NEGROES IN AMERICAN HISTORY: A FREEDOM PRIMER
Negroes in American History

A Freedom Primer

Text:
Bobbi Cieciorka
Frank Cieciorka

Drawings:
Frank Cieciorka
Contents

Introduction
The American Revolution 1
Toussaint L'Ouverture 7
Slave Revolts 11
Negroes and Indians 15
Women in the Movement 19
Frederick Douglass 23
Negroes in the Civil War 29
Reconstruction 33
Negro Cowboys 39
W. E. B. DuBois 43
The Modern Movement 49
Introduction

This is a history book about us. It is about a history that has been denied us by lies about what we are and what we have been. It is a book with pictures that can be colored with crayons. But most of all, this is a book to be used. This is a book we helped make and can continue to help make (and not just with crayons). What all of this means is that this is really a history book about us today, as well as about us yesterday.

What we learn from this book about us is that there is a lot about us that we don’t know. Which raises the question why we don’t know. That big question why is a threat and a challenge to the people who have kept us from knowing us. Which makes this a very dangerous book to those who don’t want us to know about us. Probably it won’t be used in any schools, except for the schools we make.

You see, to ask questions really means to try and find truth, which really means to ask more questions. To ask more questions means to make more challenges, which really means to do things you think are important to you. That’s dangerous
too, and usually isn’t allowed by the same people who keep us from knowing about us.

As you read, ask why haven’t I learned about Cherokee Bill, Nat Turner, Peter Salem, Sojourner Truth and the many others of us in this book. Think about how you should know about many of us in this book who fought against being slaves, and fought for freedom in this country, and weren’t “happy and satisfied.” Think about freedom. Freedom is fought for by the people who question and challenge slavery. Ask, as you read, am I free? If I am not free, who do I question and challenge? How do I question and challenge?

All of this is to say think about making a book of your own, about you today. Call it maybe a freedom fighting history book. But before doing that, make a freedom fight.

—charlie cobb
Negroes in the American Revolution

AT ONE TIME, the king of England owned America. He made laws that people in America had to obey. When a country is owned by another country, it is called a colony. America was divided up into colonies. The people in the New England colonies used to have mass meetings. They called the meetings Town Meetings.

At these meetings they spoke against the way decisions were made. They didn’t want to pay taxes to England when they didn’t get to help decide what the laws should be. They didn’t want British soldiers to live in their towns and order them around. Like Negroes in the South today, they had no voice in the government.

But many people who came to the mass meetings were Toms for the English. So when someone spoke up, he often got in trouble. After a while, people started thinking they should be free from England. They decided that they would fight Britain if that was what they had to do to be free. They were tired of being almost like slaves to England.

So they wrote the Declaration of Independence and said “all men are created equal.” Many
of the people who signed the declaration also owned slaves. Some of them felt that Negroes should be free. But many of them thought that freedom was for whites only.

IN THE DAYS before the war, Boston was one of the towns where British soldiers stayed. The soldiers’ coats were red so the people called them “redcoats.” The people and the soldiers hated each other and they would often have small fights.

One day there was a bad fist fight between some soldiers and town people. When everybody heard about it the next day, they were very angry. Many of them went out into the streets to wait for something to happen. One little boy got hit over the head by an angry soldier. The people picked up rocks and sticks and marched up to where the soldiers stayed.

The leader of the people that day was a tall, strong Negro named Crispus Attucks. He was a runaway slave who had become a sailor. He stood in front of the people and told them the soldiers would not dare to shoot. The people shouted at the redcoats, “Shoot and be damned! Shoot and be damned!”

A soldier shot into the air to scare the people away. They didn’t have tear gas and cattle prods in those days. Instead of running away, the people threw rocks at the soldiers. The angry soldiers started shooting at the people. Crispus Attucks fell to the ground, killed by a soldier’s bullet. Then the people attacked the soldiers with stones and sticks. They were too mad to care about bullets.

Finally the soldiers backed away and the fighting stopped. Four American lay dead in the street. The people carried them away and they were all given a hero’s funeral. Crispus Attucks, a black man, was the first person to die for
American freedom.

A FEW YEARS after Attucks was killed, the war for freedom really began. At first the American army did not use Negroes as soldiers. Most Negroes were slaves but many were free. The army did not even let free Negroes join. But Negroes fought anyway.

The first real battles of the war were at Lexington and Concord. Negroes fought there. After a while, the British army started promising freedom to any slaves who would fight on their side. Thousands of slaves ran away and joined the English army to fight for their freedom against their masters. After that the American army let Negroes join too.

Negroes fought for American freedom in all the biggest battles. Often it was their fighting which made the difference between winning and losing. A Negro, Peter Salem, was a hero in the battle of Bunker Hill. Another, Salem Poor, was talked about by 14 army officers. They said he acted like an officer and was a very brave soldier. Some Negroes also worked as spies for the army.

Many slaves died fighting in the war and many ran away and found freedom. But many were still slaves. Lots of people did not think it was right that people who fought in the war for freedom were still slaves. So the first big emancipation of slaves in the United States came after the war. Many black men were set free as a reward for fighting in the war. Some slave owners thought about the words of the Declaration of Independence. They freed their slaves even if they didn’t fight in the war.

