CHAPTER 14

Now That We Are Free

Reconstruction and the New South, 1863–1890

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> "Never before had I a word of impudence from any of our black folk, but they are not ours any longer."
>
> SUSAN BRADFORD, observing the defiant attitude among former slaves on her Florida plantation, 1865

The Civil War ended in April 1865, concluding the bloodiest and most divisive conflict in American history. The period that followed came to be known as Reconstruction for several reasons. Most obviously, the name called to mind the need to rebuild the war-torn South. It also referred to the effort to reestablish the Union torn apart by secession. Finally, it indicated the need to remake Southern society in the wake of slavery's destruction.

The complexities and challenges of this last goal are evident in Winslow Homer's 1876 painting, *A Visit from the Old Mistress,* which depicts ex-slaves being visited by their former owner. The elegant clothing worn by the "Old Mistress" suggests she has money, but clearly the relationship between the women has changed significantly in the wake of emancipation. To begin with, the mistress has come to visit the former slaves in their home, suggesting a diminishing of her status and power relative to them. The scene also lacks any sense of the affection that plantation owners always assured themselves existed between slaves and masters. Indeed, the three African American women eye the mistress warily. One of them even chooses to remain seated in what surely would have been considered a show of contempt. The old order was gone, but what would replace it remained unclear in the aftermath of the war.

Americans entered the Reconstruction period facing the profound questions raised by war and emancipation. Was it possible for whites and former slaves to live together in peace and mutual respect? What rights were the freedmen entitled to and who would guarantee these rights? The different answers articulated by freedmen and white Southerners revealed sharply divergent visions of the future and led to a bitter struggle to define the meaning of freedom. "Verily," observed ex-slave Frederick Douglass, "the work does not end with the abolition of slavery, but only begins."

How does this image reveal the uncertainty of race relations in the postwar South?

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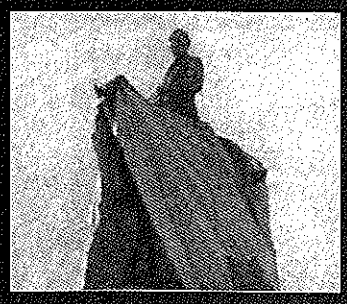


The New South p. 428

Preparing for Reconstruction

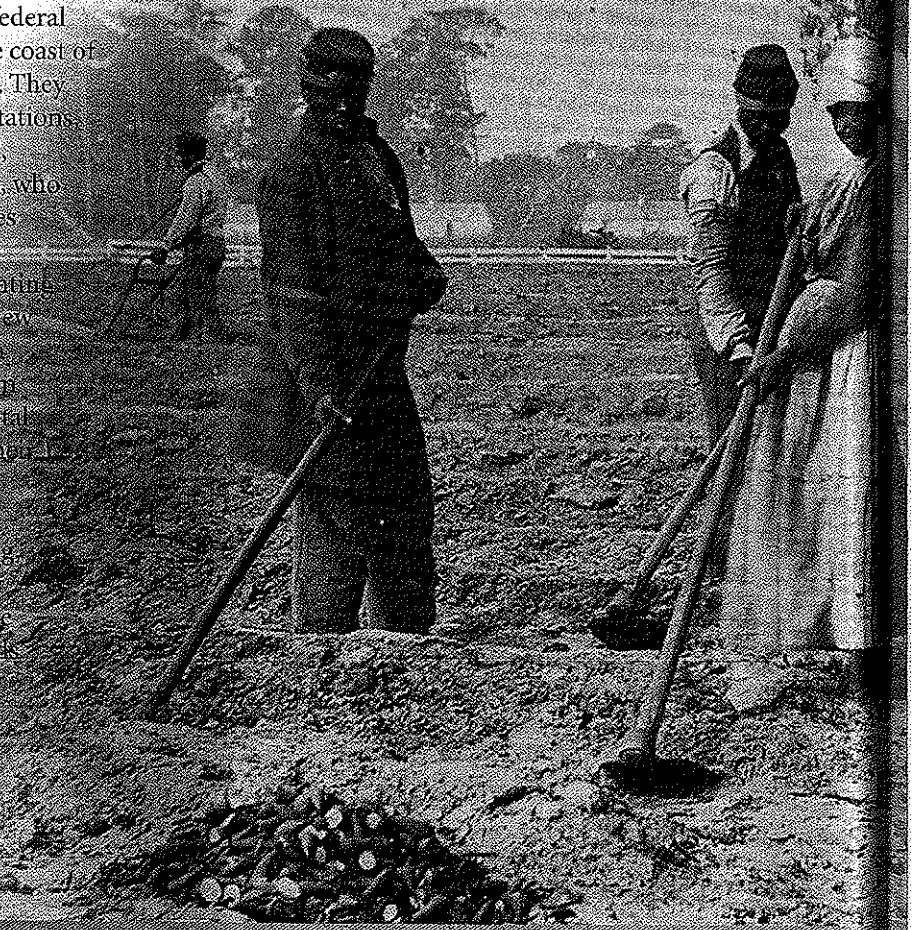
Long before the Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863 countless thousands of enslaved Africans took advantage of the chaos produced by the war to liberate themselves. Their actions raised a host of questions about what rights the freedmen would be entitled to, including land ownership and voting. Lincoln and his advisers preferred to wait until the war's successful conclusion before addressing these questions, but actions taken by the freedmen to assert their rights and secure their liberty forced the Lincoln administration to develop policies during the war that ultimately shaped postwar Reconstruction.

