

The Reconstruction Era

To what extent did Reconstruction bring African Americans closer to full citizenship?

Introduction

By the end of the Civil War, Americans longed for peace. But what kind of peace? One that punished the South for its rebellion? A peace that helped rebuild the devastated region? A peace that helped the 4 million African Americans freed from slavery become full and equal citizens? In his second inaugural address, delivered in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of a healing peace:

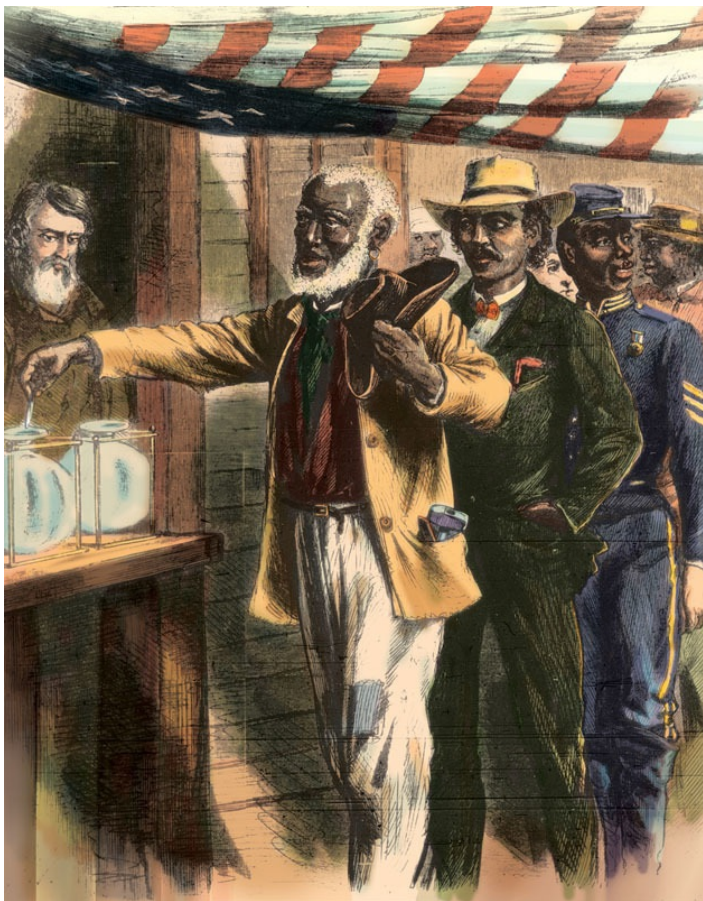
With malice [hatred] toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish [hold dear] a just and lasting peace.

The nation would never know how Lincoln planned to achieve such a peace. On April 14, 1865, just five days after the war ended, the president was assassinated while attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. The assassin, an actor named John Wilkes Booth, believed that killing Lincoln would somehow save the Confederacy.

After Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson became president. The task of rebuilding the South and bringing the Southern states back into the Union would not be easy for Johnson's administration. For while the nation was united again, Americans remained deeply divided.

As you read this lesson, think about Lincoln's dream of "a just and lasting peace." Did the end of the war and the end of slavery lead to a peace based on liberty and justice for all? Did these events bring African Americans closer to the ideals of liberty and justice, including the rights of citizenship?

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Social Studies Vocabulary

black codes

civil rights

Fifteenth Amendment

Fourteenth Amendment

Freedmen's Bureau

Jim Crow laws

Reconstruction

Thirteenth Amendment

1. Presidential Reconstruction

As the Civil War ended, people in the United States had sharply different views about how to rebuild the Southern states and bring them back into the Union. This period came to be called **Reconstruction**. For President Andrew Johnson, a Southerner from Tennessee, Reconstruction had two major aims. First, Southern states had to create new governments that were loyal to the Union and that respected federal authority. Second, slavery had to be abolished once and for all.

These aims left many issues to be **resolved**. For example, who would control the new state governments in the South—former Confederates? Would freed slaves have the same rights as other citizens? And what would the relationship be between freed slaves and former slave owners?

Many Republicans in Congress believed that strong measures would be needed to settle these issues. To them, Reconstruction meant nothing less than a complete remaking of the South based on equal rights and a

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free-labor economy. The stage was set for a battle over the control—and even the meaning—of Reconstruction.

President Johnson's Reconstruction Plan In May 1865, President Johnson announced his Reconstruction plan. A former Confederate state could rejoin the Union once it had written a new state constitution, elected a new state government, repealed its act of secession, and canceled its war debts. There was a final requirement as well. Every Southern state had to ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which abolished slavery throughout the United States.

By the fall of 1865, every Southern state had met the president's requirements. The Thirteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution, and presidential Reconstruction had begun.

The Freedmen's Bureau For former slaves, called freedmen, the freedom guaranteed by the Thirteenth Amendment brought problems as well as opportunities. Frederick Douglass described the freedman as “free from the individual master but a slave of society.” Douglass wrote,

He had neither money, property, nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dusty road under his feet . . . He was turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute [penniless] to the open sky.

To assist former slaves, Congress established the **Freedmen's Bureau** in March 1865. Over the next four years, the bureau provided food and medical care to both blacks and whites in the South, helped freedmen arrange for wages and good working conditions, and distributed some land in 40-acre plots to “loyal refugees and freedmen.”



Some whites, however, attacked the bureau as an example of Northern interference in the South. Ultimately, the hope of many freedmen for “40 acres and a mule” died when Congress refused to take land away from Southern whites.

The most lasting benefit of the Freedmen's Bureau was in education. Thousands of former slaves, both young and old, flocked to free schools built by the bureau. Long after the bureau was gone, institutions such as Howard University in Washington, D.C., continued to provide educational opportunities for African Americans.

Black Codes As new state governments took power in the South, many Republicans in Congress were alarmed to see that they were headed by the same people who had led the South before the war—wealthy white planters. Once in office, these leaders began passing laws known as **black codes** to control their former slaves.

The black codes served three purposes. The first was to limit the rights of freedmen. Generally, former slaves received the rights to marry, to own property, to work for wages, and to sue in court, but they did not have other rights of citizenship. Blacks, for example, could not vote or serve on juries in the South.

