

AMERICANS HISTORY BOOKS FORGOT

Unfulfilled Promises Killed Reconstruction

Seventh of 10 Articles

By **BETTY DeBOLD**
Scripps-Howard Staff Writer

The end result of Reconstruction for the American Negro can be summed up simply. The Federal Government fizzled out on most of the promises it made, and the South burned up over those that were kept.

After the War, four million black people — still looked at as \$2 billion in human property — began to marry legally, take paid jobs and educate themselves. Freedmen's Bureaus, in setting up schools for them, also made available to many whites the first free public school system in the South. Many of these schools were frequently and mysteriously burned down — and some teachers killed — but free education persisted.

In 1876, the 15th Amendment to the Constitution finally gave the Negro the franchise, and it was exercised. Force Bills of 1870-71 provided for Federal troops at the polls to safeguard these rights.

Enraged South

But the enraged South — which had been generously restored to home rule by President Johnson, against the advice of many — responded with its own Black Codes. These laws saw that "vagrants" (any black who could be found "idle" on the streets) were indentured to courts and put to work in chain gangs in mines and railroads. Curfew laws kept remaining blacks off the street after sundown.

Those Negroes who persisted in turning up at the ballot box and "improper" places got visited in the night by hooded Ku Klux Klansmen, organized in 1865 under the leadership of former Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest. (There were other KKK-type clubs too.)

Once the Civil Rights Act of 1875 was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court in 1883 and President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew Federal troops from the South in 1877, "Reconstruction" was over.

Negroes were then "legally" disfranchised in Southern states by property and poll taxes, literacy requirements and the "grandfather clause," which declared eligible "only those men whose grandfathers or fathers had voted prior to 1867." That took care of a lot of voters. By 1900, only 3000

Negroes remained on voting lists in Alabama.

Lynchings

But the chief method for "scaring off the niggers" remained a lynching. From 1890 to 1900, there were 1217 mob murders of Negroes in the South — 114 lynchings in 1900 alone. A typical case was the lynching of Samuel Petty in Leland, Miss., Feb. 24, 1914, reported in Fishel and Quarles' "American Negro." Leland folk already had lynched two people that week. Mr. Petty, a "quiet fellow" accused of killing a deputy sheriff, was "arrested" by about 400 people who led him into town via a rope around his neck. He was placed on a straw-filled box. One tub of oil was poured on the box, another on Mr. Petty. "The living man was set afire, and the crowd yelled as the flames shot up," an anonymous witness said.

"The poor creature managed to lift himself out of the box, fighting the flames with his hands, and the crowd allowed him to run the length of the rope. Then there were several hundred shots and (he) fell in his tracks. He was pulled back into the fire . . .

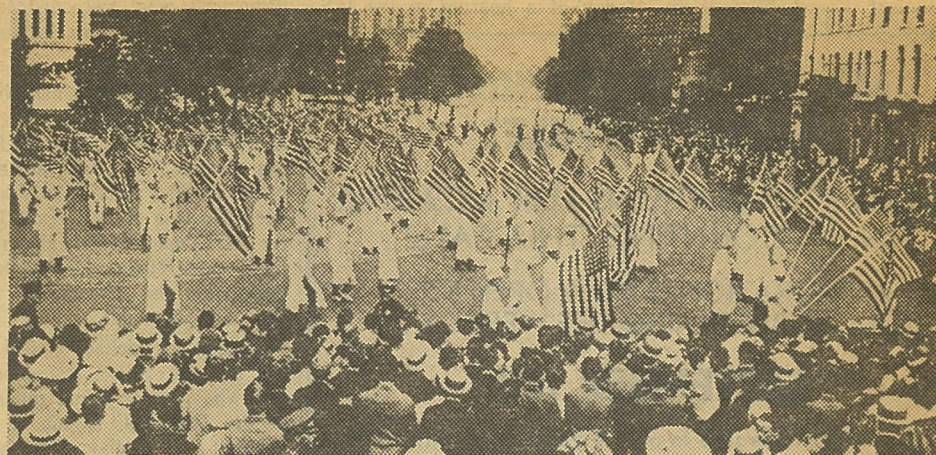
I could actually smell the flesh. Not a voice had been raised in defense of the man. (They) would yell as tho at a bull fight. After (the body burned) the bones and ashes were buried in the edge of the street in front of a colored barber shop."

2 Important Men

Two very important men and two schools of thought on the Negro's development emerged during this "dark age."

One was Booker T. Washington. Born a slave, he worked as a boy in West Virginia salt mines, then went to Hampton School in Virginia, where trades were taught. In his 20s, as a Hampton teacher himself, he was approached by a white banker and Negro mechanic to teach a Negro normal school in Alabama. Washington went, only to find a decrepit church his school, and no money for books. With his students he raised funds, bought land and built Tuskegee Institute in 1881.

Tuskegee was built with their own hands — literally — to use Washington's philosophy of industrial education. He felt classical education had to take a back seat while his people were excluded from virtually all



A Ku Klux Klan "regiment" parading thru the Nation's Capital in 1925.

skilled trades and unions. Believing firmly the Negro must "crawl before he walked," Mr. Washington placated white industrialists and educators to get money for the Institute. "When your head is in the lion's mouth, pet it," he observed fatalistically, urging his people to co-operate with whites "under existing conditions."

Mr. Washington was effective, training thousands of Negroes to earn better livings . . . but he got the reputation of a compromiser in the eyes of Negro intellectuals. Chief among these was W.E. Burghardt DuBois, who feared Mr. Washington was "leading the way backward."

Mr. DuBois, born in 1868, studied at Fisk University and taught in everything from log-cabin schools to Wilberforce and Atlanta Universities. He deplored the "emascu-

lating effects of caste distinctions" and felt it was wrong to "induce black men to believe that if their stomachs be full, it matters little about their brains."

In July, 1905, Mr. DuBois and 29 other Negro leaders opposed to Mr. Washington's philosophy formed "the Niagara Movement" to organize Negroes for "honest criticism," insistence on "manhood right" and "spiritual freedom," as well as industrial opportunity.

In 1910, the Urban League was formed by a Negro social worker at Columbia, George Haynes, and a white woman, Mrs. William H. Baldwin. The Urban League's goal was, and is, to improve working and living conditions of city Negroes. Branches soon spread across the country.

(NEXT: "Jazz: A Negro Gift to America.")