There was a movement in the North called the Rights of Man movement. This movement felt it was wrong for any man to keep another man in slavery. Through laws and in the courts, slavery
was ended in the North.

It looked like slavery would die in the South too. But then the cotton gin was invented. The gin meant that people could clean cotton much faster than before and make more money selling it. People in the South decided to keep their slaves and grow cotton. To them, making money was more important than freedom and equality for all men.
Toussaint L’Ouverture and the Haitian Revolution

THE COUNTRY OF Haiti is part of an island in the Gulf of Mexico. A few French planters and about 500,000 Negro slaves lived there in 1790. Just as in the South, the slaves worked in the fields. They raised sugar and other crops. The planters made lots of money from these crops. The slaves came from Africa just like the slaves in America did. Many of the same slave ships carried slaves to both places.

A revolution was going on in France. It was a war between rich people and poor people. The cry of the poor people was “Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood!” Slaves heard the French planters talking about the revolution. They started thinking about the words ... liberty ... equality ... Drums began to beat in the hills.

The French planters thought the Negroes were having religious ceremonies. But the black men were planning their own revolution. In 1791, a group of slaves from many different plantations met in the hills. The time was set. On August 22, all over the French colony, plantations were in flames and white people were killed. One hundred thousand slaves had revolted.
ON THE BREDA plantation there was a slave who was a carriage driver. He was about 50 years old. His name was Toussaint L'Ouverture. He saw that the revolt would need order and training to win. He knew there were enemies who would try to end the revolt if the joyful slaves were not well organized. Toussaint became the organizer.

By first supporting one and then the other, he set the British and French and Spanish to fighting among themselves. Toussaint forced them all to withdraw from the island. He claimed leadership of the whole island. He started to make it into a good country for everyone who lived there. He built roads and forts and schools and hospitals. He set up courts of law, a system of taxes and an army. He made peace with the white people who were still on the island and with the free mulattoes who had been afraid of him. Soon he was a hero to them as well as to the black people.

Haiti remained a part of the French empire in name even though it was run by black people. But Napoleon, the French ruler, had plans for his western empire. And his plans needed slaves. Toussaint was in his way. So, Napoleon sent General Le Clerc, his brother-in-law, with 25,000 soldiers to win back the island. Toussaint's army was weak so he withdrew to the mountains. His soldiers burned crops and destroyed roads to leave nothing the French could use. Toussaint waited.

Then one of his generals became a Tom for the French. Toussaint was afraid the French knew all his plans. So he asked for a temporary peace. He hoped he could go on waiting and soon the fever would kill many of the French troops. But before that happened, the French tricked Toussaint and captured him. He was sent to France and kept in prison. He died there in 1803.
Dessalines, one of Toussaint's helpers, took over the leadership of Haiti. He finally drove out the French. Haiti became free from France just like America had become free from England.

The black people of Haiti remember Toussaint, the "first of the blacks", as the hero of their revolution. And many slaves in America heard of Toussaint and remembered him too. Toussaint proved that slaves could revolt and win.
Slave Revolts

SOME HISTORY BOOKS try to make us believe that slaves were content to be slaves. Actually, ever since there first was slavery in the United States, there were also slaves trying to be free. All through the days of slavery, the white people feared that the slaves might revolt and fight back at the people who mistreated them. White people wrote the books that said Negroes were happy. That was what the white people wanted to believe.

But slaves were not happy. They knew that trying to revolt was almost hopeless. They had no weapons to fight with. White people had guns and whips. Even so, during slavery there were about 250 slave revolts in the United States. The revolt of the slaves in Haiti gave hope to many slaves who wished to be free. And it made the white people in the South even more afraid.

In 1800, Gabriel Prosser, a slave, wanted to revolt. His plan was to gather followers and attack the nearby town of Richmond, Virginia. They would kill all the white people in the town. Then they would use the town for a fort and attack other towns. One very stormy night Gabriel and
several thousand followers started for Richmond. The rain had washed out the bridge so they could not use the road. They planned to wait a few days. But one slave told his master of the plan and the people in Richmond were warned.

When the slaves started out again, they were attacked and caught. Gabriel was hanged. Many of the white people said that Gabriel probably would have captured the town if the storm hadn’t stopped him. They said the town was poorly defended and the slaves outnumbered the townspeople.

DENMARK VESEY HAD been born a slave. He bought his freedom and became a carpenter in Charleston, South Carolina. Denmark loved freedom and hated to see anyone be a slave. He asked all the slaves he met, “Don’t you want to be free?” He would tell them about the revolt in Haiti where all the slaves were now free. He spent many years agitating among the slaves. They all looked to him for a leader. Then he started to organize a revolt.

There were about 9,000 people in Denmark’s slave army. He organized them very carefully. The people he worried about most were the slaves who worked in white people’s houses. They often got to work in the houses because they were Uncle Toms and would tell their masters what the other slaves were doing. Denmark was afraid that the house slaves would tell about the revolt.

