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Freedom and Identity in the West
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[Note: These are rough notes taken by the Project Manager during the summer institute. Please double-check for accuracy. Some of the names may be misspelled.]

As we expand our geographical understanding of the West across the continent, how do freedom and identity take shape in these new places?

Greater Reconstruction took place in three steps. These stages were three wars. When you “remodel” the nation to the degree that it was remodeled, it is going to be violent and stressful.

1. 1845-1861: Old questions amplified, rising tensions (Mexican War)
 - a. This point in time was a violent period in American history. 1850-1860 violence rocked the decade and there wasn't a specific war associated with the violence.
2. 1861-1865: Basic answers (Civil War)
3. 1865-1877: Answers fleshed out (War against Indian America). Another very violent period in American history.

In thirty-two years, there were three major wars.

The Free Soil movement was not necessarily for equality. In fact, they were racist. They were concerned with economic competition. Farmer from Illinois does not want to move westward and compete with freed slaves for land and economic gain. Racial attitudes between white southerners and white northerners really saw blacks the same. The Oregon question—territorial legislature and constitution forbids slavery AND also forbids the immigration of free blacks. Excludes all blacks. The purpose is to “keep clear of this troublesome class” of people. Keeps Oregon clear of the racial troubles of the East. Quoted 1857 about the state constitution. In Kansas, most of the people were coming to get land—not to see that there wouldn't be slavery. Most of the violence involved in Kansas was over land, not over the issue of slavery.

People thought about the question of slavery in the West. But it was in racial terms. They saw the West metaphorically as an area of the nation for white people. They did not connect that they were moving to the most racially diverse area of the country.

Freed slaves that moved West to take up land under the homestead act (roughly 50,000), were going into areas that did not warmly receive them. They were moving to extremely hostile regions in which they were treated very badly.

Exoduster movement begins towards the end of Reconstruction: 1875-1880s. Benjamin “Pap” Singleton, born in 1809 in Tennessee. After the Civil War, was determined to help freed slaves. Tried to buy land in the south for freed slaves. So he went to Kansas with partners to set up colonies (Nicodemus, Kansas) for freed slaves. Eventually both colonies failed. The people that abandoned Nicodemus went to Denver and Kansas City. Reunions each summer with the descendants of people that lived in Nicodemus. What the West means to them: opportunity.

William Jefferson Hardin: mulatto

In Colorado, when they drew up the constitution for statehood (1863-1864), it was included in the constitution that black people were not allowed to vote. Hardin (a barber) led a group of freed blacks to petition the Senate. Hardin convinced the Senate to not pass the constitution without allowing blacks to vote.

1867: Territorial Suffrage Act passed by Congress

Stated that territories could not exclude blacks from voting. The question then came up that when the territories became states, they could exclude the vote, so Congress eventually passed the 15th Amendment.

The West takes on this aura of the land of opportunity—political and economic.

Taylor: In Search of the Racial Frontier

Step Back: Think of freedom and identity more broadly than just black and white.

Look at words more closely: “The People”

How are these words used in our primary documents. Declaration of Independence, The Constitution, the Emancipation Proclamation. All assume that we can talk about the American People as one—a defined group.

Arikara: Tanish, “original people”

Mandan: Numakiki, “people”

Cheyennes: Tsistsistas, “the people”

Comanches: Numinu, “the people”

Nez Perces: Niimipu, “the real people”

Heroic movement of people like Singleton and Hardin to become part of that idea of “the people.” When you expand it beyond black and white and move west, the idea changes—many Indian groups already have defined what people they are a part of. Reconstruction for native peoples means coercing them into dropping their definition of “people” to the U.S.’s definition of “people.”

By expanding the country to include all of these other cultural and racial groups, it forced the nation to define who really was a part of the fundamental documents’ idea of “people.”

Arguments used by Freedmen: We have a right to this land because we are a part of the American people. Indians are not American citizens. The Negro race are a working race (racial insiders) will work the land, build communities, and churches.

Douglass falls into same rhetoric: 1869 Blacks and Indians

“Whites have not slaughtered us because we are so close under your arm that you cannot get at us.” This has made the negro more like the white person than the Indian.

This changes the racial card—blacks become white and Indians non-white.

Freeland Grayson: Creek freedman.

“Civilized tribes” had slaves. After the Civil War, the freed blacks are having to deal with same issues with Indian tribes—would freedmen become part of the Indian nation? Would they get land from the tribes?

Very convoluted and difficult to sort out.

The most racially confused period in American history. Have to use a wide-angle lens and get out of the South. When that is done, everything gets nuts—everybody is fighting for their own interest.

One of the main reasons for the Seminole War was not that they had to leave Florida, but was that they had to get rid of slaves—so convoluted because a slave may be an uncle or tribe leader. Couldn’t tell who was a slave and who was not.

Turn to science in late 19th century: Race Science

Worldwide movement, but U.S. was considered cutting edge. This is because there were so many empires. But, in the U.S. West, there was more diversity—Indians.

Science could be used to prove race. The American West was considered the world’s laboratory for race science.

Craniometry: measure skulls

Samuel Morton

Describe race scientifically and then use science to order and classify races.

There was great anxiety about race mixing. Argument: If you open up the West and allow intermixing, then the U.S. risks becoming like Mexico (Mongrelized)—wouldn’t be able to “stand up” to places that were white and racially superior.

Josiah Nott: M.D.

Washington Irving

Two people on record, who have used the term “hybrid” in negative way.

Ephriam Squires, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley*

First use of archeology and searching for human remains. Finds skulls and argues that these skulls are the same and same as Indians today. Conclusion: Races are different and will always be different. Whites are superior, always have been superior, and Indians are inferior and always will be inferior. Must accept certain premises: that is that whites are superior and Indians are inferior—then can make the jump that since skulls have not changed in thousands of years, then races maintain their inferiority and superiority.

Louis Agassiz:

Polygenesis vs. Monogenesis

Human beings are not only divided into many races, but they are also different species. Argument then is that if one species of human “breeds” with another, then there will be hybridization of the species. (Anti-Darwinian)

Had Indian remains gathered from the West. Part of what became a major effort to gather Indian remains in the West and send to the East for study. By 1880's more than 2000 skulls gathered. They were taken from graves.

Frans Boaz financed his research in the Pacific Northwest by selling skulls.

Smithsonian interest in the skulls—why most of skulls end up at the Smithsonian

In the air in the late 19th century, not just the question of slaves and what will happen with freed slaves. If you look to the West, there is a very powerful movement for racial segregation. We could have gone in such a very different direction. The good news is: we did back away from that.

Reconstruction: While the promise to the freed slaves was never fulfilled, on the other hand, we backed away from the very different, very creepy, and very widespread idea of racial superiority and inferiority.

Racial Outsiders: Chinese and Asian

1882: Excluded completely (only racial or ethnic group that were completely excluded)

Hispanics: Marginalized in the Southwest

Become people of local color

Racial Outsiders and Insiders

Freedman

Indians

What was the government's policy?

In both cases, they were considered “the people” but they will be brought in by the government's policy and way.

Indians: you will become farmers (Dawes Act)

Blacks: same (40 acres and a mule)

Both will be Christianized

Both will be Educated to become “White”

Freedman Schools and Carlyle School

Difference is the response of the two groups.

E Pluribus Unum

Out of Many: One