

African-Americans, 1865-1910

African-Americans arrived in America as enslaved persons. Obviously, since their fates were in their owner's hands, they had little or no autonomy.

In this Part you'll look at situations which continued to deprive black Americans of autonomy after the Civil War, and at some of their responses.

Background: Feelings created by polarization didn't end with Northern victory in the Civil war. They continued to drive certain kinds of actions by both Northerners and Southerners.

In 1868, those in control in Congress wrote what became the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. It was intended to guarantee basic rights to former enslaved persons:

Amendment XIV

SECTION 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens of the United States and of the state where they live. No state shall make any law which shall reduce the privileges of citizens of the United States. No person shall deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

SECTION 3. If any person has held any office where he took an oath to support the Constitution of the United States, but later took part in rebellion or other crime, that person will not be allowed to hold any kind of office in state or national government. This limitation can only be removed by two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress.

Congress also passed what was called the "reconstruction" program, summarized below:

1. The rebel states shall be divided into military districts and placed under the military authority of the United States. It shall be the duty of the President to assign an officer of the army to command each district. Each officer shall be given a military force to perform his duties and enforce his authority within the district.
2. Each state must hold a convention to write a new state constitution giving black people the right to vote.
3. Each state must re-elect a new legislature. No former Confederate soldiers or government officials will be allowed to vote or hold office.
4. Each state government must approve the Fourteenth Amendment so it can become law.

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Investigation: “Reconstruction”

In Part 10 of *Investigating American History*, we identified nine responses that people take when they feel that they lack autonomy:

Group Formation: Organizing to increase influence and power

Opinion Appeal: Publicizing the problem to gain outside support

Economic pressure: Strikes and boycotts against those causing the problem

Violence: Angry attacks on persons or the property of persons believed to be responsible

Over-conformity: “Fitting in” to the dominant group, often in an exaggerated way

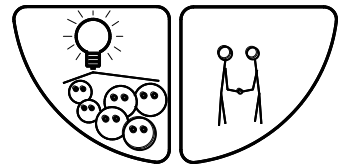
Scapegoating: Simplifying the problem by putting all the blame on an individual or group (often one that has little or nothing to do with the problem)

Opinion Appeal: Trying to influence public opinion by arguing a point of view

Escape: Putting the bad situation “out of mind” with drugs, entertainment, or other means, or moving to a new location away from the bad situation

Stasis: Taking no action because of helplessness or inability to act.

For each data selection (including the two on the previous page), identify (1) The group whose autonomy is lacking, (2) The effects of that lack on the people, (3) the ideas and patterns of action which led to that lack, and (4) their responses.



From an *Address to the Colored People of South Carolina*, adopted by a South Carolina Democratic convention in 1868:

You have been suddenly put in position to use certain powers. It is impossible that your present power can last, whether you use it for good or bad. Let not your pride, nor your pretended friends, flatter you into the belief that you ever can, or ever will, for any length of time, govern the white men of the South. Perhaps you expect to have power by the aid of the radical party at the North. The Almighty, in His wisdom, has placed in every human a sentiment called the prejudice of race. When undue power was given you by the radical party, prejudice of race sprang up.

To repeat, then, as we began: Your present power must surely and soon pass from you. Nothing that it builds will stand, and nothing will remain of it but the prejudices it may create. It is, therefore, a most dangerous tool that you are handling. Your leaders, both white and black, are using your votes for nothing but their individual gain.

New Yorker E. L. Godkin, editor of the *Nation* magazine, criticized the Reconstruction program in 1871:

The condition of Negroes after they were freed attracted Northerners anxious to take advantage of them, as naturally as a dead ox attracts the buzzard.

And then we passed laws which made the situation worse. We deliberately kept all the leading Southern men from taking active part in the management of their local affairs.

Before the war, it was the custom of the Southern states to put men of the highest social standing and character in office. The result was that it was these men who were most prominent in the steps which led to the rebellion and in the rebellion itself. When the war was over, we singled these men out for punishment by the 14th Amendment and other laws.

The results have been dreadful. Thinking that we were befriending the Negroes, we gave them control of the government. Those with experience were not allowed to help them. Instead of establishing equal rights for all, we set up a government by one class, and this class the least experienced.

