

# Life in Texas Freedom Colonies



**Subject and Grade** Texas History and Geography, 7<sup>th</sup>  
(can be adapted for grades 4<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup>)

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**Time duration** Two sessions of 45-60 minutes or one block period

**Objective** Students will learn what Freedom Colonies were and identify Texas Freedom Colonies on a map. Students will work in cooperative groups to research positive and negatives aspects of African American life after slavery within the Freedom Colonies.

**TEKS** *Social Studies, Grade 7*

(1A), identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, and explain the purpose of dividing the past into eras, including Natural Texas and its People; Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial; Mexican National; Revolution and Republic; Early Statehood; Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction; Cotton, Cattle, and Railroads; Age of Oil; Texas in the Great Depression and World War II; Civil Rights; and Contemporary Texas

(5C), explain the political, economic, and social effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Texas

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(10A), identify why immigrant groups came to Texas and where they settled

(15A), explain rights of Texas citizens

(16A), identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important Texas issues, past and present

(20C), organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

(21A), create and interpret thematic maps, graphs, and charts representing various aspects of Texas during the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries

## Materials

- Texas Beyond History exhibit, *Life After Slavery: Investigations at an African American-Owned Farmstead 1871–1905*:  
<http://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom/index.html>
- student devices
- background information on Reconstruction in Texas (textbook, trade paperback, or online)
- colored map pencils
- Freedom Colonies in Texas Map
- List of Freedom Colonies in Texas
- Freedom Colonies in Texas Map Directions
- Antioch Colony School Photo
- Life After Slavery- Freedom Colonies and Beyond Research Notes (student copy)
- Life After Slavery- Freedom Colonies and Beyond Research Notes (teacher copy)

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- Life After Slavery- Freedom Colonies and Beyond Research Notes (teacher answer key)
  - Positive-Negative Chart

**Activities  
and  
procedures**

*Prior to beginning activity, teacher will:*

- Familiarize students with all necessary technology tools and applications.
- Print out copies of map activities and research activities.
- Review prior study of slavery in Texas with students.

**Day 1**

Step 1: Display TBH exhibit, *Life After Slavery: An African American-Owned Farmstead in Central Texas 1871–1905*:

<https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom/index.html>

Discuss content in the Historical Context section of the website, explaining that at the close of the Civil War in 1865, there were an estimated 250,000 formerly enslaved African Americans (freedmen) in Texas, most facing an unsure future.

- What would be the role of the newly freed ex-slave population of Texas?
- Would former slave owners allow African Americans to live side by side with them in society?

While many freedmen stayed as paid workers or sharecroppers on the farms where they had served in bondage, nearly a quarter of Texas freedmen found ways

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to legally acquire land of their own. Between 1870 and 1890, several hundred freedmen's settlements, or 'Freedom Colonies' were founded as African American families joined together in communities to plant roots. Land ownership gave ex-slaves the ability to support themselves and be independent, while Freedom Colonies provided a support community with shared social traditions.

Step 2: Explain that to learn where Freedom Colonies were in Texas, students will locate them on a map of Texas counties and create a map key to explain which counties contained the greatest number of Freedom Colonies. Have students choose a partner to work with.

Step 3: Distribute the List of Texas Counties Containing Freedom Colonies and the Texas Counties Map (one per two students). Display the Freedom Colonies in Texas Map Directions and go over it with students. Leave the map directions displayed during the lesson.

Step 4: Ask for a volunteer to share a completed map with the class and display the map. Ask the class the following questions:

- In what part of Texas did most Freedom Colonies exist? (answer: eastern half of the state)
- Using their knowledge of Texas history and geography, why would the eastern half of the state be more likely to contain Freedom Colonies? (answer: that is where the vast majority of enslaved African Americans had worked on farms and plantations)

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## **Day 2**

Step 1: Point out that yesterday students learned what and where Texas Freedom Colonies were. Explain that today students will work in cooperative groups to learn more about why freed African Americans might have wanted to live in Freedom Colonies.

Step 2: Display the Antioch School photograph. Explain that during slavery it was against the law to teach enslaved African Americans to read. Ask students to brainstorm why this might have been. Explain that after emancipation, freedmen were allowed to form their own schools, like this one in Antioch Colony. Ask students why they think all the students and teachers in Antioch School were African American.