Just two days before the revolt was to happen, one house slave did tell. Denmark tried to revolt anyway, but the white people knew too much. They caught Denmark and all the leaders and hanged them. The white people were very scared when they found out how carefully Denmark had planned the revolt. They killed many Negroes to make sure none of the leaders were
still alive.

ONE FAMOUS SLAVE revolt which worked was Nat Turner's. Nat was a very religious man. He felt that God had some great job for him to do. One day Nat thought he saw a sign from God. He decided that God wanted him to revolt. The county seat of Southampton County, Virginia, was called Jerusalem. Nat decided that he should march to Jerusalem and kill all the white people.

At midnight one night in 1831, Nat and seven other slaves started out. They had a hatchet and a broad axe. First they marched to Nat's master's house. Everyone was asleep. They went inside and killed the whole family. They took guns and powder and set the house on fire. They went on all night, burning houses and killing white people. As they went, other slaves joined them until there were 70 in the band. Finally they rested, about three miles from Jerusalem. Someone warned the people in town. They came out and attacked Nat's band.

Nat and his men had to run away. They never got back together. They were hunted down and killed. Nat hid in the swamps and wasn't found for about two months. The white people killed many Negroes because they were so scared. They even killed some slaves who had nothing to do with the revolt. Even after Nat was caught and killed, the white people were still afraid. Many of them moved away and none of them ever forgot Nat Turner and his revolt.
Negroes and Indians

IN THE EARLY days of the United States, settlers sometimes used Indians for slaves. They did not make very good slaves because they would often die when they were kept in slavery. Also, they knew the country better than the white people. They could easily hide when they ran away so that the white people could never find them.

White people very soon found that Negroes made much better slaves. They could be used for years and years. They could be treated very badly before the hard work would kill them. It was a strange land for the black folk. Even when they did run away they were usually caught.

Some whites did keep Indians for slaves as well as Negroes. And even when they weren’t slaves, Indians often lived near the white people. Whites usually treated Indians in the same way they treated Negroes. So, Negroes and Indians were usually friendly with each other. Some Indians were afraid of the blacks. They called them “devil-gods”. But often their hatred of white people made Indians and Negroes friends. Many of them intermarried so that Negro slaves had free Indian husbands and wives. Sometimes they inter-
married so much that whole Indian tribes became part of the Negro race.

When slaves ran away from their masters, they would often go to live with the Indians. Negroes joined just about every Indian tribe in the whole United States, even the ones in the far West. Usually runaway slaves lived with the nearby tribes in the South. Most often they joined the Seminoles.

Some of the Indians kept runaways as slaves for themselves. But most of the time the Negroes would live with the Indians. Sometimes they lived in separate villages just like the Indian villages. The blacks would become members of the tribes. They would be warriors and sometimes even chiefs. They helped the Indians by telling them about the white people. When Indians had to talk with whites, Negroes would often do the talking for them. Negroes knew more about the white people and could talk with them better.

THERE WERE MANY wars between whites and Indians. Negroes would sometimes help the Indians in these wars. When the Indians won one of these wars, they would kill all the white people they captured. They almost never killed the Negro slaves. Sometimes white people would fight wars with Indians just to get back runaway slaves.

Once, about a thousand slaves took over a fort in West Florida. It had belonged to the British. They abandoned it after the War of 1812. The United States government decided that too many Indian raids were coming from West Florida—which was not a part of the United States then. So, in 1816, the government sent Andrew Jackson with an army to attack the fort. He attacked and captured it. He sent all the slaves who weren’t killed back into slavery. Many Indians
were killed too. That started the first Seminole war.

The war ended in 1818. In 1835, a runaway slave girl who had married a Seminole warrior was caught and sent back to slavery. Her angry husband led the Seminoles in an attack which started the second Seminole war. During this war at least 500 Negroes were caught and sent back into slavery. Many more Indians were killed. The reason the government gave for the wars was Indian attacks. But the real reason for both wars was to get back some of the slaves who had run away.

The Seminoles and the Negroes stuck together. In 1839, when the Indians and the government made peace, the Seminoles were sent to live in Oklahoma. And the black Indians went with the red ones.
Women in the Movement

FREEDOM! That was the dream of every slave. Not just men, but women too. They dreamed of a day when they would be free. Harriet Tubman was such a woman. Born a slave in Maryland, Harriet escaped to the North when she was 25. But freedom for just herself was not enough and soon Harriet was heading South again.

She knew she would be a slave again if she were caught but Harriet went back to her old home. She led out her brothers and her old mother and father. The way was long and hard. They had to travel at night so they wouldn’t be seen. They had to swim across rivers and much of the way they had to walk. Harriet brought them all to freedom. But even that was not enough. There were still too many of her people in slavery. Harriet returned to the South 19 times and led out over 300 slaves.

All the slave owners hated her. They said they would pay as much as $40,000 to anyone who caught her. But Harriet was careful and never got caught. She always seemed to know when there was trouble ahead and what to do about it.
Even in the middle of the night she seemed to know which way to turn.

Sometimes she had to be hard with the people she was leading. Not everyone was as strong and brave as Harriet Tubman. If there was a baby in the group, Harriet would feed it dope. Then it would stay asleep and not cry. She always carried a gun with her. One time a man was very tired. He said he couldn’t go any farther. Harriet pointed the gun at him and said, “Dead folks tell no tales. You go on or die.” So the man went on to freedom.