Out of this state of things the Ku Klux Klan has grown.

Godkin believes he is giving an accurate picture of the situation. Do you agree? Why or why not?

This testimony was given by Emanuel Fortune, a black man:

Question: When did you leave Jackson County?

Answer: In May 1869.

Question: Why did you leave there?

Answer: There got to be such a state of lawlessness that I expected that my life was in danger at all times. I left because of that. In fact I got, indirectly, information very often that I would be missing someday and no one would know where I was, because of my being a leading man in politics, and taking a very active part in it.

Question: Had men in your county been killed before you left?

Answer: Yes, sir; several were killed: Dr. Finlayson was killed, for one, and Major Furman was shot at the same time. Three men were called out of their doors and shot; some were shot through the cracks of the houses, and others as they were going into the houses. I do not remember their names, but there were a great many cases of that kind before I left.

Question: Did you hear any expression in reference to your people having a right to vote?

Answer: Yes, sir: I have had a great many arguments in reference to that. They would argue very strongly against it.

(Continued)

Question: What language would they use?

Answer: “That d----d Republican party has put blacks to rule us and we will not allow it;”
“Intelligence shall rule the country instead of the majority;” and all such as that. They
always said that this was a “white man’s government.”

Question: What is the feeling in respect to your people voting?

Answer: They are generally opposed to it; they speak bitterly against it.

Question: How do they regard your people getting land and owning it for themselves?

Answer: Well, they generally do not interfere with them much, not in that line.

Question: Are they ready to sell them land?

Answer: No, sir; they will not sell land. We have to purchase it from the government, or
from the state, otherwise we cannot get it. They do not sell our people any land; they
have no desire to do so.

From a petition to Congress in 1871:

To the Senate and House of Representatives in Congress: We colored citizens of
Frankfort, Kentucky, and vicinity, do this day petition you about the condition of affairs now
existing in the state of Kentucky.

We would respectfully state that life, liberty, and property are unprotected among the
colored race of this state.

We believe you do not know that Ku Klux Klans are riding nightly over the country,
going from county to county, spreading terror wherever they go by robbing, whipping,
killing our people without cause, forcing colored people to break the ice and bathe in the
water of the Kentucky River.

The state legislature has adjourned. They refused to enact any laws to put down Ku
Klux disorder. We regard the Ku Kluxers as now being permitted to continue their dark and
bloody deeds under the cover of the dark night. They refuse to allow us to testify in the state
courts where a white man is concerned. We find their deeds are done only to colored men
and white Republicans. We also find that for our services to the government and our race we
have become the special object of hatred and persecution at the hands of the Democratic
party. Our people are driven from their homes in great numbers, having no recourse except
the United States court, which is in many cases unable to reach them.

We would state that we have been law-abiding citizens and pay our taxes, but in
many parts of the state our people have been driven from the polls, refused the right to vote.
Many have been murdered while attempting to vote. We ask, how long is this state of things
to last?

We appeal to you as law-abiding citizens to pass some laws that will protect us and
that will enable us to exercise the rights of citizens.

In 1907 Senator Benjamin R. Tillman of South Carolina delivered a speech in Congress. In it he described how Southern whites regained control of South Carolina in 1876. Excerpts from the speech:

It was in 1876, 30 years ago, and the people of South Carolina had been living under Negro rule for eight years. Our legislature was composed of a majority of Negroes, most of whom could neither read nor write. They were the easy dupes of as dirty a band of vampires and robbers as ever preyed upon a people. Life ceased to be worth having on the terms under which we were living, and in desperation we determined to take the government away from the Negroes.

We organized the Democratic party of South Carolina with one plank, and only one plank, namely, that “this is a white man’s country, and white men must govern it;” Under that banner we went to battle.

We knew—who knew better?—that the North then was a unit in its opposition to Southern ideas. We knew it was their purpose to keep Negro governments in whichever states it was possible to do so because of a Negro majority. Having made up our minds, we set about it as practical men.

Clashes came. . . .