The second purpose of the black codes was to help planters find

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workers to replace their slaves. The codes required freedmen to work, and those without jobs could be arrested and hired out to planters. The codes also limited freedmen to farming or jobs requiring few skills and prohibited them from entering most trades or starting businesses.

The third purpose of the black codes was to keep freedmen at the bottom of the social order in the South. Most codes called for the segregation of blacks and whites in public places.



2. Congressional Reconstruction

As 1865 came to a close, President Johnson announced that Reconstruction was over. The Southern states were ready to rejoin the Union.

A group of Republicans in Congress, known as the Radical Republicans, did not agree with Johnson and had an additional goal for Reconstruction. They believed that the South would not be completely rebuilt until freedmen were granted the full rights of citizenship.

Radical Republicans wanted the federal government to take a more active role in Reconstruction—a role that would involve tougher requirements for restoring Southern governments. In the House of Representatives, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania led the Radical Republicans, and in the Senate, they were led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts.

Early in 1866, Radical Republicans joined with more moderate lawmakers to enact two bills designed to help freedmen. The first extended the life of the Freedmen's Bureau. The second was the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which struck at the black codes by declaring freedmen to be full citizens with the same **civil rights** as whites. Johnson declared both bills unconstitutional and vetoed them, but an angry Congress overrode his vetoes.

The Fourteenth Amendment To further protect the rights of African Americans, Congress approved the **Fourteenth Amendment**, which granted citizenship to “all people born or naturalized in the United States.” It also guaranteed all citizens “the equal protection of the laws,” which meant that state governments could not treat some citizens as less equal than others.

President Johnson opposed the Fourteenth Amendment and called on voters to throw Republican lawmakers out of office. Instead, Republican candidates won a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress in the 1866 election. From then on, Congress controlled Reconstruction.

Military Reconstruction Act Early in 1867, Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Act. Once again, it did so over Johnson's veto. This plan divided the South into five military districts, each governed by a general supported by federal troops. The state governments set up under Johnson's Reconstruction plan were declared illegal. New governments were to be formed by Southerners loyal to the United States—both black and white. Southerners who had supported the Confederacy were denied the right to vote.

Congress also passed two acts designed to reduce Johnson's power to interfere with congressional Reconstruction. The Command of the Army Act limited his power over the army. The Tenure of Office Act barred him from firing certain federal officials without the Senate's consent. President Johnson blasted both laws as unconstitutional, and to prove his point, he fired one of the officials protected under the Tenure of Office Act.

President Johnson Is Impeached The House of Representatives

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responded to Johnson's challenge by voting to impeach the president. Besides violating the Tenure of Office Act, the House charged that Johnson had brought “the high office of the President of the United States into contempt, ridicule, and disgrace, to the scandal of all good citizens.”

During his trial in the Senate, the president's lawyers argued that Johnson's only “crime” had been to oppose Congress. If he were removed from office for that reason, they warned, “no future President will be safe who happens to differ with a majority of the House and Senate.”

Two-thirds of the Senate had to find the president guilty to remove him from office. Despite heavy pressure to convict him, 7 Republicans and 12 Democrats voted “not guilty.” Johnson escaped removal from office by one vote, but he had lost his power.

Sharecropping While Congress and the president battled over Reconstruction, African Americans in the South worked to build new lives. Most former slaves desperately wanted land to farm but had no money to buy it. Meanwhile, former slave owners needed workers to farm their land but had no money to pay them. Out of the needs of both groups came a farming system called sharecropping.

Planters who turned to sharecropping divided their land into small plots and then rented these plots to individual tenant farmers—farmers who paid rent for the land they worked. A few tenants paid the rent for their plots in cash, but most paid their rent by giving the landowner a portion of what they raised. This payment of crops was called a share and was usually about a third or a half of the tenant's crop.

Sharecropping looked promising to freedmen at first. They liked being independent farmers who worked for themselves. In time, they hoped to earn enough money to buy a farm of their own.

However, most sharecroppers had to borrow money from planters to buy the food, seeds, tools, and supplies they needed to survive until harvest. Few ever earned enough from their crops to pay back what they owed. Rather than leading to independence, sharecropping usually led to a lifetime of poverty and debt.





3. Southern Reconstruction

Under the terms of the Military Reconstruction Act, the U.S. Army returned to the South in 1867. The first thing it did was begin to register voters. Because Congress had banned former Confederates from voting, the right to vote in the South was limited to three groups: freedmen, white Southerners who had opposed the war, and Northerners who had moved south after the war.

The South's New Voters African Americans made up the South's largest group of new voters. Most black voters joined the Republican Party—the party of Lincoln and emancipation.

White Southerners who had not supported secession were the next largest group. Many were poor farmers who had never voted before. In their eyes, the Democratic Party was the party of wealthy planters and secession, so poor farmers also supported the Republican Party. Southern Democrats were appalled and believed any white man who voted Republican to be a traitor to the South. Democrats scorned such people as scalawags, or worthless scoundrels.

The last group of new voters were Northerners who had moved south after the war. Southerners called these newcomers “carpetbaggers” after a type of handbag used by many travelers. They saw carpetbaggers as fortune hunters who had come south to “fatten” themselves on Southerners' misfortunes.

The Election of 1868 New voters in the South cast their first ballots in the 1868 presidential election. The Republican candidate was Ulysses S. Grant, a former Union general who supported Reconstruction and promised to protect the rights of African Americans in the South. His Democratic opponent, Horatio Seymour, promised to end Reconstruction and return the South to its traditional leaders—white Democrats. Seymour won a majority of white votes.

Grant, however, was elected with the help of half a million black votes. The election's lesson to Republicans was that if they wanted to keep control of the White House and Congress, they needed the support of African American voters.

The Fifteenth Amendment In 1869, at President Grant's urging, Congress passed the **Fifteenth Amendment**, which said that a citizen's right to vote “shall not be denied . . . on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” It guaranteed every male citizen the right to vote, regardless of race.

With the passage of this amendment, most abolitionists felt their work was done. The American Anti-Slavery Society declared the Fifteenth Amendment to be “the capstone and completion of our movement; the fulfillment of our pledge to the Negro race; since it secures to them equal political rights with the white race.”

New State Constitutions When the army finished registering voters, Southern Reconstruction got underway. Across the South, delegates were elected to constitutional conventions, and about a fourth of those elected were African Americans.