Sometimes Harriet led the people all the way to Canada. There were laws in the United States that said runaway slaves had to be sent back to their masters. Harriet was a famous part of what was called the “underground railroad”. The underground railroad didn’t have trains or tracks. It wasn’t a real railroad at all. It was the name given to all the people who helped slaves escape.

There were people all along the way to the North who would hide slaves in their barns and cellars. They would feed them and give them clothes. These people hated slavery just as much as Harriet did. They helped runaway slaves even though it was against the law. When Harriet talked about the underground railroad she would say, “I nebber run my train off de track and I nebber lost a passenger.” And out of all her trips, she never did lose anyone.

With the Civil War, it looked like slavery would soon come to an end. But Harriet did not feel her job was done or that the war was for men only. She served as a nurse on the battlefield and as a spy for the Union army.

THERE WAS A slave named Isabella who grew up in New York. She became free when New
York law freed all the slaves in that state. She was a very religious woman and she believed in freedom. One day she walked out of New York City carrying a bag of clothes and 25 cents. She started to preach freedom all over the country. She changed her name to Sojourner Truth. Sojourner means someone who stays for only a little while and then goes on. Sojourner travelled, stopping here and then there, and always talking about freedom.

She would tell the story of going out to look at a wheat field. She saw the wheat standing there so big and tall. She took a hold of the wheat and there was no wheat there. So she asked God, “What is de matter wid dis wheat?” And God said, “Sojourner, dere is a little weasel in it.” (She meant weevil.)

And then she would talk about the Constitution and the rights of man. She said, “I come up and I takes holt of dis Constitution and I feels for my rights but dere ain’t any dere. Den I says, ‘God, what ails dis Constitution?’ And He says to me, ‘Sojourner, dere is a little weasel in it.’”

Sojourner was a famous abolitionist talker. Few of the many people who listened to this tall, dark woman ever forgot her.
Frederick Douglass and the Abolitionists

ALL DURING SLAVERY there were people who fought against slavery. They were mostly in the North. They were called Abolitionists. Some, like Harriet Tubman, helped slaves escape. Others, like Sojourner Truth, talked about the evils of slavery. But not all abolitionists were Negroes. Many were white people. For a long time the Negroes who worked with the abolitionists didn’t have much of a voice in the movement. After a while, Negroes really began to fight for themselves.

ONE OF THE most famous of Negro abolitionists was Frederick Douglass. He was born a slave in Maryland in 1817. When he was a child, he taught himself to read. Slaves did not have schools. The white people knew that learning to read and write would make the slaves want to know more. And knowledge would make them want to be free. That was just what happened to Frederick Douglass. In 1838, he borrowed a sailor suit and got on a train to New York.

The tall, handsome Douglass soon became an abolitionist speaker. The people never heard anything like him before. Most speakers were
white men or free Negroes. Douglass had been a slave. He could tell people first hand what it was like. He was also a very good speaker. He could make the people really feel as though they were in the slave huts of a plantation.

It is the same way today with the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The people in the FDP believe that only poor people know what it is like to be poor. So they don't send lawyers and preachers to tell people in the North what it is like to be poor in the South. They send poor people.

Douglass soon was a famous abolitionist. Some other abolitionists even thought Douglass was too good. They said he sounded too educated and not enough like a man who had been a mistreated slave. Douglass worked with William Garrison. He was a famous white abolitionist in Massachusetts. Garrison was completely non-violent. He believed that people's consciences would make them give up slavery if you showed them how evil it was. He did not believe in direct action or any kind of violence.

Douglass agreed with Garrison and preached the same message. They also said that the Constitution was in favor of slavery and therefore the government was in favor of slavery. They said the government should not be supported. Not even by voting.

Douglass visited England and was warmly welcomed. The English were shocked by slavery in America. They were always very kind to the abolitionists who visited them. While he was in England, some of Douglass' friends raised money and bought his freedom. After that he could not be caught as a runaway slave when he came back to America.

After he returned to America, Douglass met John Brown, the militant white abolitionist.
Brown believed in action. He said conscience would not change the slaveowners. Hitting them in the pocket book would. He planned to organize an army in the Virginia mountains and raid plantations from it. All the slaves would be freed. They would either hide in the mountains or go north to freedom. Douglass, because of his non-violence, did not like Brown’s idea at first. But he began to lose faith in changing men’s hearts. He began to agree more and more with Brown.

In 1859, Brown rented a farm near Harper’s Ferry in West Virginia. He planned to capture the government weapons there and use it as a base. Douglass didn’t approve of this part of the plan when he heard about it. He didn’t think Brown could succeed in an attack against federal property. Brown’s plot did fail and he was hanged. But his spirit was not forgotten.

Frederick Douglass became more militant. He finally broke with Garrison to work on his own. He started a newspaper called the North Star. (He chose the name because slaves followed the north star when they were escaping north to freedom.) Douglass studied the Constitution and finally decided that it was against slavery. He felt abolitionists should work to get it enforced as an anti-slavery document.

