



Late Reconstruction featuring The Jubilee Singers

OVERVIEW

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

Who were the Jubilee Singers and how do their experiences reflect the final years of Reconstruction in the United States?

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will examine the tour of the Fisk Jubilee Singers, an a cappella group started at Fisk University in 1871 to raise money for the school. Students will analyze primary and secondary sources about the tour to determine why Reconstruction ended.

Fisk University opened in Nashville, Tennessee in 1866 to provide education for African Americans after the Civil War. In 1871, the school treasurer started the Fisk Jubilee Singers, an a cappella group, to raise money for the school that was struggling to stay open. The Fisk Jubilee Singers would travel widely around the United States and Europe where they introduced “slave songs” and were “instrumental in perserving this unique American musical tradition known today as Negro spirituals”. The Jubilee Singers are still a part of Fisk University today and celebrated their 150th anniversary on October 6, 2021.



Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, The William Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs

The five years after the Civil War saw great progress for freedmen in the South as they used the legislation that gave them freedom to become the architects of their future. By 1872, 1,510 African Americans held offices ranging from local and state positions to multiple seats in the United States Congress. Across the South, African American delegates worked alongside poor whites to create truly “by the people” state constitutions that reflected social and economic equality. They worked to obtain public education for all, fair wages, property rights, and the right to vote. Successes of the state conventions included the first tax-supported public schools and legislation in South Carolina to aid poor farmers and tax large plantation owners. In addition to holding political offices, African Americans were the majority of registered voters in many Southern states.

By the middle of the 1870s this progress would be hindered or reversed entirely by several factors which lead to the end of Reconstruction in 1877. One factor that led to the end of Reconstruction was the division in the Republican Party that began around the Fourth Enforcement Act (or the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871). All party members agreed that the violence against African Americans in the South was concerning, but they disagreed on how the federal government should respond.



The more radical members thought that President Grant should be temporarily given more power to stop the violence in the South, including suspending the writ of *habeas corpus*. The more moderate members felt that this would expand the powers of the presidency too far and would be unconstitutional. They also feared that the Democrats would use this new federal power as a campaign point in the 1872 elections. Some moderate Republicans also believed that federal intervention would not fix the issues in the South, it was time to let the Southern people be responsible for finding solutions. While the Fourth Enforcement Act did pass, the conversations and divisions of the debate in Congress would continue for the next several sessions and no significant or impactful legislation would be passed for the civil rights of freedmen.

Another factor that led to the end of Reconstruction was the resurgence of the Democratic Party beginning in 1872. In 1872, Congress passed amnesty legislation that would let ex-Confederates hold public office which they were barred from by the 14th Amendment. After the economic Panic of 1873 and several scandals in the Republican party, the Democrats were able to gain significant power by winning Congressional seats in the 1874 election (Republicans lost 93 seats in the House and 9 in the Senate). The Democrats would control the House in the 44th Congress starting in 1875, making any further policy change for civil rights almost impossible.

The villainization of African Americans in the South and poor workers in the North was also a strategy Democrats used to disenfranchise both groups while bringing Northern Republicans to their side. Democrats portrayed both groups as bringing socialism to the United States and newspapers portrayed Southern governments as corrupt, siphoning money from the wealth of white taxpayers to poor ex-slaves. In 1875, the Supreme Court case *Minor v. Happersett* ruled that citizenship did not necessarily guarantee voting rights. This would provide the opportunity to disenfranchise people with other qualifications other than race, like property ownership.

By the Presidential Election of 1876, the momentum to continue Reconstruction policy was waning both in the political and public sphere. The disputed election of 1876 and the compromise that followed reflects the waning momentum and the culmination of political shifts in the early 1870s. The election between Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican) and Samuel J. Tilden (Democrat) came down to the disputed states of Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina, all states in the former Confederacy. Through official and unofficial dealings in Congress, a compromise was developed. As part of the compromise, Congressional Democrats agreed to declare Hayes the victor of the presidential election if Congressional Republicans agreed to withdraw the last federal troops supporting governments in Louisiana and South Carolina. Republicans also agreed that they would no longer interfere in the affairs of states in the former Confederacy and leave home-rule of the South to Democrats. The Compromise of 1877 would signify the end of Reconstruction and Southern states would start to pass Jim Crow laws disenfranchising African Americans and implementing segregation.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

1. KNOW (KNOWLEDGE):

- How division in the Republican Party and the rise of Democratic power in Congress contributed to the end of Reconstruction
- The Black Codes and violence in the South that reversed progress made during the early years of Reconstruction
- Other factors that led to the end of Reconstruction, including an economic depression and waning enthusiasm for the rights of freedmen
- The effort to disenfranchise newly freedmen, poor whites, and workers
- The Compromise of 1877 and its role in bringing Reconstruction efforts to an end
The work of W.E.B Dubois, *Black Reconstruction*.