It was then that “we shot them”; it was then that “we killed them”; it was then that “we stuffed ballot boxes.” After the federal troops came and told us, “You must stop this rioting,” we had decided to take the state away. We hesitated at nothing.

Beginning in the late 1800s, southern states passed laws which placed restrictions on black people. Many of these laws segregated black people from white people in public places. Railway cars and waiting stations, streetcars, boarding houses, drinking fountains, parks, residential areas, schools, and other places were segregated.

An old minstrel song, “Jump Jim Crow,” led to the use of “Jim Crow” as a term of ridicule of black people. Laws which discriminated against blacks came to be called “Jim Crow laws.” Two of these laws:

Section 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of ****** that all railway companies carrying passengers in this state, shall provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored races. This shall be done by providing two or more passenger coaches for each passenger train, or by dividing the passenger coaches by a partition so as to secure separate accommodations. This section shall not apply to street railroads. No one shall be permitted to occupy seats in coaches other than the ones assigned to them on account of the race they belong to.

Section 1. *Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of ****** that hereafter it shall be unlawful for any school, academy, college, or other place of learning to allow white and colored persons to attend the same school, academy, college, or other place of learning.

Section 2. *Be it further enacted,* That it shall be unlawful for any teacher, professor, or educator in the state, in any college, academy, or school of learning, to allow the white and colored races to attend the same school or for any teacher or educator, or other person to instruct or teach both the white and colored races in the same class, school, or college building, or in any other place or places of learning, or allow or permit the same to be done with their knowledge, consent, or procurement.

In 1902, a New York newspaper published the following article, written by a black woman from Alabama. Her identity wasn't revealed, because of possible danger to her life.

I am a colored woman, wife and mother. I have lived all my life in the South. I have often thought what a peculiar fact it is that the less Southern whites know of us, the more they criticize us. They boast that they have little contact with us, never see us in our homes, churches, or places of amusement, but still they know us thoroughly.

The Southerners say we Negroes are a happy, laughing set of people, with no thought of tomorrow. How mistaken they are! The educated, thinking Negro is just the opposite. There is a feeling of unrest, insecurity, almost panic among the best class of Negroes in the South. In our homes, in our churches, wherever two or three are gathered together, there is a discussion of what is best to do. Must we remain in the South or go elsewhere? Where can we go to feel that security which other people feel? Is it best to go in great numbers or only in several families?

I know of houses occupied by poor Negroes in which a respectable farmer would not keep his cattle. It is impossible for them to rent elsewhere. All Southern real estate agents have "white property" and "colored property;" In one of the largest Southern cities there is a colored minister, a graduate of Harvard, whose wife is an educated, Christian woman, who lived for weeks in a tumble-down chicken house because he could neither rent nor buy in a respectable locality.

Many colored women who wash, iron, scrub, cook, or sew all the week to help pay the rent for these miserable shacks would deny themselves some of the necessities of life if they could take their little children and teething babies on the streetcars to the parks of a Sunday afternoon and sit under the trees, enjoy the cool breezes, and breathe God's pure air for only two or three hours. But this is denied them. Some of the parks have signs, "No Negroes allowed on these grounds except as servants." Pitiful, pitiful customs and laws that make war on women and babies! There is no wonder that we die. The wonder is that we persist in living.

(Continued)

Fourteen years ago I had just married. My husband had saved enough to buy a small home. On account of our limited money we went to the suburbs, on unpaved streets, to look for a home, only asking for a high, healthy locality. Some real estate agents were “sorry, but had nothing to suit,” some had “just the thing,” but we discovered on investigation that they had “just the thing” for an unhealthy pigsty. Others had no “colored property.” One agent said that he had what we wanted, but we should have to go to see the lot after dark, or walk by and give the place a casual look; for, he said, “all the white people in the neighborhood would be down on me.” Finally we bought this lot. When the house was being built we went to see it. Everybody was upset. We had “ruined” this neighborhood of poor people. The people who lived next door received the sympathy of their friends. When we walked on the street (there were no sidewalks) we were embarrassed by the stare of many unfriendly eyes.