Emancipation Test Cases

Even before the Emancipation Proclamation took effect, the federal government realized that it needed to enact policies regarding the growing numbers of freedmen in areas of the South occupied by the Union army. These policies varied by region and were shaped by local customs and the attitudes of freedmen and white officials. As such, they amounted to test cases for the coming debate over Reconstruction. Three of these test cases revealed both the promise and the contentious conflict surrounding emancipation.

The first test case began when federal forces seized the Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina in November 1861. They found a vast system of cotton plantations but no planters. The latter had fled, leaving behind ten thousand slaves, who moved quickly to establish new lives based on their understanding of freedom. While clearly posed, "Planting Sweet Potatoes" (**14.1**), shot by a New Hampshire photographer visiting a regiment from his state stationed on the island, captured one fundamental way in which ex-slaves expressed their new freedom. Rejecting cotton, a crop they associated with slavery, they planted crops of their own choosing, such as sweet potatoes and corn for local consumption. Freedom for the African Americans of the Sea Islands meant a future as independent farmers living free of white control.

Many Northern whites who arrived after the military takeover, however, brought with them a very different vision of the future for the Sea Islands. Convinced that Sea Island blacks should resume their labors on cotton plantations—not as slaves but as paid wage earners—federal officials opted not to grant land to the freedmen and instead auctioned it off to the highest bidder. Northern investors bought most of the land, hired freedmen as wage laborers, and resumed cotton cultivation. This vision was



14.1 Freedmen in the Sea Islands Cultivating Sweet Potatoes, 1862
Most freedmen refused to grow cotton, considering it a symbol of slavery. They grew sweet potatoes and other crops, such as corn, primarily for their own consumption. [*Source*: Collection of The New-York Historical Society, [37628]]

How did freedmen define freedom in the Sea Islands?

driven in part by the sincere belief that subsistence farming on small tracts of land was backward, harmful to the long-term interests of the freedmen and also by the racist notion that African Americans were not capable of handling their freedom responsibly and therefore needed white employers to guide them.

A second test case unfolded on Davis Bend, the Mississippi plantations owned by Confederate President Jefferson Davis and his brother Joseph. Before the Civil War, they had tried to make Davis Bend a model slave labor community where slaves received better food and were granted a high degree of autonomy. The Davis brothers hoped other planters would follow their example and thus refute the abolitionist argument that slavery was inhumane. Instead, Davis Bend became a model of a very different sort of ideal, one that vividly demonstrated what freedmen were capable of achieving if granted land and autonomy. When General Ulysses S. Grant arrived and found the former slaves running the plantations, he ordered federal officials to lease land to the freedmen. Unlike the freedmen of the Sea Islands, the African American residents of Davis Bend did not have to contend with Northerners seeking to reassert white control over the land and impose a wage labor system. As a consequence, by 1865 Davis Bend residents had established their own local government and cleared a profit of $160,000 in cotton sales.