Step 3: Point out that while African Americans were no longer enslaved after the Civil War and many lived in the relative security of Freedom Colonies, they still had serious problems trying to live peacefully and prosperously in Texas and other southern states. Put students into groups of 3-4. Assign each group a research topic from the following list:

- Black Codes: 1866-1965
- Freedmen's Bureau: 1865-1872
- Ku Klux Klan: 1865-present
- 13th Amendment: 1865
- 14th Amendment: 1868
- 15th Amendment: 1870
- Jim Crow: 1876-1965

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Step 4: Distribute “Freedom Colonies and Beyond- Life After Slavery” Research Notes, one copy per group. Teacher displays a blank copy of Research Notes and fills it in, using Freedom Colonies as the topic and using “Freedom Colonies and Beyond- Life After Slavery Research Notes- Teacher Copy” as a guide. Explain that each topic’s five research questions must be answered by each group. Groups begin researching their topics, using available resources to gather information and filling in their Research Notes.

Step 5: When research notes are complete, display Positive-Negative Chart. Explain that in the process of integrating African Americans into white society after the Civil War, both positive and negative factors came into play. Call on a representative from each group to read aloud the research notes from their topic. Then ask whether that topic should be included as a positive or negative for Freedom Colony residents. Write the name of each topic in the appropriate section of the Positive-Negative Chart.

Step 6: When all topics are represented on the Positive-Negative Chart ask students if they have a better understanding of why African Americans would have wanted to live in Freedom Colonies.

**Extension Activities** Have students write a one-page essay about a day in the life of someone living in a Freedom Colony.

**Assessment** Freedom Colonies in Texas Map and Research Notes

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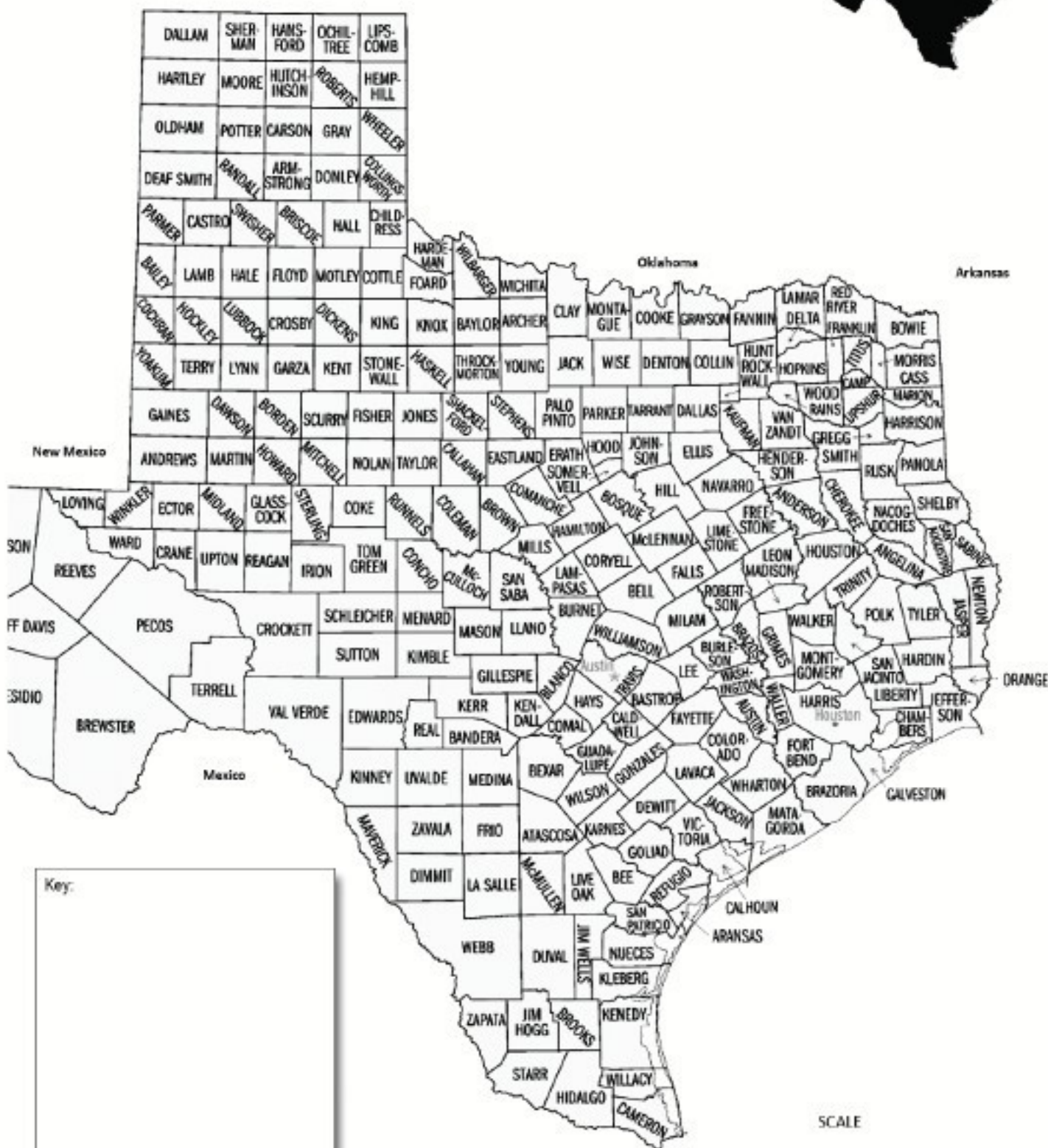
**Related  
Websites**