The conventions met and wrote new constitutions for their states. These constitutions were the most progressive, or advanced, in the nation. They guaranteed the right to vote to every adult male regardless of race, ended imprisonment for debt, and established the first public schools in the South. The Georgia constitution stated that these schools should be “forever free to all the children of the state.” However, under the new state constitutions, these schools were open only to whites.

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New State Governments Elections were then held to fill state offices. To the dismay of Southern Democrats, a majority of those elected were Republicans, and about a fifth were African Americans.

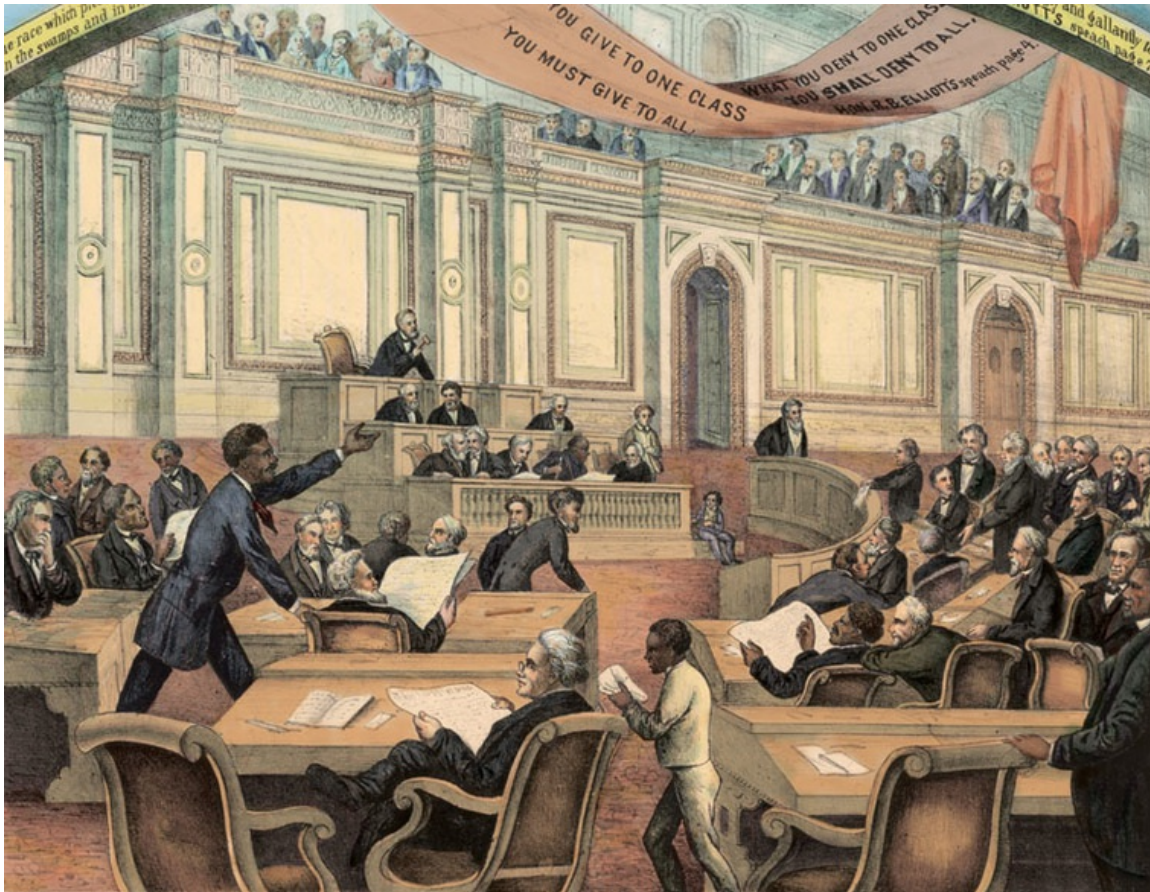
The South's new state governments quickly ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. By 1870, every Southern state had finished this final step of Reconstruction and rejoined the Union.

Next, Southern governments turned to the task of rebuilding. In addition to constructing new schools and hospitals, work was also begun on damaged roads, bridges, and railroads. To pay for these projects, state legislatures raised taxes, which caused taxes in the South to increase by up to 400 percent between 1860 and 1870.

African Americans in Office About a fifth of the South's new officeholders were African Americans. Blacks served in every Southern legislature and held high offices in three states. Twenty-two African Americans represented their states in Congress—20 in the House and two in the Senate. After watching these representatives, many of whom had been born slaves, Pennsylvania congressman James G. Blaine said,

The colored men who took their seats in both the Senate and House did not appear ignorant or helpless. They were as a rule studious, earnest, ambitious men, whose public conduct . . . would be honorable to any race.

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4. The End of Reconstruction

Most whites in the South bitterly resented the Southern Reconstruction governments. They hated the fact that these governments had been “forced” on them by Yankees.

Many taxpayers also blamed their soaring tax bills on corruption—the misuse of public office for personal gain—by the South's new leaders. Although some Southern officeholders did line their pockets with public funds, most, whether black or white, were honest, capable leaders. Still, when taxes increased, opposition to the new state governments increased as well.

However, what bothered many Southerners most about their Reconstruction governments was seeing former slaves voting and holding public office. Across the South, Democrats vowed to regain power and return their states to “white man's rule.”

Violence Against African Americans At first, Democrats tried to win black voters away from the Republican Party. When that tactic

failed, they attempted to use legal means to keep blacks from voting or from taking office. In Georgia, for example, the legislature refused to seat elected black lawmakers until they were forced to by the state supreme court. When legal methods failed, whites turned to violence.

Throughout the South, whites formed secret societies—the most infamous being the Ku Klux Klan—to drive African Americans out of political life. Dressed in long, hooded robes and armed with guns and swords, Klansmen did their work at night. They started by threatening black voters and officeholders, and African Americans who did not heed their threats were beaten, tarred and feathered, and even murdered.

The Enforcement Acts In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed three laws to combat violence against African Americans. Known as the Enforcement Acts, these laws made it illegal to prevent another person from voting by bribery, force, or scare tactics.

President Grant sent troops into the South to enforce these acts, and hundreds of people were arrested for violence against blacks. Those who were brought to trial, however, were seldom convicted because few witnesses and jurors wanted to risk the Klan's revenge by speaking out against one of its members.