One of Douglass’ fellow workers at the time was Henry Garnet. Also a black man, Garnet favored a national slave strike. He said, “Rather die freemen than live to be slaves.” Douglass, too, began to favor direct action.

ABOLITIONISTS DIDN’T WIN much in those years and Douglass became discouraged. He planned to visit Haiti. He thought about having Negroes move to the island in large numbers. Always before he had opposed such movements. He said America was the black man’s home now
and this was where he should stay. Just as Douglass was about to leave for Haiti, the Civil War broke out. "God be praised!" cried Douglass when he heard the news.

President Lincoln had not yet said whether he was for or against slavery. Some of the states that had slavery were still with the Union. They were called border states. Lincoln was afraid they would join the Confederates if he said he was against slavery. Douglass and the abolitionists worked hard to educate the country and Lincoln. They tried to show that the war had to end slavery. Douglass even personally visited Lincoln to put pressure on him. Lincoln wanted to go slow. At one time he even suggested that the border states should end slavery by 1900!

But the Union needed Negroes to fight. It was this need, more than belief in the rights of man, that ended slavery. Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Emancipation on New Year’s Day in 1863. Whatever the reason, the abolitionists were joyful. They had finally won freedom.

During the rest of the war, Douglass was busy getting Negroes to join the army. Until his death in 1895, Frederick Douglass remained a fighter for Negro rights. He did all that he could to make the dream of freedom real for all black people.
Negroes in the Civil War

THE CIVIL WAR was caused by the different needs of the North and the South. Laws that were good for agriculture in the South were bad for industry in the North. And laws that helped industry hurt agriculture.

The South felt that the North was picking on it. The North thought the South was being old fashioned and holding up progress. This went on until finally the two started fighting. But only a few people in the South owned most of the best land and most of the slaves. And only a few people owned the industry in the North. These people didn’t even have to fight in the war.

In the South, anyone who owned more than 15 slaves did not have to be a soldier. In the North, anyone who paid the government $300 did not have to go to war. That was a lot of money in those days and only the rich could afford it. As in most wars, it was the working people on both sides who did the fighting. People said it was a “rich man’s war but a poor man’s fight”.

The North said it was fighting to save the Union, not to free the slaves. President Lincoln said that he would keep slavery if it would hold
the country together. At first, many Union officers actually returned runaway slaves to their masters. This helped the very people they were fighting. So in the beginning of the war, many slaves were confused about what the war meant for them. They waited and watched to see what would happen.

Finally the Northern army decided to stop helping the enemy by returning slaves. Negroes flocked to the Union lines by the thousands. Over 500,000 slaves ran away from their masters to follow the Union army. It was the biggest general strike in the nation’s history.

After two years of fighting, Lincoln decided that he could not win the war without the help of Negroes. He gave the order that Negroes could join the army. By the end of the war, almost 200,000 black men had answered the call to arms. And 38,000 of them died in battle.

WHEN NEGROES FIRST joined the army, many Union officers didn’t think they would make good soldiers. But they soon proved that they could fight. In fact, they fought even harder than white soldiers. They knew the evil of the enemy’s slavery better than anyone else. One Union colonel said that black soldiers won battles that the bravest white troops would have lost.

In one battle near Richmond, 12 Negroes won Congressional Medals of Honor. In another battle at Milliken’s Bend, Louisiana, 2,000 Texans attacked 1,000 Negroes. The Negro troops ran out of bullets and fought the Confederates with their bayonets and with their hands. They used their empty guns as clubs. The Texans were not used to this kind of battle and ran off in defeat.

Another reason Negroes fought so hard was because they knew they would suffer hard treatment if they were captured. Many Confed-
erates hated Negroes. Instead of treating them as prisoners of war, they would murder any Negroes they caught.

One of the worst crimes of the war was the Fort Pillow Massacre. The Confederates captured the fort and killed every Negro after the battle. They killed them with bayonets and with clubs. They burned them alive and buried them alive. They nailed them to houses and tortured them to death. Three hundred Negroes were murdered this way. The Confederate general who led the murderers was Nathan Bedford Forrest. Forrest was a slave trader before the war. He became the first grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan after the war.

WHEN THE WAR ended in 1865, Negroes looked to the future with hope in their hearts. They didn’t know that one hundred years later, equality would still be an empty promise.
Reconstruction

WHEN THE CIVIL War ended, people in the North couldn't decide what to do with the South. Before the war, almost all of the best land and most of the slaves were owned by a small number of white people. These slaveowners made most of the decisions about how the South was run. They were also the people who started the war. Many northerners wanted to let them run things again after the war. Andrew Johnson became president when Lincoln was shot. He was one of those who wanted to forgive the Confederates.

Other people believed that the war was fought for nothing if the old slaveholders were put back in power. They wanted to "reconstruct" society in the South so that equality and democracy would replace rule by a few. They were called "radicals". Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner were two leaders of the Reconstruction program in Congress.