2. MASTERY OBJECTIVE:

- Students will be able to identify the reasons that Reconstruction came to an end and its lasting impact on the United States through the analysis of primary and secondary sources.

ACTIVITIES

DISCLAIMER

This lesson contains primary source documents and other materials that may include terms and images reflecting the attitudes, perspectives, and beliefs of different times that today are considered offensive and demeaning. Teachrock.org does not endorse the views expressed in these documents, but recognizes the value such materials provide for historical inquiry. For guidance on introducing controversial historical materials into the classroom, we suggest reviewing this document from The Library of Congress: <https://blogs.loc.gov/teachers/2011/11/dealing-with-difficult-subjects-in-primary-sources>.

MATERIALS REQUIRED

- A device with access to the internet for each student.

PREPARATION

- Display **Gallery Walk - Jubilee Singers Tour Stops** around the room.
- On a whiteboard or a big sheet of paper, create a space titled “Fisk University and Jubilee Singers Quick Facts”

MOTIVATIONAL ACTIVITY

1. Play the YouTube video “Homecoming: A Film By Beyoncé | Official Trailer | Netflix” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB8qvx0HOII>) and ask students:
 - Have you seen this documentary?
 - Have you seen Beyoncé’s 2018 Coachella performance?
 - What is she celebrating in her performance? (*HBCU- Historically Black Colleges and Universities*)
 - What is an HBCU?
 - Why do you think Beyoncé chose to celebrate HBCUs in this performance?
 - Why are HBCUs important?
2. Explain to students that in this lesson they will be exploring one of the first HBCUs established in the country in order to understand the last years of Reconstruction.

PROCEDURE

Part 1: Reconstruction and Fisk University

1. Break students up into groups of four and explain that they will now look at a HBCU that was started following the Civil War in 1866. Inform students that Fisk University was started in Nashville, Tennessee to educate formerly enslaved African Americans. By 1871, the university was struggling financially and students are going to examine documents to explore why this happened and how it reflects the later years of Reconstruction (1871-1877) in the United States.
2. Distribute one copy of **Handout - Fisk University and Reconstruction Document Set** to each group. Explain to students that they will work with their group members to jigsaw the document sets. View instructions for a jigsaw activity [here](#). (*Note to teacher: provide a way for students to look up the meaning of words they are unfamiliar with in the document set.*)
3. Distribute one copy to each student **Handout - Fisk University and Reconstruction Document Set Questions** (Teacher’s Guide available). Explain to students that each member of the group will choose one document set (1-4) to become the “expert” on by reading the document set and answer the aligning questions independently.
4. After students have completed their document set and answered the aligning questions they will then get into “expert” groups with students who completed the same document set from other groups. Display **Image 1, Expert Group Discussion** and instruct students to discuss using the bullet points as guidance.
5. After students are finished in their “expert” groups, have them rejoin their original groups. Instruct each member to take turns presenting their document set to the group while helping them answer the questions that align to each document set.

6. If time allows or for homework, have students complete the **Handout - Exit Ticket** and instruct them that they will share their answers with the class the following day/period.

Part 2: The Jubilee Singers and the End of Reconstruction

1. To begin the second day of this lesson, ask students to share their responses from the previous day's exit ticket with the class. Explain to the class that they will explore what Fisk University did to raise money in 1871.
2. Play the audio Library of Congress audio "Swing Low, sweet chariot" for the class. Then ask students:
 - Have you heard this song before? If so, where?
 - Do you know the history behind this song, if so what do you know?
 - Have you heard of the Fisk Jubilee Singers before? If so, where?
 - If you haven't heard of the Fisk Jubilee Singers before, who might they be?
3. Display **Image 2, The Original Jubilee Singers** and inform students that "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" originated from when African Americans were enslaved in the United States before the Civil War. It was made popular by the Fisk Jubilee Singers, an a capella choral ensemble created in 1871 at Fisk University. Using their personal devices, ask half of the class to read the "About The Fisk Jubilee Singers" webpage (<https://fiskjubileesingers.org/about-the-singers/>) and the other half of the class to read the "Our History" (<https://fiskjubileesingers.org/about-the-singers/our-history/>) on the Jubilee Singers website.
4. Ask students to call out facts from what they read and write them in the space "Fisk

University and the Jubilee Singers Quick Facts" already set up in the room.

