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## GEORGIA

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Georgia was unique among the American colonies in that slavery was prohibited by law at the founding of the colony. Georgia was founded for military and humanitarian principles in 1732. The Trustees who governed the colony forbade ownership of slaves. As soon as the settlers became prosperous in their new home, they began to smuggle slaves from South Carolina. The ban on slaves became so widely ignored that in 1749 the Trustee government was forced to yield to pressures for legalization of slavery. After the ban was lifted many African slaves were brought to Georgia. By 1750 there were nearly 1,000 black people in the colony. By 1760 the slave population had increased to 3,000.

Numerous Negroes fought in the Revolutionary armies and in the Georgia militia in the hope that freedom from Britain would mean freedom from slavery. Some black men who served in the army were freed and given land grants as were many Revolutionary soldiers.

By 1790 the black population of the state had increased to 29,000. Slavery did not become a huge enterprise until after the invention of the cotton gin in 1793. Slavery expanded greatly and talk of ending slavery in Georgia ceased. Inspired by the ideals of the Revolution, there had been considerable feeling for ending slavery. Georgia had prohibited the foreign and domestic slave trade before 1800. Yet slavery had become so profitable that abolition sentiment lessened. Before 1800 most slaves had been used on coastal rice and indigo plantations, but the cotton gin had made upland cotton farming the largest crop of the state. By 1825, Georgia was the chief world producer of cotton. Although three-fifths of the white population owned no slaves, most of the export production was done by black slave labor.

South and central Georgia became the heart of the Black Belt where large plantations were located. Most of north Georgia consisted of small farms. Usually the larger the plantation, the less personal contact the field slave had with whites. On the isolated Sea Islands where huge plantations were often owned by absentee landowners, the overseer was one of the few daily contacts which the slave had with white society. Consequently, these slaves were able to retain more of their African heritage. A special dialect called Gullah developed

among the Sea Island black people. In myth, song and dance patterns the rich Yoruba and Ibo cultures of West Africa were able to assert themselves. African background was able to exert a decisive influence on patterns of ideology and religion, family structure, and agricultural techniques. The degree to which slaves were exposed to white society varied. Field hands had less exposure than house servants, who practically lived with the whites. Although house servants had more opportunity to understand and adopt the cultural patterns of white society, the attitudes of all slaves varied widely depending on the treatment they received from their master.

The reactions to slavery took different forms. Many slaves escaped by joining the Seminole Creek Indians, who moved from south Georgia into Florida to get away from the whites. In the Seminole wars, escaped Negro slaves were among the most unrelenting fighters against the United States army. After the removal of Indian groups from Georgia, most escaping slaves followed the Underground Railroad to the North. The fact that many restless slaves escaped probably acted as safety valve, reducing the number of slave revolts. Slaves often rebelled in more subtle ways, such as the destruction of farm equipment. The killing of a master or an overseer was a more overt form of rebelling. After large scale revolts like the Nat Turner revolt in Virginia in the 1830's, Georgia increased restrictions on slaves. Free Negroes were also greatly restricted, being little better than slaves. Special codes for free blacks show the basic attitude of white towards blacks. There was law in Georgia to prohibit the teaching of reading to any Negro, slave or free. Free blacks were greatly limited as to the type of work they could do. Even in permissible jobs they were often discriminated against.

There were strict punishments for any sign of rebellion among slaves. Atlanta city council minutes of the 1850's show that whites often protested over competition from free black tradesmen. For certain violations of the law a freeman could be sold back into slavery. By the time of the Civil War there was a law that any free black person would have to leave the state or be returned to slavery.

After the 1830's earlier feelings against slavery disappeared. Propagandists for slavery began to consider slavery a positive good. The domestic slave trade was reopened. Southern prosperity rested on the backs on black slaves. A unique Southern culture promoted everything Southern, including slavery. Although the international slave trade was illegal, slave smugglers continued to land on the Georgia coast. In 1858 the slave ship *Wanderer* was captured at Jekyll Island, making it the last known ship bringing captured Africans to the nation.

Many scholars feel that the South's determination not to retreat on the question of slavery helped bring on the Civil War. After the war began Georgia was, except for the coastal region, free from massive military action until 1864. Black Union soldiers played a large part in capturing and occupying Georgia's coastal regions. Some attempts at Negro colonization of deserted plantations on the Sea Island succeeded, but in the main the blacks in the freed areas had to begin without land. Slaves were used to build the extensive defenses around Atlanta. Black sentiment was overwhelmingly in favor of the Union forces. On General W. T. Sherman's March to the Sea in 1864, many slaves followed the Union forces. With the end of the Civil War over 500,000 slaves in Georgia, valued at two hundred seventy two million dollars, were freed.