But no matter what people in the North thought, the freed slaves had their own ideas. They wanted to own their own land, they wanted education, and they wanted a voice in how things were run.
DURING THE WAR, many slaves took over the plantations when the Union army chased the owners away. The soldiers told the slaves that Congress would give them the land to keep after the war. They set up their own government. They built roads, schools and churches. And they got guns to protect themselves. Many times when President Johnson gave the plantations back to Confederate leaders after the war, the people who used to be their slaves kept them away with guns.

All over the South, Negroes and poor whites organized together into what they called Union Leagues. One out of every three people in the Union Leagues was white. These Leagues were very much like the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party is today. They held mass meetings once a week in churches and schools. They talked about the kind of government they wanted in the South. And for a few years after the war, they got their chance to be a part of the government.

During Reconstruction there were Negroes in Congress and in the state legislatures. There were Negro police, judges and lawyers in the South. Before the war, only the rich could afford to get an education. Only people who owned property could vote. Poor white people were not much better off than Negroes. The freed slaves and poor whites in the legislatures after the war gave everyone a chance to get a free education. They changed the law so that a person didn’t have to own property to vote. They also gave more rights to women and they passed civil rights bills.

Most history books don’t say that Negroes and poor whites passed good laws during Reconstruction. They say that Negroes did not have enough education to make good laws. But when someone is sick, you don’t need to go to college
to know that he needs medical care. And when someone can’t read, anyone knows he needs education. These were the kinds of laws that were passed.

THE OLD SLAVEOWNERS tried to destroy the movement. They organized secret groups like the Ku Klux Klan. They tried to get their old power back by burning, beating and killing. But there were still federal troops in the South. And the Union Leagues still had guns to defend themselves. So the slaveowners were not too successful.

But in 1876, the election for president was very close. There were three Southern states that turned in two sets of votes. The slaveowners had separate elections and they voted for the Democrat, Tilden. Negroes and poor whites voted for Hayes, the Republican. Congress set up a committee to decide which votes should be counted.

Hayes wanted to make sure he became president. He talked to the people on the committee who were in favor of the slaveowners. He said that if they counted his votes instead of Tilden’s, he would pull the federal troops out of the South. That meant that Negroes and poor whites would no longer have federal protection. So in 1877, President Hayes sold out the cause of democracy. The Klan stepped up their system of terror and hatred of Negroes as soon as the federal troops were gone.

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY in the South was run by the old Confederates. Many of them wanted to have Negroes vote for them. So they offered to hold back the Klan in return for Negro votes. But Negroes didn’t feel that they had the same needs and interests as rich people, landowners and old slaveholders. On the other hand, the
Republican Party was selling them out again and again. Negroes were confused about which of the two parties to vote for.

Then, in the 1890’s, a new party rose up to challenge the other two. It was called the Populist, or People’s Party. The Populists said that poor whites and Negroes should stick together. As long as they were set against one another, their wages would be low and they would never get anywhere. One Populist leader, Tom Watson, said the party would “wipe out the color line”.

The Democrats were afraid the Populists would take over the South. First the Democrats tried to split the union of poor whites and Negroes. They blamed Negroes for all the troubles of the South and they preached hatred of Negroes. Together with the Klan, they started race riots and lynchings. Many of the poor whites in the Populist Party began to turn against the Negroes.

The next step was to take the right to vote away from Negroes. Each of the Southern states passed laws to keep Negroes from voting. Mississippi was the first in 1890. By 1910, all the states in the South had such laws. For example, in Louisiana there were 130,000 Negro voters in 1896. By 1904 there were only 1,300.

By losing the Negro vote, the Populist Party was cut in half. More and more the Populists tried to get white votes by talking against the Negroes. By 1906, even Tom Watson turned against the Negroes. But the Democrats were solidly in power and the Populist Party slowly disappeared. Negroes and poor whites were left without any voice in the decisions that affected their lives.
Negro Cowboys

MOST PEOPLE TODAY don’t know that Negroes played an important part in taming the American West. But they did. As early as 1539, a Negro explorer named Estevánico discovered the Pueblos of New Mexico. In the middle of the 1700’s, Negro families were among the founders of Los Angeles. Before the Civil War, many Negroes were brought to Texas as slaves. After the war, many more went west to find a new life.

The big business of the West was raising cattle. The big problem of the West was to get the cattle to the people in the east who would buy them. That meant very hard work driving the big herds on the trails from Texas to the railroads in the north. The trip took two or three months. Over 5,000 Negro cowboys helped to do that work.

Besides being cowboys, many Negroes were cooks for the trail crews. The cook was often a cowboy who was too old for the hard work of riding with the herds. He was in charge of setting up camp and feeding the cowboys. He also kept up their spirits by listening to their troubles and entertaining them. Sometimes he played a banjo or a fiddle.
When the first jail was built in Abilene, a Negro cook was the first prisoner. He was also the first to escape when the cowboys he cooked for found out where he was. They chased the marshal away and shot the lock off the jail. The cowboys always tried hard to keep their cooks happy.

Negro cowboys met with some discrimination. But there was less than in other parts of the country. In the east, poor white workers were afraid that Negroes would get their jobs so they hated Negroes. In the West, there were more jobs than workers. If men could work hard, that was more important than their race. Even so, very few Negroes ever got the top jobs.

