

George Jordan, Pap Singleton and Westward Migration

Essential Question: What factors led African-Americans including George Jordan and Pap Singleton to migrate west following the Civil War?

The end of Civil War and the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments meant increase opportunities for African-Americans in the South. However, the rise of Jim Crow laws such as Tennessee's Chapter 130, made it increasingly difficult for African-Americans to achieve economic or social equality with their white neighbors. As a result, many African-Americans sought better opportunities in the West. Tennessean Benjamin "Pap" Singleton encouraged so many African Americans to move west that he is known as "Father of the Exodus."

Singleton was born a slave in Nashville in 1809. He worked as a cabinet maker until he was sold into the Deep South. He escaped slavery and went to Canada and then moved to Detroit. In Detroit, he ran a boarding house that provided shelter to fugitive slaves. Following the Civil War, Singleton returned to Nashville and again worked as a carpenter.

Singleton believed that land ownership was the key to the economic, political and social independence. Singleton tried and failed to buy land in Tennessee in the 1860's. Singleton encountered many African-American families who lost their homes when their landlords turned them out. African Americans also faced violence from the Ku Klux Klan as well as discrimination institutionalized by the black codes. Singleton began to encourage families to form independent communities in the west. The people who moved west were called "Exodusters" because they believed that the dusty lands of the west would be their promised land. The term is a play on the biblical term Exodus which described the journey of the Jews after they were freed from slavery in Egypt.

Singleton began to investigate the possibility of forming a colony in Kansas. Singleton sent men to study the possibility and determined that for African American families to relocate to Kansas it would cost about \$1000. Most southern blacks were very poor and could not afford the journey. A few did relocate to Cherokee County, Kansas, but were mostly unsuccessful. Land was just too expensive. Many of the settlers were forced to become sharecroppers or day laborers.

Singleton learned from his mistakes and formed the Freedman's Aid Association to provide educational opportunities for African Americans. In 1878, Singleton turned his attention to central Kansas. The 1862 Homestead Act had made land in that part of the territory much more affordable. In 1877, African Americans founded the Nicodemus Colony in central Kansas. Singleton is credited with bringing over 20,000 African American migrants to Kansas. Later,

Singleton backed plans for African American emigration to Cyprus and Africa that did not succeed. Singleton died in Kansas City, Missouri on February 17, 1900.

Another Tennessean who sought opportunities in the West was George Jordan. Jordan was born into slavery in Williamson County Tennessee around 1849. After emancipation, Jordan traveled to Nashville and enlisted in the U.S. Army on Christmas Day, 1866. The army offered African Americans food, shelter and some medical benefits. Jordan transferred to the 9th Cavalry in 1870 and served for 26 years. He was promoted to corporal in 1874 and sergeant in 1879. He also learned to read and write during this time period.

The 9th Cavalry was one of four segregated units formed after the Civil War. The 10th Cavalry, 24th and 25th infantry were also units made up of African American soldiers commanded by white officers. These units came to be known as “The Buffalo Soldiers.” The nickname was probably given by the Cheyenne who thought that the soldiers’ hair looked like the fur between the horns of a buffalo. The nickname was a term of praise and respect because buffalo were highly revered by Native Americans on the Great Plains. It also referred to the fighting ability of the soldiers. The term first appeared in print in 1873 in a letter from a frontier army wife to magazine. Describing the 10th Cavalry she wrote, “*The officers say that the Negroes make good soldiers and fight like fiends ... the Indians call them 'buffalo soldiers' because their woolly heads are so much like the matted cushion that is between the horns of the buffalo.*”

On May 14, 1880, Jordan was in command of a group of 25 men who stopped an attack on Fort Tularosa by a force of more than 100 Apaches. In 1881, Jordan and a group of 19 men held back an attack from an extremely exposed position in Carrizo Canyon. Their bravery prevented the enemy from surrounding the command. On May 7, 1890, George Jordan was awarded the Medal of Honor for his bravery at Fort Tularosa. He also received a Certificate of Merit for Carrizo Canyon.

In 1896 at Fort Robinson, Jordan retired and joined a community of other buffalo soldier veterans in Crawford, Nebraska. Jordan became a successful land owner. However, Jordan’s success as a soldier and landowner did not spare him from the injustices of a segregated America. Jordan was denied the right to vote. In 1904, Jordan became ill and tried to seek medical care at the Fort Robinson’s hospital. Jordan, the Medal of Honor Recipient, was denied care. He was told to try the Soldier’s Hospital in Washington D.C. George Jordan died on October 19, 1904. The chaplain for Fort Robinson filed an official complaint stating that he died “died for the want of proper attention.” Jordan was buried in the Fort Robinson cemetery with full military honors.

Sources:

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George Jordan

Design a poster featuring George Jordan. Use the graphic organizer below to help plan your poster.

Early Life-

Buffalo Soldier-

Medal of Honor

Later Years-