Although the Negro was technically freed in 1865 and guaranteed political rights during Reconstruction, he was freed without land, education, or capital upon which to build. Sharecropping developed to take the place of slavery and the vast majority of blacks in rural areas of Georgia became sharecroppers. Sharecroppers farmed the land of another person and turned over a portion of the crop to the owner of the land. There was little profit for the sharecropper, who usually lived in perpetual debt to the local banker or storekeeper.

Despite their poverty, Negroes were able to exert a considerable political influence. Since the Democrats favored white rule, blacks were almost solidly Republican. Without education, Negroes helped to elect officials who were sometimes dishonest in government. But public dishonesty was typical of government throughout the nation during this period.

A number of black men were elected to government posts. In 1871, for example, William Finch and George Graham were the first blacks to be elected to the Atlanta city council. Along with other Negro leaders, they worked strongly for the promotion of Negro education. Atlanta became a national center for the education of black people. In 1867 Atlanta University, with the help of Northern capital, was founded. Shortly thereafter, Morehouse College was established.

In 1870 Clark College was organized, followed by Spelman Seminary in 1881 and Morris Brown College in 1885. Until well into the twentieth century, one of the major contributions of this complex of colleges was to serve as the center of nearly all research concerning the American Negro.

With help from institutions like Atlanta University, a number of Negroes made considerable advances before the end of the nineteenth century. Black people

became barbers, mechanics, dentists, and doctors. Alonzo Herndon, a former slave who came to Atlanta penniless in 1876, opened a barbership, accumulated property and founded the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. By 1908 his assets were valued at over eighty thousand dollars. Henry Ossian Flipper, from Thomasville, entered Atlanta University in 1869 and later became the first black man to graduate from the United States Military Academy at West Point. Thomas Greene Bethune, a former slave from Columbus who was blind from birth, electrified audiences throughout the nation by his ability to reproduce any musical sound on a piano after hearing it only once. He was billed as "Blind Tom - Musical Prodigy" and considered one of the finest pianists of the era.

Many black men were active in state and national politics. Over fifty Negro Republicans served in the Georgia Legislature during Reconstruction. Henry McNeal Turner was one of the leaders in drafting the Georgia Constitution of 1868. Jefferson Frankling Long from Macon served in the Forty-first U. S. Congress.

With the end of Reconstruction and domination of politics by the Republicans, the political influence of Negroes began to wane. However, the Negro vote continued to play an important role in Georgia politics. Usually the white conservatives attempted to persuade Republican Party officials to support a Democratic candidate, thus throwing the black vote to that side. In the last decade of the century a sincere attempt developed to unite the white and black lower classes into a political union that would benefit both. This farmers' party, the Populist Peoples' Party, held integral positions for blacks and included police & beneficial to blacks in its party platforms. Thomas E. Watson, leader of the Populists in Georgia, directly addressed the poor black and poor white in revolutionary terms: "You are kept apart that you may be separately fleeced of your earnings. You are made to hate each other because upon that hatred is rested the key stone of the arch of financial despotism which enslaves you both. You are deceived and blinded that you may not see how this race antagonism perpetuates a monetary system which beggars both." (1892).

Although the Populist Party loomed large on the national scene and in Georgia, racial prejudice and prosperity had defeated it by the first decade of the twentieth century. Racial control had taken more than one course in Georgia since the end of the Civil War. Ku Klux Klan terrorism had begun during Reconstruction to cut down the black vote and intimidate Negroes. In the 1890's a mass of discriminatory legislation, called Jim Crow laws, was passed by the state legislature. This period saw the rise of a racial hysteria that resulted in lynching. From 1888 to 1903 there were two hundred forty one black people

lynched in Georgia. The state was second only to Mississippi in the number of mob killings during that period. Usually a lynch mob would become inflamed over a black person being accused of a crime against a white. The victim was dragged from his home or the county jail and, after being tortured, was killed without any semblance of a trial.