There was more justice for Negroes in the West than in the South. If a white man murdered a Negro, he might hang for it if he were caught. And a Negro's testimony in court could put a white man at the end of a rope. But many of the whites who went west were unreconstructed confederates. So there were examples of people being murdered for no reason other than the color of their skin, just like in the South.

Thousands of Negroes also served in the cavalry. There were two regiments of Negro cavalry, the 9th and the 10th. They saw duty all over the West, from the border of Mexico clear up to Canada. The Indians called them "Buffalo Soldiers" because their tight curly hair looked like buffalo hair. They fought in many battles with the Indians. Negro cavalry captured Geronimo.

Sometimes Negro soldiers even fought against Negro Indians. One Negro who was on both sides was James Beckwith. He was a trapper, frontiersman, army scout and Indian fighter. He was also a member of several Indian tribes. When he died he was a chief of the Crows.

BESIDES WORKING AS cowboys or being
in the cavalry, Negroes were also farmers, trappers, prospectors and miners. A few owned saloons, hotels, dance halls and gambling houses. And some were outlaws.

One outlaw was Ben Hodges of Dodge City. He was a swindler, forger and cattle thief. Nobody trusted him but most people liked him. They thought his plans were funny. It was hard to find a jury that would convict him of anything. He lived a long life. When he died, he was buried near the founding fathers of Dodge City so that "they could keep an eye on him".

Another Negro outlaw who was not so well liked was Cherokee Bill. He was a robber and a killer. By the time he was 20 years old, he had killed so many people that the judge who sentenced him to hang said he was a monster. They asked him if he had any last words as he stood on the gallows. He said, "No. I came here to die—not to make a speech."

There were many Negro outlaws and there were many Negroes who rode with the posses that tried to catch them. Negroes rode with Billy the Kid and Negro cavalry rode after them. Negroes had a part in just about everything that happened in the west. Many were famous for bronco busting and for bulldogging.

Rodeo workers today say that Bill Pickett, a Negro, invented bulldogging. Pickett worked on the same ranch with Tom Mix and Will Rogers. In the early 1900's, they went around the country putting on shows. Pickett's bulldogging act was always one of the highlights of the show.

Today in books, movies and television, the old West is lily white. Why don't they show some of the Negroes who worked and fought to win the West? Even in his place in history, the Negro finds himself the first to be fired.
W. E. B. Du Bois

IN 1868, TWO things happened which were very important for the Negro people of America. One was the signing of the 15th amendment which gave Negroes the right to vote. The other was the birth of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois.

Du Bois grew up in Massachusetts. He went to Fisk University. In the summers he traveled around in the back country and taught at log cabin Negro schools. He went to Harvard University. Later he received the first Ph.D. Harvard had ever awarded to a Negro. For 13 years he taught at Atlanta University. During this time he published many studies on Negro life. He became an expert on the American Negro.

AT THIS TIME, the most powerful Negro in America was Booker T. Washington. Washington was the founder of Tuskegee Institute, the famous Negro trade school in Alabama. He was also the unofficial leader of the Negro race in the United States. Washington had reached his important position because he said things which white people liked to hear. One of his famous sayings was: “In all things purely social we can be
as separate as fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress . . ."

Washington said Negroes should improve themselves by learning trades. He thought equal rights would come without fighting as Negroes improved themselves. He said Negroes should go to trade schools rather than colleges. In 1912, he said that education should make the Negro "humble, simple, and of service to the community". Washington even said lynching was mostly the Negroes' fault for not being properly educated.

Things did not go as Washington thought they would. Negroes did not get ahead very much. Many were being lynched. But few people, black or white, questioned Booker T. Washington. He was an important man, so most people just listened when he talked.

But Du Bois didn't like what Washington was doing to the Negroes. After his studies, he saw how the Negroes were still being held down. He knew that black people had to have education, college education.

In 1903, Du Bois published one of his most important books. It was called The Souls of Black Folk. In it, he pointed out where he thought Washington was wrong. After that, other Negroes who also didn't like what Washington was doing joined with Du Bois. Soon Negro leaders were in two groups. Some followed Du Bois and some followed Washington.

In 1905, Du Bois and some other militant Negro leaders started the Niagara Movement. They were tired of waiting. Many of the things they said were like what the people in the freedom movement say now. They said: "We will not be satisfied with less than our full manhood rights . . . We claim for ourselves every right that belongs to a free-born American—political, civil and
social . . ."

In 1909, a new group grew out of the Niagara Movement. This was the NAACP. In those days, the NAACP was much more militant than it is now. NAACP members fought many court cases. They protested against discrimination wherever they found it.

Du Bois was editor of the NAACP magazine, the Crisis. The Crisis became a voice for militant Negroes. It was a thorn in the side of racists, Uncle Tom Negroes, and go-slow Negroes like Washington. It was a place where young Negro writers could get their work published. It was a tie to pull the black race together. Du Bois edited the Crisis from 1910 to 1932.

Du Bois had spent two years studying in Germany when he was in college. During that time he learned to consider himself a citizen of the world as well as of America. He got the idea of a Pan-African Congress. This was a meeting where Negroes from all over the earth could get together. They could talk about the position of the race in different parts of the world. The United States government opposed the idea. But in 1919, a Congress was held in France.