5. Ask students the following questions to enrich their understanding of the facts they shared:
 - What did Fisk do to raise money for the school starting in 1871?
 - Why is the music they sing significant and important for the United States?
 - Why is the story of the Fisk Jubilee Singers important?
6. Display **Image 3, The Jubilee Singers Tour Timeline, 1871-1879** to refer to in the next activity.
7. Distribute **Handout - The Jubilee Singers Tour Graphic Organizer** (adapted from the Library of Congress Primary Source Analysis Guide found here) and explain to students they will now look at some of the stops on the Jubilee Singers tour by analyzing the **Gallery Walk - Jubilee Singers Tour Stops** already displayed in the room. (*Optional: Play this video of the Jubilee Singers performing as students circle the room: <https://www.kennedy-center.org/video/education/music-popular/the-fisk-jubilee-singers/>*)
8. Ask students to fill out the graphic organizer as they visit each stop around the room. Then ask students:
 - How does what you read confirm what we learned yesterday about the last years of Reconstruction?
 - What is something that surprised you about what you read?
 - Was there anything that you read that didn't line up with what you learned yesterday about the later years of



Reconstruction? (For example: the myth of the North being better; despite obstacles there were still successes for the Jubilee singers; desegregation of Pullman train cars and raising the money for Jubilee Hall.)

- Why do you think the Jubilee Singers were successful in their tour and were able to raise the money to build Jubilee Hall?

SUMMARY ACTIVITY

1. Distribute **Handout - Compromise of 1877** and ask a student to read aloud the Compromise of 1877. Instruct students to summarize the compromise in their own words on the handout and ask several students to share their summaries with the class.
2. Instruct students to complete the writing prompt on the handout. Then ask students:
 - What do you think the end of Reconstruction meant for the country and African Americans moving forward after 1877?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Create a visual timeline of the Jubilee Singers tour using images and primary sources from the Library of Congress (LOC.Gov).
2. Watch Chapter 1 of the Jubilee Singers: Sacrifice and Glory documentary (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/Singers-chapter-1/>)
3. Using the Library of Congress Newspapers Archive (<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/newspapers>), further explore what newspapers published about the Jubilee Singers. When you find an article, answer the following questions:
 - What does the newspaper say about the Jubilee Singers?
 - What do you find interesting about the article?
 - What questions do you have? How can you find out more about it?
4. Watch the Beyoncé documentary, *Homecoming*.
5. Will the Jubilee Singers perform near you this year? Look at their upcoming performance schedule here: <https://fiskjubileesingers.org/performances/>
6. Research another Historically Black College and University (HBCU):
 - When and where was it founded?
 - Did they have a similar or different experience to Fisk University?
 - Do they have a similar group like the Jubilee Singers?



STANDARDS

COLLEGE, CAREER, AND CIVIC LIFE (C3) SOCIAL STUDIES STANDARDS

History

D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.

D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives.

D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.

CALIFORNIA HISTORY—SOCIAL SCIENCE CONTENT STANDARDS

8.11 Students analyze the character and lasting consequences of Reconstruction

2. Identify the push-pull factors in the movement of former slaves to the cities in the North and to the West and their differing experiences in those regions

3. Understand the effects of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the restrictions placed on the rights and opportunities of freedmen, including racial segregation and “Jim Crow” laws.

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE FRAMEWORK STANDARDS

Topic 5. The Civil War and Reconstruction: causes and consequences [USI.T5]

6. Analyze the consequences of the Civil War and Reconstruction (e.g., the physical and economic destruction of the South and the loss of life of both Southern and Northern troops; the increased role of the federal government; the impeachment of President Johnson; the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments; the expansion of the industrial capacity of the Northern U.S.; the role of the Freedmen’s Bureau and organizations such as the American League of Colored Laborers, the National Negro Labor Council, the Colored Farmers’ National Alliance and Cooperative Union; the accomplishments and failures of Radical Reconstruction; the presidential election of 1876; and the end of Reconstruction)

SOCIAL STUDIES – NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE SOCIAL STUDIES (NCSS)

Theme 1: Culture

Theme 3: People, Place, and Environments



Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity

Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

Theme 7: Production, Distribution, and Consumption

Theme 9 : Global Connections

Theme 10: Civic Ideals and Practices

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

College and Career Readiness Reading Literature Standards for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1. Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

College and Career Readiness Reading Information Text Standards for Grades 11-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.



CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3 Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening for Grades 9-12

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization,



development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.

LEARNING FOR JUSTICE SOCIAL JUSTICE STANDARDS

JU.9-12.15 I can identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world.



RESOURCES

HANDOUTS

- Gallery Walk - Jubilee Singers Tour Stops
- Classroom Activity - Jigsaw
- Handout - Fisk University and Reconstruction Document Set
- Handout - Fisk University and Reconstruction Document Set Questions
- Handout - Fisk University and Reconstruction Document Set Questions (Teacher's Guide)
- Handout - Exit Ticket Activity
- Handout - Jubilee Tour Stops Graphic Organizer
- Handout - The Compromise of 1877