The Amnesty Act of 1872 By this time, most Northerners were losing interest in Reconstruction and the plight of the freedmen. It was time, many people said, to “let the South alone.”

One indication of this changing attitude was the passage of the Amnesty Act of 1872. Amnesty means forgiveness for past offenses. The Amnesty Act allowed most former Confederates to vote once again.

The effects of the Amnesty Act were seen almost immediately, and by 1876, Democrats had regained control of all but three states in the South. Republicans clung to power in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida, but only with the help of federal troops.

The Disputed Election of 1876 In 1876, Americans went to the polls to choose a new president. The Democrats nominated New York governor Samuel J. Tilden as their candidate, and Rutherford B. Hayes was the Republican nominee. When the votes were counted, Tilden won a majority of popular votes and 184 electoral votes, just one short of the 185 needed for election. Hayes received 165 electoral votes. Twenty electoral votes from four states were in dispute.

Congress, which was controlled by Republicans, appointed a commission to decide which candidate should get the disputed electoral

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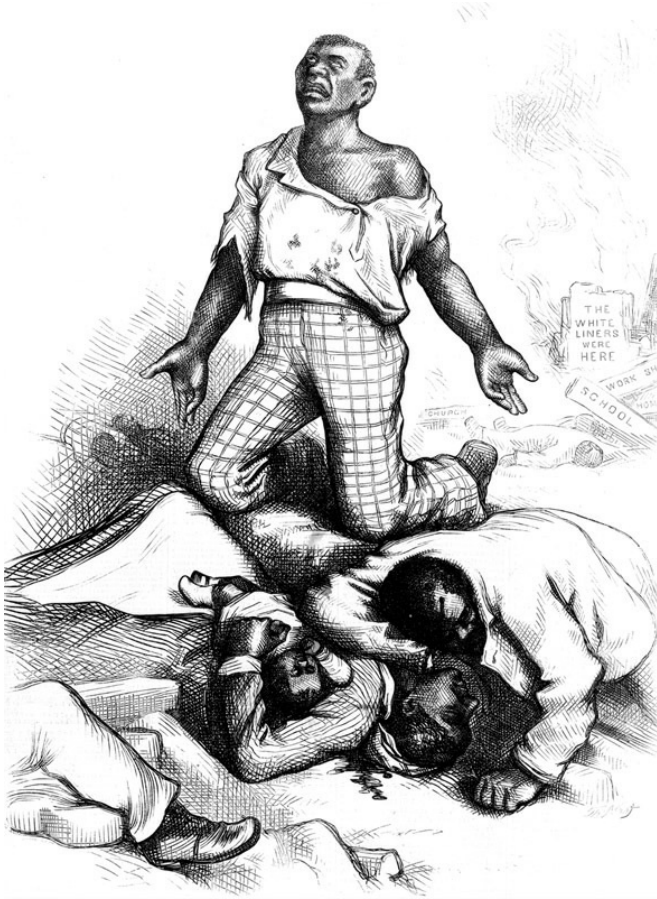
votes. The commission awarded all 20 to Hayes, giving him exactly the 185 electoral votes he needed to win. The Democrats threatened to block the commission's decision. Inauguration day grew near with no new president in sight.

The Compromise of 1877 After weeks of negotiation, Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress agreed to a compromise. The Democrats accepted the electoral commission's decision, allowing Hayes to become president. In return, Hayes agreed to withdraw the remaining federal troops still occupying Southern states.

Once President Hayes withdrew all remaining federal troops from the South in 1877, Reconstruction was officially over. After that, Democrats quickly took control of the last Southern states. “This is a white man's country,” boasted South Carolina senator Ben Tillman, “and white men must govern it.”

Most white Southerners celebrated the end of Reconstruction, but for freedmen, the return of the South to “white man's rule” was a giant step backward. “The whole South—every state in the South,” observed a Louisiana freedman, “has got into the hands of the very men that held us as slaves.”

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5. Reconstruction Reversed

With Reconstruction over, Southern leaders talked of building a “New South” humming with mills, factories, and cities. Birmingham, Alabama, became a major iron-making center, and the number of textile mills in the South grew rapidly between 1880 and 1900. Still, most Southerners, black and white, remained trapped in an “Old South” of poverty.

Losing Ground in Education During Reconstruction, freedmen had pinned their hopes for a better life on education provided by the South's first public schools. When Southern Democrats regained control of states, however, they cut spending on education. Free schools are not a necessity,” explained the governor of Virginia. Schools, he said, are a luxury . . . to be paid for, like any other luxury, by the people who wish their benefits.”

As public funding dried up, many schools closed, and those that stayed open often charged fees. By the 1880s, only about half of all black children in the South were attending school.

Losing Voting Rights Southern Democrats also reversed political gains made by freedmen after the war. Many Southern states passed laws requiring citizens who wanted to vote to pay a poll tax. The tax was set high enough that voting, like education, became a luxury that many black Southerners could not afford.

Some Southern states also required citizens to pass a literacy test to show they could read before allowing them to vote. These tests were designed so that any African American, regardless of his education, would fail.

In theory, these laws applied equally to blacks and whites and, for that reason, did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment. In practice, however, whites were excused from paying poll taxes or taking literacy tests by a **so-called** “grandfather clause” in the laws. This clause said the taxes and tests did not apply to any man whose father or grandfather could vote on January 1, 1867. Because no blacks could vote on that date, the grandfather clause applied only to whites.

African Americans protested that these laws denied them their constitutional right to vote. The Supreme Court, however, found that the new voting laws did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment because they did not deny anyone the right to vote on the basis of race.

Drawing a “Color Line” During Reconstruction, most Southern states had outlawed segregation in public places. When Democrats returned to power, they reversed these laws and drew a “color line” between blacks and whites in public life. Whites called the new segregation acts **Jim Crow laws** after a black character, Jim Crow, in an entertainer's act in the mid-1800s.

Not all white Southerners supported segregation. When a Jim Crow law was proposed in South Carolina, a *Charleston News and Courier* editorial tried to show how unjust it was by taking segregation to ridiculous extremes:

If there must be Jim Crow cars on railroads, there should be Jim Crow cars on the street railways. Also on all passenger boats . . . here should be Jim Crow waiting saloons [waiting rooms] at all stations, and Jim Crow eating houses . . . There should be Jim Crow sections of the jury box, and a separate Jim Crow . . . witness stand in every court—and a Jim Crow Bible for colored witnesses to kiss.

