

STUDY QUESTIONS, NEGRO HISTORY

L1\*)  
1860 -- 1900

In this forty year period American Negroes (1) won their struggle for freedom during the Civil War, (2) beat back efforts of Southern whites to destroy this freedom after the war, and (3) made vital economic, political, and cultural advances in the face of powerful opposition. By the end of the period many Negroes had gained new insight into their basic needs and were beginning to win important white allies. At this stage the Negro's enlightened political activity frightened the Southern power structure, so that it helped to create strong new legal barriers to progress.

Problem: Then, as now, Negroes were a minority group. Political decisions had to be made by a majority vote. How did the Negro manage to win strong enough allies to enable him to secure badly needed rights? What specific alliances did he make? Who joined with him, and for what reasons? What conditions help to account for his successes and failures? The following material is designed to help teachers encourage discussion of these questions.

Specific citations which follow the questions all refer to three specialized studies: W.E.B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction  
C. Vann Woodward, The Strange Career of Jim Crow  
Herbert Aptheker, Documentary History of the Negro People in the U.S.  
(There are paper editions of all three books.)

Four general histories which can be useful are:  
Vaunders Pedding, They Came in Chains  
John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom  
Lerone Bennett, Before the Mayflower  
Schulte-Nordholt, The People That Walk in Darkness

PROBLEM

I. THE NEGRO STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM AND INDEPENDENCE DURING THE WAR

1. What did Negroes do to help Lincoln to change his mind so dramatically over the question of emancipation, 1861-63?
  - a. How did Northern Negroes react to the war? How did Frederick Douglas differ with Lincoln over war aims? What specific demands did Negroes make? (Aptheker, Vol. I, 451 ff.)
  - b. Show why slaves were of great military importance to the South. In what ways could slaves help the Union win the war, and at the same time help themselves? (DuBois, 55-65, 80-120.)
2. Once free Negroes reached Union territory during the war, they faced serious problems for which they had to work out answers if they were to survive.
  - a. Show how original Northern war aims made it necessary for Negroes to work out so many of these problems for themselves. (DuBois, 66-67.)
  - b. How did Negroes deal with their economic problems? What skills did they have to employ? (DuBois, 68-71.)
  - c. Describe the Free Island Circular. What Negro achievements encouraged Sherman to issue this order? (DuBois, 72-75.)



- d. Negroes won many concessions from Union leaders. Show how these agreements helped them to become independent. (DuBois, 66-67.)
- e. Will you show how conditions of martial law played ducks and drakes with legal rights of white Southerners during the war. Remember that after the war the county court house records were once more valid.

### III. "FEDERAL RE CONSTRUCTION:" NEGROES GET AND USE THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

#### A. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY:

1. Describe the major factions in the Republican Party, which groups were the most powerful? (DuBois, 210-11.)
2. List three important economic measures which Congress acted on during the war, which Southern planters and farmers would have opposed. (DuBois, 210-15)
3. When the war ended, business people in the North became strong supporters of the Negroes' right to vote. Why? (212-15)

#### B. NEGRO POLITICAL DEMANDS, 1866-1877.

1. As Republicans invited Negro support for their Party, Negro Leaders made their own demands. What did Southern Negroes want to do about such questions as the Black Codes, land ownership, the right to vote, education, and legal rights? (Aptheker, Vol. II: 534-47.)
2. What devices did employers use to discourage Negro organization? Note how Negroes learned from this oppression to make the demands listed above. (Aptheker, II: 552-58; 595-99. DuBois, 670-84.)
3. Show how Negroes used their civil rights to help make laws helpful to both themselves and others in making a better living for themselves. (DuBois, 443-44; 543-44; 551.)
4. What kind of whites sometimes joined with Negroes to help make laws helpful to both? Which whites? Which laws? (DuBois, 443-44, 446-49.)
5. Some people have argued that after the Civil War "the Negro was given the vote too soon." Do you agree? On whom did he have to depend in order to live freely and well? Give details.

