



Break Those Chains at Last: African Americans 1860-1880: 5 (The Young Oxford History of African Americans)

By Noralee Frankel

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"We thought we'd break those chains at last," sang the slaves, hoping such spirituals would sustain them until the Confederacy surrendered and slavery was gone forever. During the Civil War, blacks served in the Union army and navy (although some fought for the South) and in Union-controlled camps, which harbored fleeing slaves. Not all slaves escaped, but even those who remained with their masters began to imagine a new life.

After the war, amendments to the Constitution abolished slavery, granted citizenship to freed people, and gave African-American men the right to vote. Freedom, blacks hoped, would also mean political equality and economic well-being. Some moved from rural areas to cities in the South or North; others looked to the West, where many African-American men became farmers or found work as cattle-drive cooks and cowboys.

But many whites viewed freedom for African Americans as a threat, and they responded by establishing white supremacy organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan. Organized violence against blacks, along with poor agricultural conditions, discrimination, and worsening economic times, guaranteed poverty for most Southern blacks.

Although the tightly knit slave communities on the larger plantations began to disperse, a sense of having shared interests and goals actually widened freed people's vision of the meaning of community. Despite fierce white opposition, African Americans established their own churches, schools, and other associations and began to participate actively in government. *Break Those Chains at Last* tells the story of these turbulent and complicated years, as African Americans created the communities and organizations that survive to this day.

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Editorial Review

From School Library Journal

Grade 8 Up? Well-researched, immensely readable accounts that bring African American history to life. Commendably, both authors rely heavily upon primary sources in addition to drawing on a number of general histories and studies of the politics, social and economic conditions, and culture of blacks in America. Frankel makes especially good use of quotations from interviews with former slaves done in the 1930s; Reconstruction Era pension examiners' interviews with Black Civil War widows; Freedmen's Bureau records, etc. Kelley uses quotes from a variety of memoirs, biographies and autobiographies, oral histories, etc., to examine, among other topics, the rebirth of black nationalism; the neoconservative movement; black feminism; interethnic tensions; and the emergence of rap music and hip-hop culture. Black-and-white period photographs, posters, prints, letters, and other artwork lend emphasis to salient points made in the texts. Both books include a useful chronology and extensive lists for further reading; additionally, Frankel appends the civil rights amendments to the U.S. Constitution. These titles, which are eminently suitable for general readers, can stand-alone, serve as companions to the other volumes in the series, or complement books such as the McKissacks' *The Civil Rights Movement in America from 1865 to the Present* (Childrens, 1991), Alton Hornsby's *Chronology of African American History* (Gale, 1991), as well as Milton Meltzer's *The Black Americans: A History in Their Own Words, 1619-1983* (HarperCollins, 1984).?David A. Lindsey, Lakewood High and Middle School Libraries, WA
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Review

"Even when the issues are complex, the text remains clear and engaging.... This lively text is largely based on interviews with former slaves and material from other primary sources."--*The Book Report*

"Frankel makes especially good use of quotations from interviews with former slaves done in the 1930s.... Can stand alone, serve as companions to the other volumes in the series, or complement other books."--*School Library Journal*

About the Author

Noralee Frankel is Assistant Director on Women and Minorities at the American Historical Association. She is the coeditor of *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* and author of the forthcoming *Freedom's Women: Black Women in Mississippi in the Civil War Era*.

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