Two years passed before a single woman spoke to me, and only then because I helped one of them when a little sudden trouble came to her. Such was the reception I, a happy young woman just married, received from people among whom I wanted to make a home. Fourteen years have now passed, four children have been born to us, and one has died in this same home, among these same neighbors. Although the neighbors speak to us, and occasionally one will send a child to borrow the morning’s paper or ask the loan of a pattern, not one woman has been in my house.

The Southerner says the Negro must “keep in his place.” That means the particular place the white man says is his. A self-respecting colored man who does not cringe, but walks erect, supports his family, educates his children, and teaches them that God made all men equal, is called a “dangerous Negro”; “he is too smart”; “he wants to be white and acts like white people.”

Whenever a crime is committed, the policemen look for the Negro in the case. A white man with face and hands blackened can commit any crime, then wash and join in the hunt to lynch the “big, black burly brute.” When a white man in the South does commit a crime, that is simply one white man gone wrong. If his crime is especially brutal he is a freak or temporarily insane. If one low, ignorant black wretch commits a crime, that is different. All of us are condemned. A young white boy’s badness is simply the overflowing of young animal spirits; the black boy’s badness is badness, pure and simple.

Is it surprising that feeling grows more bitter, when the white mother teaches her boy to hate my boy, not because he is mean, but because his skin is dark? I have seen very small white children hang their black dolls. It is not the child’s fault. He is simply a good student.

Sometime, someone will take up our cause and force the world to see that we deserve justice, as other heroes forced it to see that we deserved freedom.

This unit focuses on African-Americans up to 1910, but their autonomy problems have continued without interruption beyond that date. If you have access to the Internet, see <http://all-that-is-interesting.com/20-photos-segregation-america#9>.

Legal segregation in the United States continued until Federal civil rights laws and Supreme Court decisions made state and local segregation laws unconstitutional, after World War II. Unfortunately, ending legal segregation didn’t end autonomy problems for African-Americans.

Investigation: Actions to Gain Autonomy

Black leaders disagreed over this question, “What are the best ways for us to gain autonomy?” Below are some of their opinions. ***Based on the data:***

1. ***Identify the actions and attitudes recommended by black leaders.***
2. ***Classify the actions according to the reactions to threatened autonomy.***

Booker T. Washington was a black leader and educator. In 1895 he spoke in Atlanta, Georgia. In his speech, Washington presented recommendations for improving conditions for his people:

Our greatest danger is that, in the great leap from slavery to freedom, we may overlook the fact that most of us must live by the work of our hands. We shall prosper as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor, and put brains and skill into the common occupations of life. No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem. It is at the bottom of life we must begin, and not at the top.

To those of the white race who look to the immigrant for the prosperity of the South, consider instead my people. Help and encourage them. With education of head, hand, and heart, you will find that they will buy your surplus land, make blossom the waste places in your fields, and run your factories.

While doing this, you can be sure that in the future, as in the past, you and your families will be surrounded by the most patient, faithful, law-abiding, and unresentful people that the world has seen. We have proved our loyalty to you in the past, in nursing your children, watching by the sickbed of your mothers and fathers, and often following them with tear-dimmed eyes to their graves. In the future, in our humble way, we shall stand by you with a devotion that no foreigner can approach, ready to lay down our lives, if need be, in defense of yours. We shall weave our industrial, commercial, civil, and religious life with yours and make the interests of both races one. In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things necessary to mutual progress.

Bishop Henry McNeil Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal Church also spoke in Atlanta in 1895. Portions of his speech:

I believe that the Negro has been free long enough now to begin to think for himself and plan for better conditions than he can find in this country. There is no future in the United States for the Negro. He may manage an existence for generations to come, but he can never be a fully developed man.

A great gap exists between the two races in this country. The white people will not have social contact with any portion of the Negro race. Talk about two races remaining in the same country and working together, with no social contact, is ridiculous.

Senator Morgan of Alabama tells the truth when he says that the Negro will get nowhere without social equality with the whites, and that the whites will never grant it.

The status of the Negro is simply whatever the white man lets him have. The black man can demand nothing. On the railroads, he is the victim of discrimination. He must ride in the Jim Crow car or walk. The Supreme Court of the United States decided, October 15, 1882, that the colored man had no civil rights under the general government. States, from then until now, have been enacting laws which limit and deprive him of civil rights, even the right to vote.