- Library of Congress - African American Odyssey:  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/aahtml/exhibit/aopart5.html>
- The Freedmen's Bureau Online:  
<http://www.freedmensbureau.com/texas/index.htm>
- The Texas Freedom Colonies Project:  
<https://www.thetexasfreedomcoloniesproject.com/>

## Freedom Colonies in Texas Map Directions

1. Write your names on the map.
2. Title your map, "Freedom Colonies in Texas."
3. Draw a Compass Rose on your map. Label it with the four cardinal directions.
4. Using your *Texas Counties Containing Freedom Colonies List*, create a color-coded map key (5 colors) that will illustrate which counties contained the following:
  - 1-5 freedom colonies
  - 6-10 freedom colonies
  - 11-15 freedom colonies
  - 16-20 freedom colonies
  - 21 or more freedom colonies
5. Locate each listed county on your map and neatly color each county according to your map key.





Key:



## Texas Counties Containing Freedom Colonies

Anderson - 8	Gregg - 13	Nacogdoches - 11
Angelina - 1	Guadalupe - 6	Navarro - 11
Bastrop - 13	Hardin - 1	Newton - 10
Bell - 1	Harris - 7	Panola - 20
Blanco - 2	Harrison - 5	Polk - 4
Bosque - 3	Hays - 1	Red River - 1
Bowie - 3	Hill - 1	Refugio - 4
Brazoria - 10	Hood - 1	Robertson - 1
Brazos - 2	Hopkins - 11	Rusk - 6
Burleson - 3	Houston - 19	Sabine - 1
Caldwell - 1	Hunt - 1	San Augustine - 9
Camp - 7	Jasper - 4	San Jacinto - 13
Cass - 3	Jefferson - 1	Shelby - 12
Chambers - 2	Karnes - 1	Smith - 31
Cherokee - 24	Kaufman - 4	Tarrant - 1
Coryell - 1	Kinney - 1	Titus - 3
Delta - 2	Lavaca - 1	Travis - 5
Dewitt - 4	Lee - 12	Upshur - 8
Falls - 3	Leon - 1	Van Zandt - 3
Fayette - 3	Liberty - 2	Victoria - 1
Fisher - 1	Limestone - 11	Walker - 3
Fort Bend - 4	Madison - 2	Waller - 5
Freestone - 44	Marion - 18	Wharton - 7
Galveston - 1	Matagorda - 11	Williamson - 6
Goliad - 3	McClennan - 2	Wilson - 6
Gonzales - 11	Medina - 1	Wood - 3
Grayson - 2	Milam - 2	