A third and far larger test case for emancipation policy began in Louisiana and was eventually extended up the Mississippi Valley affecting some 700,000 former slaves. Soon after Union forces seized New Orleans in April 1862, army officers established a policy to guide the transition from slavery to emancipation. As in the case of the Sea Islands, the policy reflected the racist belief among Northern whites that African Americans could not responsibly handle their freedom and therefore needed strict rules regarding conduct and work. Blacks were required to remain on their plantations, working as wage laborers bound by one-year contracts. Those wishing to travel, even for short distances, required a pass from the plantation owner. Runaways and resisters, as depicted in this 1864 drawing (**14.2**), would be forcibly returned to their plantations. Offsetting these harsh provisions was a ban on the use of corporal punishment for plantation labor. Freedmen bitterly

14.2 Freedmen Forcibly Returned to Their Plantations, 1864 Violators of the Reconstruction plan were deemed "vagrants" and forcibly returned to their plantations.

Why did Union officials define freedom for former slaves so narrowly in Louisiana?

opposed the new system, arguing that it placed them in a nearly powerless position under the authority of their former masters. In New Orleans, home to the South's largest free black population before the war, African Americans began to demand equal rights for all freedmen, including the right to vote and hold office. Although their efforts failed, they sparked a national debate over freedmen's rights that would come to dominate Reconstruction.

The experiences in the Sea Islands, Davis Bend, Louisiana, and elsewhere during the war created a host of conflicting visions regarding the rights of freedmen, land redistribution, and the authority of ex-slave owners. Yet the emancipation experience also revealed the optimism of the freedmen and their commitment to defend their newly won freedom and make the most of it.

Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan

Even as the Civil War raged, President Lincoln had begun to formulate an official Reconstruction policy. A moderate on the big issues before the war, Lincoln proposed a moderate Reconstruction policy. As he suggested so eloquently in his second inaugural address, he intended to deal with the defeated South "with malice toward none" and "charity for all" to "achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves. . . ." He believed that extending lenient terms to the South would convince Confederates to surrender sooner and speed the healing process necessary for the good of the Union. Vengeance, he held, would only delay Reconstruction. It might even inspire defeated Confederate soldiers to form renegade bands of insurgents to wage a war of terrorism for years to come.

> "A more studied outrage on the legislative authority of the people has never been perpetuated."
>
> Wade-Davis Manifesto denouncing Lincoln's veto of the Wade-Davis Bill

In December of 1863 Lincoln issued his Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, also known as the **Ten Percent Plan.** Intended to establish Southern state governments, the plan pardoned all Southerners (except high-ranking military officers and Confederate officials) who took an oath pledging loyalty to the Union and support for emancipation. As soon as ten percent of a state's voters took this oath, they could call a convention, establish a new state government, and apply for congressional recognition.

Radical Republicans Offer a Different Vision

The lenient character of Lincoln's plan enraged many Radical Republicans. In July of 1864 Radical Republican leaders Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio and Congressman Henry W. Davis of Maryland cosponsored the **Wade-Davis Bill,** a Reconstruction program designed to punish Confederate leaders and permanently destroy the South's slave society. Southerners could reestablish new state governments only after a majority of a state's voters signed an "ironclad" oath declaring they never aided the Confederate army or government. Southerners who did serve as high-ranking army officers or government officials would be stripped of their citizenship, including the right to vote and hold office. The former Confederate states would be readmitted only after a lengthy period of punishment and a clear demonstration of their commitment to the Union, emancipation, and freedmen's rights.

