

Summary: The Challenge of Freedom

Freedom and Hardship

Reconstruction was a time of hope for African Americans. Slavery was over. New laws protected their rights. The plantation system was over. African Americans knew how to farm, but they could not afford to buy land. Some landowners let freed African Americans farm on their land. This system was called sharecropping. Landowners loaned sharecroppers tools and seeds. Sharecroppers gave the landowners a share of the crop. Often sharecroppers did not make enough money to pay their debts.

Some southerners opposed Reconstruction. They did not like federal troops in their states. They did not support laws that gave rights to African Americans. People formed secret organizations, like the Ku Klux Klan, to stop African Americans from taking part in government. They threatened, beat, and killed African Americans to stop them from voting.

The End of Reconstruction

By 1877 many people thought Reconstruction had not reunited the nation. President Rutherford B. Hayes told the federal troops to leave the South. Without soldiers to protect them, many African Americans could not vote. They lost their political power. Southern states passed Jim Crow laws to keep African Americans separate. Segregation was enforced in schools, hospitals, even cemeteries. The states usually spent less money on schools and hospitals for African Americans. Many African Americans believed education was important. In 1881, a former slave named Booker T. Washington opened the Tuskegee Institute where students studied and learned useful skills. The teachers and students were African Americans. Washington believed that educated African Americans would get equal treatment. Churches became important centers in African American communities.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

sharecropping *noun*, system where farmers used land and gave landowners a share of the crop

Jim Crow *noun*, laws that kept African Americans separate from other Americans

segregation *noun*, forced separation of races of people



After You Read

REVIEW Why did many freed African Americans become sharecroppers?

Underline the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW What was the purpose of the Tuskegee Institute? Circle the name of the man who started the Tuskegee Institute. Then highlight the words that tell what people did at the Institute.