At that Congress, Du Bois learned about discrimination against American Negro soldiers in World War I. The United States army had asked the French not to be friendly with Negro soldiers. The army had said that, in the United States, Negroes were considered "a menace". Du Bois printed this information in the Crisis. The government was very upset. The Post Office would not mail the Crisis for a few days. But finally it was mailed. Negroes got to hear how their soldiers were treated.

Du Bois wrote and said a lot of things which the government didn't like. When he talked about
freedom and equality, he meant more than being able to vote or to buy a house or to get a job. To Du Bois, equality meant that everyone should have enough food and clothes and a warm house, even if he couldn’t get a job. Equality meant men shouldn’t have to work long hours for little pay when someone else got all the money from their work.

Freedom for everyone meant the United States government shouldn’t oppress people in the rest of the world. Freedom meant that working people shouldn’t have to fight with other working people so that big business could make money. Freedom meant that, since atomic war could destroy the world, there shouldn’t be any more wars. That was the kind of thing Du Bois said that the government didn’t like.

Du Bois worked with the Peace Information Center trying to get world peace. He said Negroes shouldn’t fight against other people of color in Korea. The United States government said he was an agent of a foreign government and put him in jail. He was then over 80 years old. Du Bois won his case and went free. But after he had been in jail, some people no longer respected or listened to him.

Du Bois left the United States and traveled all over the world. He finally settled in Ghana, Africa, where the black people welcomed him. The President, Nkrumah, called him “father”. But Du Bois did not forget his people in America. In 1961, when he was 93, he wanted to join the Freedom Riders in the South. His friends thought he was too old to go but they had a hard time stopping him.

Du BOIS WAS ONE of the greatest leaders black people ever had. His wisdom and courage helped Negroes all through the years from Recon-
The Modern Movement

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY changed the face of the world with new inventions and progress in science. Man could send rockets to the moon. But in many ways he was still living in the Stone Age. Men used the new inventions to kill their fellow men. The Nazis murdered 6,000,000 Jews. The United States dropped the atomic bomb on hundreds of thousands of Japanese men, women and children. This led many people to question the use of violence. A new method of dealing with oppression was developed. Nonviolence. This became the weapon of the struggle for equality in America.

The Negro never had real equality after Reconstruction, but the system of segregating the races in the South with laws didn’t begin until the end of the 1800’s. By 1900, all the Southern states had Jim Crow laws for trains. A few had segregation on street cars. After 1900, the South started passing laws to segregate everything it could think of.

In the next twenty years, almost every point of contact between the races was covered by a Jim Crow law. If laws missed something, then it
became segregated by an unwritten law. WHITE ONLY signs sprang up like weeds across the South. In 1960, the Movement faced a solid system of segregation. Most people believed it must have always been that way.

THE MOVEMENT SHIFTED into high gear in February of 1960. Four Negro students sat down at a Woolworth's lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The sit-ins had begun. This simple tactic of refusing to accept segregation was successful five years earlier in Montgomery. That was when Negroes wouldn't ride in the back of the buses. But this time it caught the imagination of young people across the South. Within days, thousands of students were sitting-in at lunch counters.

In April of 1960, these college students formed the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. The Movement got wheels with the Freedom Rides. CORE and SNCC rode across the color line in public transportation.

Many people started wondering what was the good of eating a hamburger if you couldn't vote. They felt that Negroes had to have their share of political power if things were going to be changed. They wanted a voice in the government. So the effort to break down discrimination in voting was begun. But even the few who got registered found that, in Mississippi, they were not allowed in the Democratic Party. And they could not run for office.

In 1964, in Mississippi, a new political organization was created. The Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. The FDP had Freedom Registration with no discrimination. It elected its own people to represent the state at the Democratic convention in Atlantic City. They held their own Freedom Elections and elected Mrs. Annie Devine,
Mrs. Victoria Gray, and Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer to represent them in Congress. This was a direct challenge to the white power structure and the system of segregation.

The people in the FDP didn't like the idea of a strong leader. They believed that decisions should be made by all the people. They held lots of meetings in churches all over Mississippi. They talked about what they wanted and they voted on it. It was a bold, new experiment in democracy in the South.

NOW MANY PEOPLE are asking new questions. Where is the Movement going? When everyone has the right to vote, what will they vote for? Who should make decisions for the country? Who makes these decisions now? Why do we spend billions of dollars each year for weapons when millions of people in this country need food, shelter, education and medical care?

Why does the United States support dictators and racists in other countries? As machines put more and more people out of work, what will these people do? All of these questions have to do with freedom. People in the Movement are looking for answers.

Since 1960, thousands of Negroes have gone to jail and have been beaten in the struggle for equality. Some have even been killed. They are writing tomorrow's history with their lives.
When did the Movement start? Was it in 1775 when the first abolitionist society was formed? Or in 1663 when the first slave revolt was planned? Maybe it was in 1526 when the first slaves ran away and joined the Indians. Then again, you might say that it began thousands of years ago when, even then, human beings were oppressed by their fellow men and they found that there is something in the human spirit which can’t stand chains . . . .