#### C. THE REPUBLICAN PARTY ADVERTISES ITS NEGRO ALLIES:

1. On what important questions did Southern Negroes disagree with important Northern Republicans. Discuss here the tariff, money policy, railroad regulation, taxes for welfare programs.
2. Who were Southern Conservatives? In what ways did they resemble Northern Conservatives?
3. Explain (1) why Northern Republicans generally refused to support the Negro's demand for land, and (2) how his failure to acquire land limited the Negro's political freedom.-



### III. THE NEGRO STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE IN THE SOUTH, 1877-1900

Although Federal troops which could protect them left the South by 1877, Negroes withstood fraud, violence, and economic pressure and continued to use their civil rights. They voted, used the courts, and made such bargains as they could to become more independent.

1. Show how Negro demands for education (652,663), a new land policy (653, 663), and political action (667,702) aroused the opposition of Southern employers. (Aptheker, Vol. II)
2. Describe some social and economic privileges which Negroes continued to have even after Federal troops departed. (Woodard, 19-20)
3. Explain the term "Readjuster." Note that both Negroes and whites were Readjusters, and show how this unity was against the interests of Southern Conservatives. (Aptheker, 726-34)
4. Divisions among white men over taxes, social legislation, railroads, contract labor, etc., encouraged employers and landowners to support Negro voting rights. How did all whites did not agree about the State policy on these questions. (Woodard; 38, 32-33, 35-37, 39.) Why were Negroes willing to support conservatives rather than the white poor at this time?
5. Which Conservative financial and economic policies injured the Negroes' interests? (Woodard; 40, 50-52; Aptheker: 670-77.)
6. In what ways did violence against Negroes meet the needs of employers and landowners? (Aptheker, 736, 740, 742) How did conservatives persuade poor whites to injure both the Negro and themselves? (Woodard, 61-64.)
7. What was the "Atlanta Compromise?" (Woodard, 68-71; Aptheker, 753-57.) Relate this policy of Booker T. Washington to the growth of white aggression in the South. On what grounds did other Negroes oppose Washington? (Aptheker, 753.)

### IV. NEGROES AND THE POPLIST PARTY (1888-1900)

(For brief commentaries, read Woodard, 41-47, and Aptheker, 804-06)

1. Who were the Populists? For what reasons did they expect Negroes to work with them? (Woodard, 42-42, 45-46.)
2. How did the absence of Federal protection for voters weaken the Populists in the South? (Aptheker, 806.)
3. Describe the Colored Alliance. Which Southerners would feel threatened by the Alliance? How would conservatives react to integration of white and colored Alliances? (Aptheker, 810; Woodard, 43-46)
4. Show how destruction of the Negroes' right to vote also deprived many white people of the vote. (Aptheker, 816.)
5. Conservatives managed to destroy the racial unity of Populists. (Woodard, 43-44, 46-47; Aptheker, 812-17) Describe further steps which Negroes took to improve their chances in the struggle for freedom. (Aptheker, 645-47; 678-80; 713-14; 727-29.)



SUMMARY QUESTION: Show how the Negroes' struggle for economic improvement aroused the opposition of conservative southerners. Show also how the latter managed to break the alliance between white and black farmers in the South.

NOTE TO FUTURE SCHOOL TEACHERS:

The study of history is a cumulative process. Students grow and develop new insights as they (1) master relevant information, and (2) relate this new knowledge to the information they already have, and (3) attempt to apply these insights to current problems. I suspect that the most successful history classes will be those which meet regularly at appointed hours during the week, deal at each session with some discreet, manageable problem, and provide for both discussion and written work by the students. Any questions, of course, can serve as a basis for study. These questions are designated and designed primarily for teachers who have had little time to study Negro History, and who wish to make up for lost time during the semester break or during their spare hours between classes. In my opinion there is no reason not to give copies of these questions to interested students as well; they could use the books which are appearing on the scene both during class hours and outside of the classroom.