Lincoln quietly pocket vetoed the bill. Undaunted, Wade, Davis, and other Radicals mounted a movement to replace Lincoln as the Republican Party presidential nominee. Although the effort failed, it exposed the deeply divided opinions regarding Reconstruction policy.

Lincoln and his fellow Republicans did manage to find common ground on two issues. In late January 1865, at the urging of Lincoln's administration, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery. The measure ended any ambiguity that had surrounded the Emancipation Proclamation, abolishing slavery everywhere in the United States and offering no compensation to former slaveholders. Twenty-seven states, including eight former Confederate states, would ratify the amendment by year's end.

In March Congress established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. Known simply as the **Freedmen's Bureau,** it was to serve as an all-purpose relief agency in the war-ravaged South, providing emergency services, building schools, and managing confiscated lands. It represented the first attempt by the federal government to provide social welfare services and quickly became the bedrock institution for implementing Reconstruction policy.

What advantages did Lincoln see in proposing a moderate Reconstruction policy?

The Fruits of Freedom

Many Southerners were stunned by the response of their slaves to freedom. Clinging to self-serving paternalistic notions of the plantation as one big family under the benign authority of the master and planter, they were taken aback when their slaves refused to obey their orders or exhibited anger or disrespect toward them. Susan Bradford, a young woman living on a Florida plantation, wrote in her diary that she was "hurt and dazed" when one of her former slaves refused to prepare a dinner for her mother. "Tell her if she want any dinner," sneered the free woman, "she kin cook it herself." "I believed that these people were content, happy, and attached to their masters," wrote one South Carolina planter in 1865, unable to comprehend why slaves abandoned their masters "in [their] moment of need." It would be the first of many such shocking experiences for whites, who never imagined that slavery might one day be abolished.

INFORMATION WANTED

OF A MAN BY THE NAME OF ELIAS LOWERY McDERMIT, who used to belong to Thomas Lyons, of Knoxville, East Tennessee. He was sold to a man by the name of Sherman about ten years ago, and I learned some six years ago that he was on a steamboat running between Memphis and New Orleans, and more recently I heard that he was somewhere on the Cumberland river, in the Federal army. Any information concerning him will be thankfully received. Address Colored Tennessean, Nashville, Tenn. From his sister who is now living in Knoxville, East Tennessee.

je24-1m] MARTHA McDERMIT.

SAML. DOVE wishes to know of the whereabouts of his mother, Areno, his sisters, Maria, Neziah, and Peggy, and his brother Edmond, who were owned by Geo. Dove, of Rockingham county, Shenandoah Valley, Va. Sold in Richmond, after which Saml. and Edmond were taken to Nashville, Tenn., by Joe Mick; Areno was left at the Eagle Tavern, Richmond.

Respectfully yours,

SAML. DOVE.

Utica, New York, Aug. 5, 1865–3m

U. S. CHRISTIAN COMMISSION, NASHVILLE, TENN., July 19, 1865.

14.3 Freedmen Searching for Loved Ones Sold Away during Slavery
These classified advertisements in the August 12, 1865 *Colored Tennessean* were just two of thousands published in mainly black-owned newspapers during Reconstruction. They vividly highlight the efforts of freedmen to overcome one of slavery's harshest legacies. [*Source*: Chicago History Museum]

Freedom of Movement

Even before the guns of the Civil War went silent, African Americans had begun to explore the meaning of their freedom and formulate their own vision of a reconstructed postwar South, both of which included unrestricted mobility. Under slavery, movement was sharply limited, and few slaves ventured very far from their plantations. In the chaos of war and later with official emancipation, African Americans hit the road. Many did so to get away from the plantations that were home to their former masters and countless bitter memories. Others simply reveled in the idea of free and unfettered movement. They wandered for the pleasure of it with no particular destination in mind. As these advertisements (**14.3**) from the *Colored Tennessean,* Tennessee's only African American–owned newspaper, indicate, many freedmen also journeyed in search of loved ones sold away years before.