Instead of being a joke, as intended, most of these ridiculous suggestions soon became laws.

Plessy v. Ferguson African Americans argued that segregation laws violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the laws. Homer Plessy, who was arrested for refusing to obey a Jim Crow law, took his protest all the way to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court decided his case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in 1896. The majority of the Supreme Court justices found that segregation laws did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as the facilities available to both races were roughly equal. Justice John Marshall Harlan, a former slaveholder, disagreed. In his dissenting opinion, he wrote, “Our Constitution is color blind, and neither knows nor **tolerates** classes among citizens.”

After the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy*, states passed additional Jim Crow laws. Blacks and whites attended separate schools, played in separate parks, and sat in separate sections in theaters. Despite the Court's decision that these separate facilities must be equal, those set aside for African Americans were almost always **inferior** to facilities labeled “whites only.”

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6. Responding to Segregation

African Americans responded to segregation in many ways. The boldest protested openly, but doing so was dangerous. Blacks who spoke out against “white rule” risked being attacked by white mobs, and some were lynched, or murdered, often by hanging. During the 1890s, an African American was lynched somewhere in the United States every few days.

African American Migration Thousands of African Americans responded to segregation by leaving the South. A few chose to return to Africa. In 1878, some 200 Southern blacks chartered a ship and sailed to Liberia, a nation in West Africa that had been founded in 1821 for the settlement of freed American slaves.

Many more African Americans migrated to other parts of the United States. Not only were they pushed from the South by racism and poverty, but they were pulled by the lure of better opportunities and more equal treatment. Some sought a new life as wage earners by migrating to cities in the North where they competed for jobs with recent immigrants from Europe and often faced racism, if not Southern-style segregation. Others headed to the West, where they found work as cowboys and Indian fighters. Two all-black U.S. Cavalry units known as the “Buffalo Soldiers” fought on the front lines of the Indian wars, while some blacks found new homes with American Indian nations.

Thousands of black families left the South for Kansas in the Exodus of 1879. The “exodusters,” as the migrants were known, faced many hardships on their journey west. Bands of armed whites patrolled roads in Kansas in an effort to drive the migrants away, but the exodusters pushed on, saying, “We had rather suffer and be free.”

Self-Help Most African Americans, however, remained in the South. They worked hard in their families, churches, and communities to improve their lives. While most blacks farmed for a living, a growing number started their own businesses, and between 1865 and 1903, the number of black-owned businesses in the South soared from about 2,000 to 25,000.

Families, churches, and communities also banded together to build schools and colleges for black children. Because of these efforts, literacy among African Americans rose rapidly. When slavery ended in 1865, only 5 percent of African Americans could read. By 1900, more than 50 percent could read and write.



Lesson Summary

In this lesson, you learned about the period of Reconstruction in the South from 1865 to 1877.

Presidential Reconstruction Under President Johnson's Reconstruction plan, every Southern state rejoined the Union after it had written a new constitution, elected a new state government, cancelled its war debts, and ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery.

Congressional Reconstruction Congressional Reconstruction began in 1866, when Republican leaders in Congress worked to give freedmen the full rights of citizenship. Congress passed, and the states ratified, the Fourteenth Amendment, which gave citizenship to all people born in the United States and equal protection of the law to all citizens.

Southern Reconstruction Under the Military Reconstruction Act, federal troops returned to the South in 1867 and began registering voters. New Southern voters helped former Union general Ulysses S.

Grant become president. In 1869, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which protected the right of African American men to vote. Many blacks were elected to state government offices during this third phase of Reconstruction.

The End of Reconstruction Southern whites used legal means as well as violence to keep blacks from voting or taking office. Reconstruction officially ended in 1877, when President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew all remaining federal troops from the South once he took office after the disputed election of 1876.

Reconstruction Reversed After Reconstruction, African Americans lost educational and political gains. Many Southern states closed schools that had been opened to freedmen. They also passed laws designed to keep blacks from voting. Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized many forms of discrimination against blacks.

Responding to Segregation Many African Americans responded to segregation by leaving the South. Many migrated to other parts of the United States. Those who remained in the South worked hard to improve their lives.



Reading Further

The Long Road to Equal Rights

During Reconstruction, Congress added three amendments to the Constitution that guaranteed equal rights to African Americans. However, it took another 100 years and large-scale

political action to make those guarantees real.

The station wagon rolled down West 28th Street in Little Rock, Arkansas, as part of a convoy, with one jeep leading in front of it and another trailing behind. Each jeep carried a machine gun and soldiers armed with rifles. In the station wagon sat nine nervous high school students headed to their first day of school at Little Rock's Central High School.

More soldiers waited at the school for the convoy to arrive. One of the students, Ernest Green, recalled that frightening moment, "The whole school was ringed with paratroopers and helicopters hovering around. We marched up the steps . . . with this circle of soldiers with bayonets drawn."

It was 1957, and the students, who came to be known as the Little Rock Nine, would be the first African Americans to attend the city's all-white Central High School. They had previously attempted to enter the school twice a few weeks earlier but had met fierce resistance. Many of Little Rock's white citizens were determined to prevent the students from attending the school and physically tried to stop them. Melba Pattillo, one of the students, described what she went through:

On the first day, the kinds of things that I endured were parents kicking, parents hitting, parents throwing things. You would get tripped; people would just walk up and hit you in the face. And you couldn't hit back.

On those first days, police had escorted the Little Rock Nine into a side entrance of the school building. However, the principal had sent the nine students home because he feared for their safety.

The third time the Little Rock Nine began their school year, they did so with military protection. On national television that night, President Dwight Eisenhower explained why. He said, "I have today issued an executive order directing the use of troops under federal authority to aid in the execution of federal law at Little Rock." The federal law that Eisenhower referred to was the law to integrate public schools, and the military would ensure it was obeyed.

The Fourteenth Amendment Comes of Age

Efforts to integrate public schools began long before the Little Rock Nine entered Central High. In a sense, they began in 1868 during Reconstruction, when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified.

The Fourteenth Amendment said that no state could limit privileges or deny any American equal protection under the law. The amendment guaranteed freed slaves the same rights as white Americans.

