African Americans during the Gilded Age

Unit 2: Industrialization
Standard & Objective:

U.S. 3   Explain the impact of the Compromise of 1877, including: Jim Crow laws, lynching, disenfranchisement methods, the efforts of Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and the Exodusters, and the Plessy v. Ferguson decision.

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The Reconstruction Era

- Time period after the Civil War (1865-1877)
- Ended the remnants of Confederate secession and ended slavery, making the newly-free slaves citizens with civil rights ostensibly guaranteed by three new Constitutional amendments
- Rebuilding of the South
The Reconstruction Amendments

- 13th Amendment - bans slavery throughout the U.S.
- 14th Amendment - anyone born or naturalized in the U.S. were citizens
- 15th Amendment - declared that the right to vote cannot be denied based on race or color
Legalizing Segregation

- In the South, Jim Crow laws were passed that legalized segregation.
- The Supreme Court gave support to this by overturning the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had prohibited keeping people out of public places on the basis of race and barred racial discrimination in selecting jurors.
- The Supreme Court ruled that the 14th Amendment only applied to governments, but private controlled organizations could practice segregation.
- The Supreme Court then further allowed for legalized segregation in the case of Plessy v. Ferguson, which upheld legalized segregation through the doctrine of “separate, but equal” and allowed states to continue legalized segregation for the next 50 plus years.
Jim Crow Laws

- A collection of state and local statutes that legalized racial segregation
- Were supported by the following beliefs:
  - whites were superior to blacks in all important ways, including but not limited to intelligence, morality, and civilized behavior
  - sexual relations between blacks and whites would produce a mongrel race which would destroy America
  - If necessary, violence must be used to keep blacks at the bottom of the racial hierarchy
- Were meant to return Southern states to an antebellum class structure by marginalizing black Americans
  - Separate drinking fountains, schools, waiting rooms, restrooms etc.
Disenfranchisement Beginnings

- When African-Americans began joining the Populist Party, Southern Democrats worried about losing the support of poor whites.
- In order to keep the support of the poor whites, Democrats began appealing to racism and using various methods to make it hard for African-Americans to vote.
Poll Taxes

- In the 1890’s, states began instituting poll taxes and literacy tests
- While these tests might have kept poor whites from voting, laws known as “grandfather clauses” (which allowed one to vote if they had an ancestor able to vote before the implementation of the 13th, 14th, & 15th Amendments) allowed them to not be subject to the same restrictions.
Plessy v. Ferguson

- Ruling by the Supreme Court on May 18, 1896
- Was the first major inquiry into the meaning of the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal-protection clause
- It gave constitutional sanction to laws designed to achieve racial segregation by means of separate and supposedly equal public facilities and services for African Americans and whites
The Compromise of 1877

- Was an informal, unwritten deal, that settled the intensely disputed 1876 U.S. presidential election.
- The election of 1876
  - Republican - Rutherford B. Hayes (Won)
  - Democrat - Samuel Tilden
- 19 Southern electoral votes are disputed
- Compromise promised to pull federal troops out of the South and formally ended the Reconstruction Era
- Black Republicans felt betrayed as they lost power and were subject to discrimination and harassment to suppress their voting.
Benjamin “Pap” Singleton and the Exodusters

- After the Civil War, many Southern African Americans worked as sharecroppers, which often left them in debt & poverty.
- Convinced that the South would not allow African Americans to rise from such degradation, Benjamin “Pap” Singleton began encouraging African Americans to move to Kansas, creating the Exoduster movement.
- Over 6,000 African Americans left for Kansas & started arriving in 1879.