African American mobility led to a sharp rise in the black population of Southern cities. In contrast to rural life, black settlements in cities offered more and varied job opportunities, albeit nearly always menial, difficult, and low paid. Urban life also provided freedmen access to strong black institutions such as churches, charities, and newspapers.

Southern whites reacted to black mobility with a mixture of alarm and disdain. Just as former slaves equated freedom with mobility, their former masters saw in it a shocking reminder that the old order was gone. Not surprisingly, one of the first expressions of white Southern resistance to black freedom was the passage of vagrancy laws intended to restrict African American mobility.

Forty Acres and a Mule

In addition to exercising their right to move about freely, many freedmen also tried to become landowners. If travel was a symbolic expression of their new freedom, land was freedom in concrete form. Land, the freedmen believed, would give freedom meaning by providing an independent living, free of planter control.

The idea that freedmen would receive land in addition to their freedom originated during the war. As Southerners abandoned their plantations before the advance of the Union army, ex-slaves often took control, partitioned land, and planted crops. Freedmen defended these extralegal actions as simple justice, citing the generations of unpaid labor that they and their ancestors had performed on Southern farms and plantations. "The property which they [former slaveholders] hold," asserted a freedmen's convention, "was nearly all earned by the sweat of our brows."

In early 1865 General William T. Sherman issued Field Order No. 15, supplanting these acts of unofficial confiscation. Having laid waste to the Confederate southeast, Sherman announced that 400,000 acres of abandoned land stretching from northern Florida to the South Carolina Sea Islands would be distributed to freedman in 40-acre plots. Weeks later Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau, authorizing it to rent 40-acre plots of confiscated and abandoned land, along with a mule, to freedmen. By June some forty thousand freedmen were living on Sherman lands while thousands more

Why did freedmen believe they were owed land?

"Give us our own land and we take care of ourselves; but without land, the old masters can hire or starve us, as they please."

A South Carolina freedman speaking to a Northern journalist, 1865

began renting plots under control of the Freedmen's Bureau. African Americans and Radical Republicans hoped to see this program of land redistribution, popularly known as "forty acres and a mule," enacted across the South. Before long, however, their optimism would give way to bitter disappointment.

Regardless of whether they owned or worked their land or worked as farm laborers for wages, African Americans used their freedom to change the way they worked. They often refused to work in gangs under overseers because it reminded them of slavery. Instead they preferred working independently, under the direction of elder family members. Many African American women left work in the field in order to work in their homes and care for children.

Uplift through Education

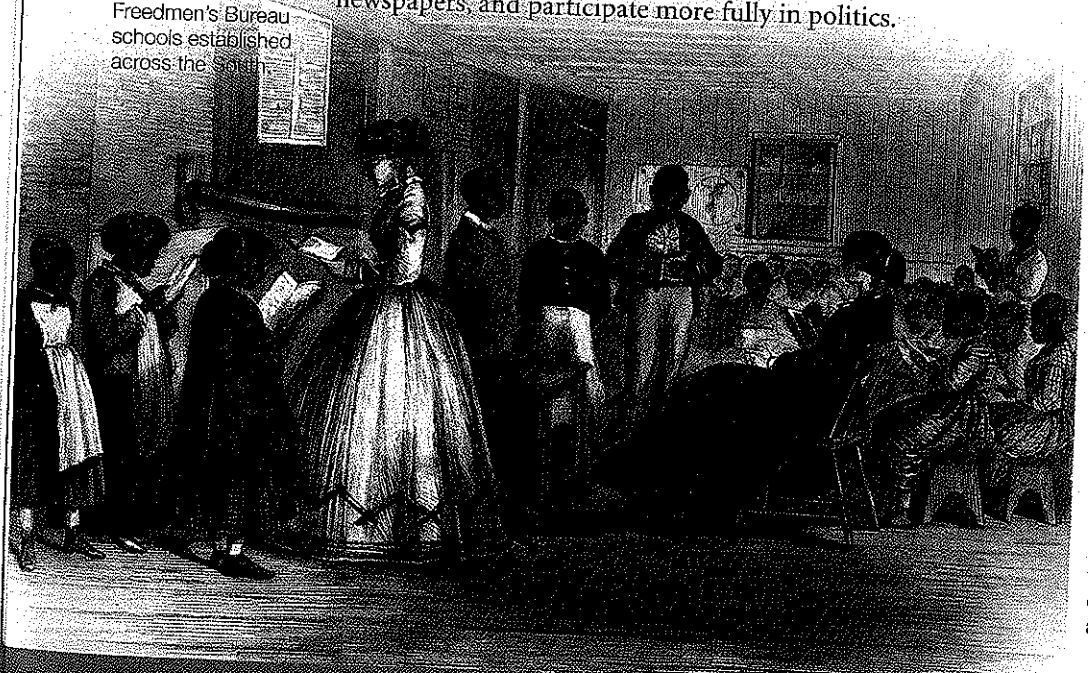
Along with land, freedmen sought education as a necessary guarantee of their freedom. Laws and customs preventing the education of slaves had left most freedmen illiterate. But with the ability to read and write they could conduct their own legal and business affairs, acquire better-paying jobs, read newspapers, and participate more fully in politics.