Unfortunately, that guarantee was modified in 1896 after the Supreme Court held that it was legal to segregate public places. As long as facilities for blacks were equal to those for whites, the court said, segregation did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment. So, under this doctrine of “separate but equal,” segregation continued. Although the Constitution guaranteed equal rights, African Americans would have to continue to fight to exercise those rights.

Focused efforts to end segregation in schools began in the 1930s. The long haul toward school integration began with a vision. A young African American lawyer named Charles Houston believed that the way to get equal rights was for black lawyers to challenge segregation in court. However, there were very few black lawyers at the time because most law schools were segregated or accepted only a few black students. But Houston had a plan. At the historically black Howard University in Washington, D.C., Houston trained a generation of black lawyers. Among them was his star pupil, Thurgood Marshall.

Those lawyers confronted segregation in one case after another for more than 20 years. They started by arguing against segregated law schools and then segregated graduate schools. But it was not until the 1950s that they took on the segregated public schools.

Their efforts culminated in the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. In its decision, the Court held that separate schools could never be equal, which meant that public schools would have to integrate. Three years later—nearly 90 years after the Fourteenth Amendment was added to the Constitution—the Little Rock Nine, under armed guard, followed that law and entered Central High School.



The Fifteenth Amendment Comes of Age

The struggle to integrate schools and other public places did not end at Central High. There would be other battles to win for African Americans to have equal rights. In 1963, to mark 100 years since Abraham Lincoln had emancipated the slaves, more than 200,000 people marched to the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington.

At the historic March on Washington, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of the work that remained unfinished:

Five score [one hundred] years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation . . . But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity [wealth]. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing [suffering] in the

corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land.

Voting rights, like integration, had been promised after the Civil War, but that promise had not yet been fulfilled when King spoke in 1963. The Fifteenth Amendment, which was ratified in 1870, granted African Americans the right to vote. However, in the 1960s, very few black citizens in the South were able to exercise that right.

The reason? Laws in many Southern states made voting impossible for most African Americans. For example, some places had literacy tests, which meant that anyone who could not read and write was prohibited from registering to vote. The tests were often rigged with questions no one could answer so that even literate blacks would fail them. Taxes and property requirements were other methods that made it impossible for most African Americans to exercise their right to vote.



These restrictions are why, in the 1960s, African Americans were fighting to register to vote in places like Selma, Alabama. In Selma, the registration office was only open two days a month. In addition, the workers there often arrived late, left early, and took long breaks. In 1963, only 156 of Selma's 15,000 eligible black voters were registered.

Throughout 1963 and 1964, black citizens of Selma tried again and

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again to register to vote. Repeatedly, the county sheriff and other white leaders attempted to stop them. Finally, the situation in Selma came to a head in 1965.



On Sunday, March 7, about 600 people gathered in Selma and began the 50-mile march to the state capital in Montgomery to insist on their right to vote. When they reached the Edmund Pettus Bridge, Alabama state troopers ordered them to leave. The marchers chose to stay, however, and the police then advanced, knocking people to the ground and firing tear gas. Police on horseback also charged at the marchers.

That day, which came to be called Bloody Sunday, marked a turning point in the struggle for voting rights. Many people across the United States had previously been unaware of the extent of segregation and the violent methods used to enforce it, and they were horrified by the images of the violence in Selma that they saw on television and in newspapers. The mayor of Selma, Joe Smitherman, remembered that the tide turned that day, "When that beating happened at the foot of the bridge, it looked like war. That went all over the country [on the television news]. And the people, the wrath of the nation came down on us."

The clashes in Selma continued for days. Then, President Lyndon

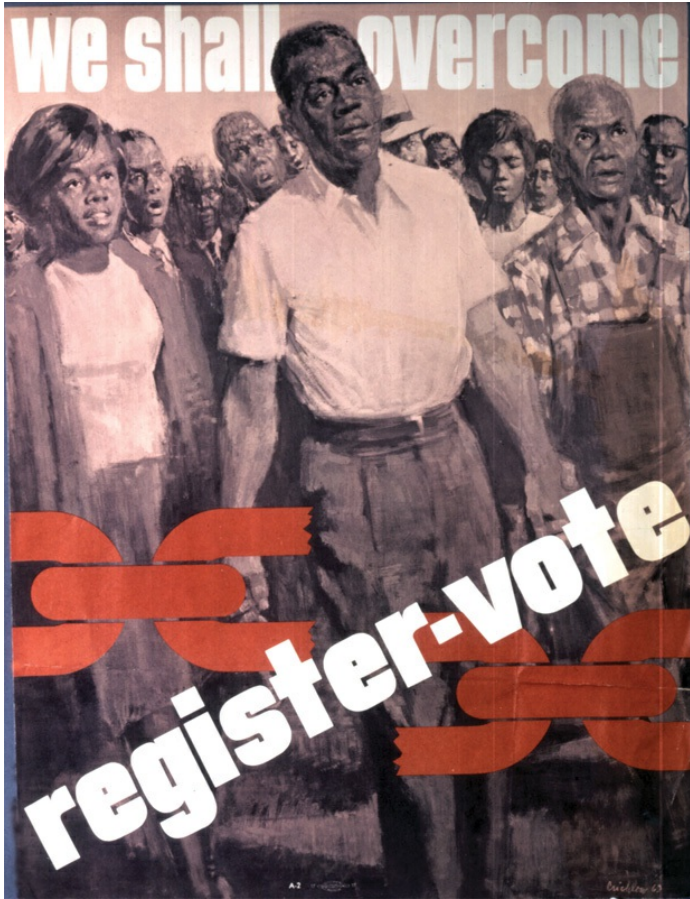
Johnson put voting rights legislation before Congress. “Their cause must be our cause too,” Johnson said to the American people. “Because it is not just Negroes, but really it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice.”

Days later, thousands of people began the march from Selma to Montgomery, and five days after that, 25,000 people gathered at the state capitol in Montgomery. They celebrated their success and braced themselves for the hard work ahead. Later that year, Congress passed the historic Voting Rights Act of 1965, which supported the rights that the Constitution had promised blacks nearly 100 years earlier.

Some historians say that the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a “Second Reconstruction.” They point out that the three Reconstruction amendments—the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth—promised equal rights to African Americans, but it took another century for those rights to be realized.