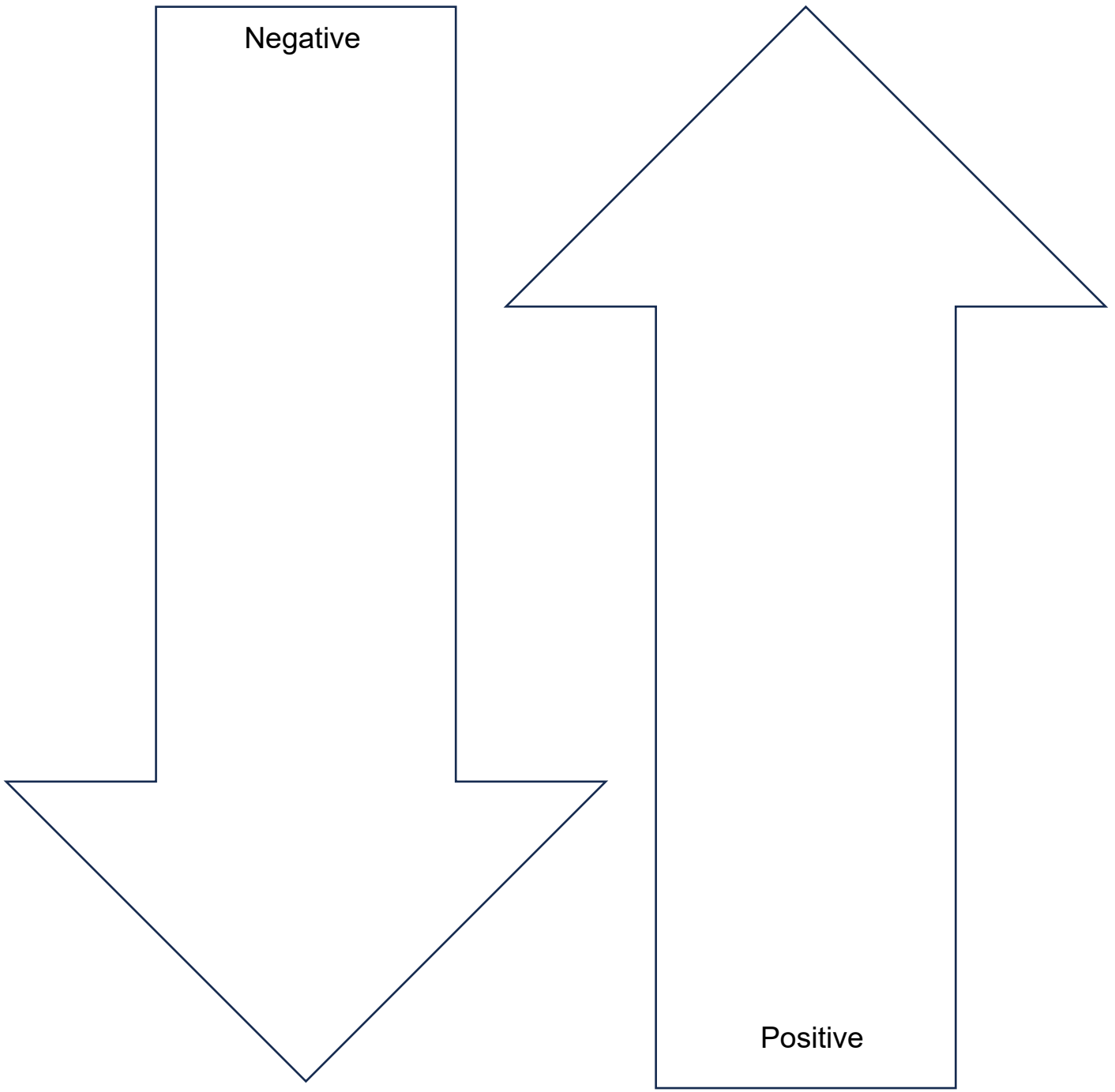


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## Texas Freedom Colonies Positive Negative Chart

On the arrows below, write in research topics that made life better for Freedom Colony residents (positive) and those that made it difficult (negative).



## Freedom Colonies in Texas Research Notes

Names of your group members:

1. What: What is your research topic?
2. Who: Describe who was involved.
3. Where: Explain where it took place.
4. When: Give the time period for your topic.
5. How: Describe how your topic affected African Americans living in Texas after emancipation.

## Freedom Colonies in Texas Research Notes – Teacher Answer Key

Names of your group members:

1. What: What is your research topic?

Freedom colonies

2. Who: Describe who was involved.

Freedmen who became landowners

3. Where: Explain where it took place.

Areas where freedmen could afford to buy land in Texas and the south.

4. When: Give the time period for your topic.

Established around 1870-1890, though some are still around today.

5. How: Describe how your topic affected African Americans living in Texas after emancipation.

Freedom colonies allowed land-owning African Americans to live near each other, sharing churches, schools, and customs.

## Freedom Colonies in Texas Research Notes – Teacher Answer Key

1865: 13th Amendment - abolished slavery in the U.S.

1865-1872: Freedmen's Bureau - Organization established by U.S Congress to provide assistance to freed slaves. Operated in Texas 1865-1870, offering food, clothing, medicine, and education to freedmen and their families.

1868: Fourteenth Amendment - Gave state and U.S. citizenship to ex-slaves and protected their rights by law.

1866-1965: Black Codes - Laws passed by Southern states to keep African Americans in an inferior position after the Civil War. First Texas Black Codes passed in 1866 discriminated by forbidding African Americans to vote, hold office, sit on juries, marry white people, share railroad cars with white people, and share school funding with white people. Many of these Black Codes segregated African Americans from white society until 1965.

1868-present: Ku Klux Klan - originally formed in Tennessee in 1866, spread to Texas by 1868. Intimidated freedmen (and other minority groups) by keeping them from voting, by burning their houses and crops, by beating and murdering them. There are still active KKK chapters in the United States.

1870: 15th amendment - Granted African American men the right to vote.

1876-1965: Jim Crow - Movement named after a character in a song and dance show was a series of 27 laws passed in Texas to undermine the rights given to freedmen by the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments and promote segregation. Originally called Black Codes, Jim Crow existed in Texas until ended by the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s.