remained the legal, Supreme Court Supported, foundation of segregation for more than 50 years.

The African American Response

Ida B. Wells

In 1892, Ida B. Wells, a young woman from Tennessee, decided to begin a crusade against lynching. She was motivated after a friend was lynched. She was driven out of Tennessee and moved to Chicago where she continued her fight. She spoke out, wrote a book and worked to end lynching. She also fought against restrictive housing agreements in Chicago. Although lynching did continue, the numbers dropped during the early 1900's.

Mary Church Terrell

Mary Church Terrell was active in the anti-lynching movement, the women's suffrage movement and the development of the NAACP. She spent her entire life fighting against racism, sexism and lynching. She led boycotts and worked to organize African Americans and women to fight for equal treatment.

Compromise and the Rejection of Compromise

Booker T. Washington proposed that African Americans focus on achieving economic goals not political goals. In a famous speech, called the Atlanta Compromise, he urged African Americans to focus on education and vocational preparation instead of civil rights.

W. E. B. DuBois believed that acceptance of Booker T. Washington's plan had no advantages. He believed that racism was barbarism and that political rights were necessary to manhood. His main focus within the issue of civil rights was the right to vote.