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The Reconstruction Era Redefines African American Identity

The Reconstruction Era redefined what it meant to be an African American. New policies and amendments affected 4,000,000 newly freed slaves, affecting families, women, and education.

The Freedmen's Bureau was an agency established by Congress to help former slaves better integrate into society. The bureau was severely underfunded and lacked properly trained workers. But it was still able to provide medical care for over a million freed slaves. More than 21 million food rations were also given to poor blacks and even poor whites.

Reconstruction Era Education The biggest feat accomplished by the bureau was in education. More than 1,000 schools were built for freed slaves. Money was also spent on teacher training facilities. Some of these would later be known as the first historically black colleges and universities, or HBCU.

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Clark Atlanta University, Howard University, and Morehouse College trained students for careers as teachers or ministers and missionaries, while others focused on preparing students for industrial or agricultural occupations. Before the Freedmen's Bureau, Republican Senator Justin S. Morrill introduced the Land Grant Act, or Morrill Act of 1862.



The act provided 30,000 acres of federal land for each state. The act did not apply to many southern states because of the ongoing Civil War. Provision six of the act declared, "No State while in a condition of rebellion or insurrection against the government of the United States shall be entitled to the benefit of this act." The "benefit" of the act allowed states to sell land and use the money to build colleges that focused on agriculture and mechanics. These "A and M" land-grant schools include Cornell University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and more. A total of 69 colleges were built.

After the Civil War, the act was extended to the confederate states. A second Morrill Act was later added by Congress in 1890. This would go on to fund black land-grant institutions. Many southern states still did not allow blacks to enroll in land-grant colleges. Under the second act, money was withheld from states that refused to let black students

learn. It led to the founding of 17 new historically black colleges. Educator and reformer Booker T. Washington founded what's now Tuskegee University. The successful school became a model for later institutions.

Freedwomen Under the Republican-led legislations, freedwomen were allowed to attend schools as well. There were all-female colleges but most were co-educational.

However, finding work was harder for black women. Some fortunate women found work as teachers but most professions were labor intensive. They were also excluded from manufacturing plants where white women worked. A few women found work in hotels and many worked in their own homes as laundresses. Some were able to work as maids, child-nurses, and cooks. Jobs as seamstresses or dressmakers were desired over domestic services but much more difficult to find.

Unlike the freedmen, freedwomen were not allowed to vote. This did not stop them from participating. Women as well as men took election day off from work and went to the polls. Voting was often dangerous for blacks and by showing up in groups, they hoped to deter violence and intimidation from white voters.

Black women formed their own political organizations too. Rising Daughters of Liberty, Daughters of the Union Victory in Richmond, and the United Daughters of Liberty were run by coal miners' wives living outside Manchester were a few from the late 1860s and 1870s. They promoted political education, raised funds, and campaigned for candidates and policies.

During the last years of Reconstruction, the women guarded meetings the men were in by brandishing guns and questioning suspicious people. A reporter once described a scene as 50 women watching over 25 men. A Macon newspaper once reported: "They were seen everywhere, talking in an excited manner, and urging the men on. Some of them were almost furious, showing it to be part of their religion to keep their husbands and brothers straight in politics."



African American Families During Reconstruction Family dynamics were greatly changed after emancipation. Men who served as soldiers were being treated as the head of the household. They were also given voting rights during Reconstruction. This gave them a higher social standing than the women in their lives which created a gender imbalance in some families.

African Americans had strong family ties that were often torn apart by the sale of family members during slavery. After emancipation, the Freedmen's Bureau allowed people to legitimize slave unions, legally marry for the first time, and find their lost families.

Federal officers described parents making "superhuman efforts" to try and find children who were sold away from them. A Northern reporter named John Dennett encountered an exhausted freedman who had walked more than 600 miles from a plantation in Georgia to North Carolina. He was searching for his wife and children. Whether this man found his family is still unknown.

Legal recognition of family ties was important, but the Freedmen's Bureau placed heavy emphasis on promoting one kind of family. Anything other than a man marrying a woman was not accepted. For example, different states had variations of the same laws about

marriage. For some, the marriage laws were harshly enforced.

Couples living together became legally recognized marriages. Couples living together who did not get married within six to nine months would be arrested and charged. Mississippi's 1865 civil rights law said: "All freedmen, free negroes and mulattoes, who do now and have heretofore lived and cohabited together as husband and wife shall be taken and held in law as legally married."

While this law worked out for many couples, it was difficult for many others. Some wives and husbands who were sold off in slavery often remarried thinking they would never see their first spouse again. After Emancipation, the marriage laws made their situations confusing. If a husband returned to the wife and found her remarried, they would have to settle matters in court. The wife would have to choose who to stay with or be placed in jail for adultery.

Often, the Bureau would hastily make decisions for the freed couples without consulting the people involved. If it became too complicated, the Bureau would hand the husband or wife off to the authorities to deal with. This usually led to imprisonment for claims of adultery.

Reactions to Reconstruction

From 1865 to 1877, the United States entered into a period of Reconstruction. The goal of these Reconstruction efforts was to rebuild the Southern states. To do this, the Southern states had to reaffirm their loyalty to the Union and abolish slavery permanently.

However, throughout the United States, people had mixed reactions to the idea of Reconstruction. In the North, some quickly lost interest in the idea of Reconstruction as new challenges emerged, while others maintained that more needed to be done to protect the newly created rights for African Americans. In the South, resentment over Reconstruction grew, and groups emerged to counteract Reconstruction efforts.

Below are different reactions people had to the process of Reconstruction. How do the different reactions about Reconstruction highlight the tension of the period?

Northern Reactions

In the early years of Reconstruction, many supported efforts to reform the governments of the South following the end of the Civil War. Among

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these supporters was Frederick Douglass.

The following excerpt is from an article titled "Reconstruction" that Douglass published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1866. Douglass warns Congress about allowing the South to return to reinstate its prewar political policies. What does Douglass fear the Southern states will do if they are allowed to return to their prewar politics?

Seldom has any legislative body been the subject of a solicitude more intense, or of aspirations more sincere and ardent. . .

Whether the tremendous war so heroically fought and so victoriously ended shall pass into history a miserable failure, barren of permanent results, . . . or whether, on the other hand, we shall, as the rightful reward of victory over treason, have a solid nation, entirely delivered from all contradictions and social antagonisms, based upon loyalty, liberty, and equality, must be determined one way or the other by the present session of Congress. . . .