In the atmosphere of racial discord, the Cotton States and International Exposition was held in Atlanta in 1895. It was here that Booker T. Washington made his famous "Atlanta Compromise Address" which had great influence on black attitudes during the next fifty years. Washington realized that racism had implanted itself in the nation and advised a non-confrontation approach for Negroes. He promoted the idea that blacks concentrate on "the common occupations of life", and advised ending pressures for social equality. His compromises, while drawing loud praise from the white press, caused much dissension among black leaders. Professor W. E. B. DuBois of Atlanta University was a leader of the anti-Washington school of thought. He later exerted much influence in the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Some black leaders in Georgia saw a hopeless situation for the Negro. African Methodist Episcopal Bishop Henry M. Turner, who had been active in Reconstruction politics, now counseled blacks to leave America and return to Africa. In 1901 he declared that the black man "will have as much chance in the future of the United States as a frog in a den of snakes. He is not regarded as a factor in the dominant powers, except in the tax office and in the penitentiary. So far as his civil and political rights are concerned he is a nonentity, and his condition is destined to be worse. He is now the victim of the mob that wishes to take his life.

Let the Negro race in this country do as God would have it do — emigrate to the land of our ancestors." Bishop Turner and other Negro religious leaders made contacts with Africans through missionary work. Many of their ideas were incorporated into the "back to Africa" movement of the turn of the century.

Racial hysteria continued to grow and culminated in the worst riot in Georgia history. Inflamed by a sensational anti-Negro press, a white mob began attacking blacks in Atlanta on September 22, 1906. When the riot ended four days later, twelve people were dead and over seventy were injured. Although there was a reaction against the rioters by many white Atlanta leaders, the spread of anti-Negro legislation was not deterred. Former Populist leader Tom Watson, disillusioned by the failure of his program, joined the movement for disfranchisement of Negroes and supported white supremacy. Governor Hoke

Smith pushed through the Constitution of 1901 which effectively disfranchised the black population.

By World War I Georgia had segregation in almost every aspect of life. The 1905 Separate Park Law prohibited blacks from mixing with whites in public facilities. Separate Bibles were used in courtrooms for blacks to swear upon. Atlanta office buildings even had separate elevators for the different races. Most urban jobs were closed to Negroes. Major occupations of blacks were as janitors or domestic servants. In 1915 the Ku Klux Klan was organized in Georgia and spread over the nation by the early 1920's.

Faced with increasing discrimination and racial terrorism, and suffering from the severe agricultural depression caused by the boll weevil, an increasing number of black people migrated out of Georgia. From 1880 to 1910 the black population of Georgia was reduced by two per cent. But in the same length of time, from 1910 to 1940, the black population was reduced by eleven per cent.

The largest out-migration from the State was during the 1920's. Migrant Negroes hoped to find jobs in Northern cities. Most ended up in huge ghettos of cities like New York or Chicago.

A migration of Negroes also occurs from rural to urban areas of Georgia. The black community in Atlanta was able, despite discrimination, to make progress. In 1924 the first Negro public high school in Atlanta, Booker T. Washington High School, was established. Four years later the Atlanta Daily World began publication. For many years it was the only daily black newspaper in the United States. Individual blacks broke through to fame in sports and the arts. In 1926 Leo "Tiger" Flowers of Atlanta became the first Negro to win the world middleweight boxing championship. Roland Hayes, born in Curryville, became internationally famous as a classical singer.

Although segregation appeared as strong as ever through the 1940's, there were signs that it was cracking. In 1946 Plessy vs. Ferguson from Louisiana challenged the white Democratic primary before the United States Supreme Court. In one of the first major decisions against discrimination, the court ruled that the white primary was unconstitutional. However, race-baiting continued to be a major aspect of Georgia politics. In 1956 the state legislature passed a resolution to ignore Supreme Court decisions dealing with integration of public schools. A Georgia governor declared he would close all the schools of the State before one school was integrated.

With its nucleus of black educational and religious institutions, Atlanta became a center of black leadership. Foremost among the Negro leaders of this era has

been Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference has played a decisive role in the black revolution. Dr. King is the only Georgian to have received the Nobel Peace Prize. Other Georgians who have been nationally prominent in the Negro movement of the 1960's include Julian Bond and Rev. Ralph Abernathy. Elijah Muhammed, leader of the Black Muslims, was born in Sandersville. Famous black entertainers who were born in Georgia include Ray Charles and James Brown.

Black people have been deeply involved in every era of Georgia's history. Only recently have their experiences and contributions been acknowledged.