Any oppressed people will not only become cowardly, but will transmit that same quality to their children, and their children's children. As such they will never make a bold and courageous people.

The Negro should, therefore, build up a nation of his own, and create a language in keeping with his color, as the whites have done. Nor will he respect himself until he does it.

I believe that two or three million of us should return to the land of our ancestors, and establish our own nation, laws, and customs. We should give the world the benefit of our individuality. We should build up a society of our own, and cease to be grumblers, complainers, and a menace to the white man's country, or the country he claims and is bound to dominate.

In the early 1900s, black leader Marcus Garvey led a "Back-to-Africa" movement. Garvey believed that blacks would never be given equality in countries where most people were white, and worked to build a homeland for black Americans in Africa. The movement was most popular in 1920 and 1921. It declined in 1925 after the federal government convicted Garvey of illegal actions in connection with his project.

In 1889 black journalist John Bruce wrote:

Disturbance is a good thing. Organization is a better thing. The million Negro voters of Georgia, and the millions in other Southern states could, with proper organization and intelligent leadership, meet force with force with most beneficial results.

The man who will not fight for the protection of his wife and children is a *coward* and deserves to be ill-treated. The man who takes his life in his hand and stands up for what he knows to be right will always command the respect of his enemy.

In the present situation, the only hope for the Negro to be found in a use of force under wise leaders. He must sooner or later set at rest, for all to come, the charge that he is a coward.

To settle this Southern problem, the Negro must not be rash either in action or in words. He must be very determined to bring order out of chaos. He must convince Southern rowdies and cut-throats that more than two can play at the game with which they have amused themselves for nearly a quarter of a century. Let the Negro require from every white murderer in the South or elsewhere a life for a life. If they burn our houses, burn theirs. If they kill our wives and children, kill theirs. Pursue them, meet force with force everywhere it is offered. If they demand blood, exchange with them until they have had their fill. If we do this, the shedding of human blood by white men will soon become a thing of the past.

Wherever and whenever the Negro shows himself to be a man, he can always command the respect even of a cutthroat. Organized resistance to organized resistance is the best remedy for the solution of the problem. I submit this review of the question, ladies and gentlemen, for your careful consideration.

In the early 1900s, the two most important black leaders were Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois. Their opinions about what black people should do to gain autonomy differed. You've already read Washington's views. Here are those of DuBois:

We must first make American courts build up a set of legal decisions which will protect the plain legal rights of black American citizens.

We must get legislatures and Congress to pass laws to give national aid to public school education, and to remove legal discriminations based simply on race and color.

The human contact between white and black human beings must be increased. It is frightful that ten million black people are coming to believe that all white people are liars and thieves. The whites in turn are coming to believe that the chief industry of Negroes is bothering whites. The publication of the truth repeatedly can help change public opinion and correct these awful lies.

To accomplish all these goals we must organize. Organization among us has already gone far but it must go farther and higher. Organization is sacrifice. It is sacrifice of opinions, of time, of work, and of money. But it is, after all, the cheapest way of buying the most priceless of gifts—freedom and efficiency.

In your opinion, which of the recommendations was better during this period of history? Is it the best advice for the present? Explain.

NOTE: Although the policies of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois were very different, both men and their ideas had great influence on later advances in black autonomy. Washington worked to provide job skills for black people through industrial training. He believed that through hard work, self-help, and cooperation with whites, black Americans could improve their condition in life.

Washington organized Tuskegee Institute, a school for African-Americans in Tuskegee, Alabama. This and other black colleges improved educational opportunities for black Americans and helped increase job skills.

DuBois saw the need for industrial training and self-help as preached by Washington. He also felt that blacks should be trained for positions of leadership, and came to believe that his people should work for complete equality and full rights as citizens.

In 1909 DuBois helped form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). This organization and similar groups formed since then have fought to end discrimination against black people and to obtain their full rights as citizens. They've worked toward these goals by taking legal action and making appeals to public opinion.