The arm of the Federal government is long, but it is far too short to protect the rights of individuals in the interior of distant States. They must have the power to protect themselves, or they will go unprotected, spite of all the laws the Federal Government can put upon the national statute-book.

Slavery, like all other great systems of wrong, founded in the depths of human selfishness, and existing for ages, has not neglected its own conservation. It has steadily exerted an influence upon all around it favorable to its own continuance. And to-day it is so strong that it could exist, not only without law, but even against law. Custom, manners, morals, religion, are all on its side everywhere in the South; and when you add the ignorance and servility of the ex-slave to the intelligence and accustomed authority of the master, you have the conditions, not out of which slavery will again grow, but under which it is impossible for the Federal government to wholly destroy it . . . The true way and the easiest way is to make our government entirely consistent with itself, and give to every loyal citizen the elective franchise,—a right and power which will be ever present, and will form a wall of fire for his protection.

. . . No republic is safe that tolerates a privileged class, or denies to any of its citizens equal rights and equal means to maintain them. What was theory before the war has been made fact by the war.

Southern Reactions

In the South, the end of the Civil War brought new conflicts. Reconstruction efforts led to racism and hatred against former slaves. Some of these Southern states passed laws known as black codes that aimed to limit the rights of African Americans.

Below is an excerpt from "An Act to Confer Civil Rights on Freedmen, and for other Purposes," otherwise known as the Mississippi "black codes," passed in November, 1865. Mississippi's black codes are often considered among the harshest laws passed during this time period. In what ways do they impact the lives of the former slaves?

Section 2. All freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes may intermarry with each other, in the same manner and under the same regulations that are provided by law for white persons: Provided, that the clerk of probate shall keep separate records of the same.

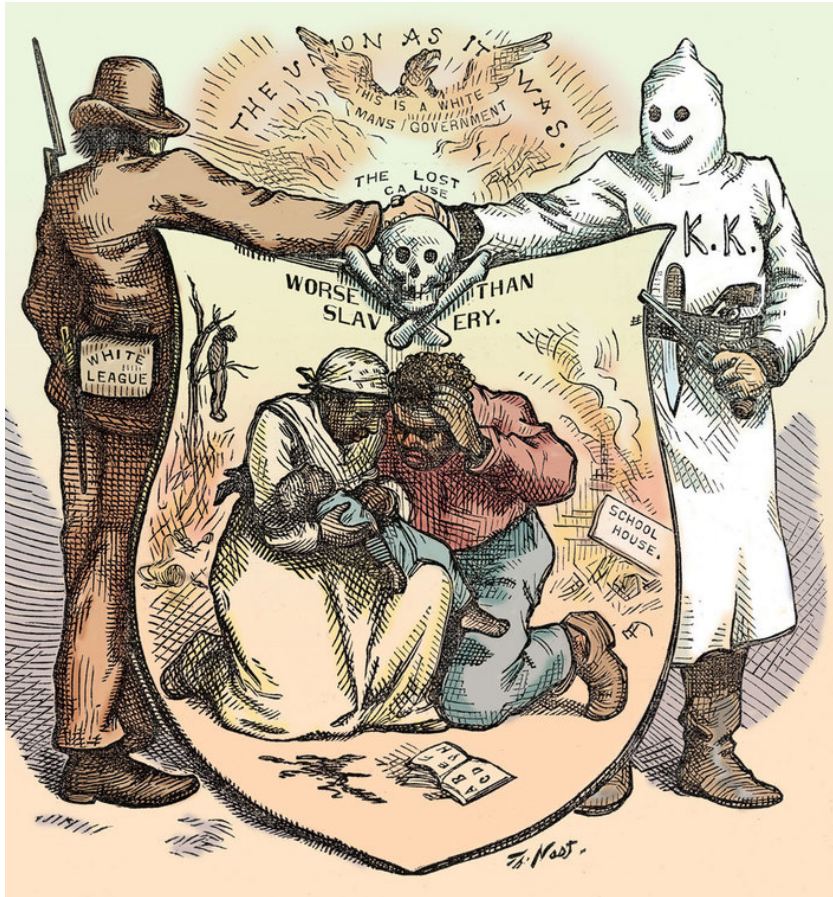
Section 3. . . . It shall not be lawful for any freedman, free Negro, or mulatto to intermarry with any white person; nor for any white person to intermarry with any freedman, free Negro, or mulatto; any person who shall so intermarry shall be deemed guilty of felony and, on conviction thereof, shall be confined in the state penitentiary for life . . .

. . . Section 6. All contracts for labor made with freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes for a longer period than one month shall be in writing and in duplicate . . . and if the laborer shall quit the service of the employer, before expiration of his term of service, without good cause, he shall forfeit his wages for that year, up to the time of quitting.

Section 7. Every civil officer shall, and every person may, arrest and carry back to his or her legal employer any freedman, free Negro, or mulatto who shall have quit the service of his or her employer before the expiration of his or her term of service without good cause . . .

Other forms of racism in the South also emerged following the end of the Civil War. Founded by a Confederate general in 1866, the Ku Klux Klan emerged in an effort to terrorize African Americans and Republicans. These members of the KKK, dressed as the ghosts of dead Confederate soldiers, attacked and murdered many African Americans.

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The Ku Klux Klan started violent campaigns against black and white Republican leaders and voters in an effort to undo Reconstruction policies. Between 1867 and 1868, 10 percent of the African Americans elected to the government were attacked in these campaigns, and seven were ultimately killed. Black schools and churches were also victims of Klan violence.

By the 1870s, the Ku Klux Klan had extended throughout the South. Although some in the South tried to blame Ku Klux Klan violence on poor whites, members came from many different backgrounds. Some Klan members were even lawyers, merchants, or doctors. Although Congress would try to pass laws to combat the rise of the Klan, their efforts were ultimately unable to stop the damage that had been done.

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- "Reconstruction" by Frederick Douglass in *Atlantic Monthly*

Entire Selection:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1866/12/reconstruction/30>

Accessed March, 2017

- "An Act to Confer Civil Rights on Freedmen, and for other Purposes" *known as "black codes,"* passed by the Mississippi State Legislature< November 25, 1865.

Entire

Selection:<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/slavery/experience/legal/docs6.html>

Accessed March, 2017