World War I did much to change the lives of many blacks. After the Civil War most had remained in the South as farmers, but many had moved to cities in the North, where the only jobs open to them were as servants and unskilled laborers. World War I, which the United States entered in 1917, opened up new job opportunities in industry.

Follow-Up: Autonomy and Stress for Present-Day Minorities

The problem of stress from lack of autonomy for African-Americans continues. New laws, court decisions, publicity about unfair treatment, and the influence of leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. have helped reduce segregation. Old laws, and any rules and actions which discriminate against non-white people have been declared illegal. However, racial prejudice and discrimination continue to affect the lives of people of color in America.

Collect data that describe present-day problems in the United States for African-Americans and other minorities:

- 1. If possible, interview minority adults and record their recent experiences related to race relationships.*
- 2. Gather additional data from newspapers, magazines, the Internet, or other sources on the same subject. (Keywords: racial profiling, racial quotas, racial discrimination. Note that all of these subjects are controversial. Articles and opinions will vary widely.)*
- 3. Based on your data, describe present-day limitations on autonomy, and reaction to these limitations.*

Acknowledgements/Sources:

Page 2t: *Ku-Klux Klan Conspiracy: South Carolina*, 42nd Cong., 2nd session **2b:** *Nation*, XIII, Dec. 7, 1871. **3:** *The Ku-Klux Klan Conspiracy. Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States: Florida*, 42nd Cong., 2nd session. **4:** *Senate Miscellaneous Documents*, 42d Congress, 1st session. **5t:** *Congressional Record*, 59th Cong., 2nd session, Jan 21, 1907. **5b:** Louisiana Laws, 1890, No iii **6t:** Laws of Tennessee, 1901, Ch. 7, House Bill No 7. **6b, 7:** *The Independent* (NY.), Sept. 18, 1902, LIV **8b, 9t:** *The Negro and the Atlanta Exposition*, Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, Occasional Papers No.7, 1896. **9b:** "The American Negro and the Fatherland" *Addresses and Proceedings of the Congress on Africa*, 1896. **10:** Manuscript in John E. Bruce Collection, Folder No.7, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. **11:** W. E. B. DuBois, "The Immediate Program of the American Negro," *The Crisis*, IX, April 1915, pp. 310-312.

Notes for Teachers and Mentors:

As with all of these auxiliary units in American history, the activities in the associated booklet, *Investigating American History* (see <https://www.marionbrady.com/AHH.asp>) are a necessary prerequisite. The analytical concepts associated with autonomy (and its lack) in that resource must be learned to help learners handle the investigations included in this unit.

The period after the Civil War gives us example after example of the ways people react to reduced autonomy. People marginalized by the dominant society—African-Americans and Native Americans, for example—provide poignant evidence of stress and frustration in this period, and show a variety of responses. These are forces that create history and change societies, sometimes for the better, sometimes not.

“The Great Migration” of African-Americans to northern cities is, of course, a powerful example of escape as a response to lack of autonomy. Learners may want to investigate this aspect of the period in more depth.

In the south, of course, the formerly-dominant white ruling class also perceived that their autonomy was being reduced by northern Republican rule, and reacted within the spectrum of responses we’ve listed. Formation of white supremacist groups such as the KKK was a response to perceived loss of autonomy. Of course, this doesn’t excuse their members’ reprehensible behavior.

The history is not complete without a consideration of the post-WWII civil rights movement that culminated in several important legislative victories, most notably the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The fight against racism, of necessity, continues.

In recent years, new emphasis has been placed on two dark aspects of African-American history during the “Jim Crow” period (and later): Lynchings, and racial massacres. This unit does not supply data for either, but for interested learners, ample evidence of both is available for investigation. We suggest that learners be encouraged to look further into this part of history, especially those who are coming to grips with their own heritage.

Recent years have also seen resistance among some white Americans against any emphasis within schools on learning the dark sides of American history, believing that it would tend to reduce the allegiance of young citizens to their country.

Whitewashing America’s past is intellectually dishonest, and effective citizens must develop an understanding of America’s failures as well as its successes. Without a clearheaded understanding that our nation can and has failed in important ways, our young cannot learn to be on guard against future failure.