General O. O. Howard, the first head of the Freedmen's Bureau, shared the freedmen's belief that education should be an essential goal of Reconstruction. Working with a number of charitable societies and African American leaders, the Freedmen's Bureau helped build three thousand schools across the South that by 1870 served 150,000 students of all ages. By 1875 literacy among freedmen jumped from 10 percent to 30 percent.

Initially, most of the teachers in these schools were educated single white women from the North, like the Cooke sisters (**14.4**). Often sponsored by Northern charitable societies, these teachers saw themselves as missionaries dedicated to the uplift of the freedmen. The journal that published this image in 1866, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly,* shared this vision. Note how the artist depicted the children in spotless attire with all of them focused on their studies.

That the vision of these teachers and their sponsors went beyond merely teaching ex-slaves to read is shown in this image (**14.5**) of a brief biography of African American poet Phillis Wheatley. Published in 1866 by a Boston Christian organization, it demonstrates their effort to instill in freedmen a pride in African American achievement, believing it would aid them in their quest for education and independence.

Still, educating freedmen was no easy job. Southern whites often put up fierce resistance to African American education, especially in more remote areas. One report in 1865 provided a vivid description of the many hardships teachers faced. "Compelled to live on the coarsest diet . . . subjected



14.4 ***The Misses Cooke's School Room, Freedman's Bureau,* 1866**
The Cooke sisters moved from the North to Richmond, Virginia to run one of hundreds of Freedmen's Bureau schools established across the South.

THIRD READER. 75

LESSON XXXIX.

bought — pleas-ant — caugh-ter — ap-pear-ance
whole — clear-ness — learn-ing — ea-ger-ness
health — sick-ness — al-though — in-tel-lect-ing

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

PHILLIS WHEATLEY, whose likeness is on this page, was brought to this country from Africa in the year 1761. She was then between seven and eight years old. She was bought by Mrs. John Wheatley, a Boston lady, who chose her from a crowd of other negroes, although she looked feeble and sickly, because of her modest appearance and pleasant face.

14.5 Education and Inspiration
Some Northern charitable societies, like the Boston Tract Society, published and distributed books to both teach reading and inspire African Americans.

Why did education become such a priority for African Americans?

to the jeers and hatred of her neighbors . . . swamped in mud—the school shed a drip, and her quarters little better; raided occasionally by rebels, her school broken up and herself insulted, banished, or run off."

The Freedmen's Bureau and Northern aid societies also established more than a dozen black colleges, including Howard in Washington, D.C., and Hampton in Virginia. One of the most immediate goals of these new colleges was to train black teachers. By 1870 African American teachers outnumbered white teachers in freedmen's schools. Many freedmen teachers assumed roles as community leaders and many eventually ran for political office. At least seventy former teachers won seats in Southern state legislatures during Reconstruction.

The Black Church

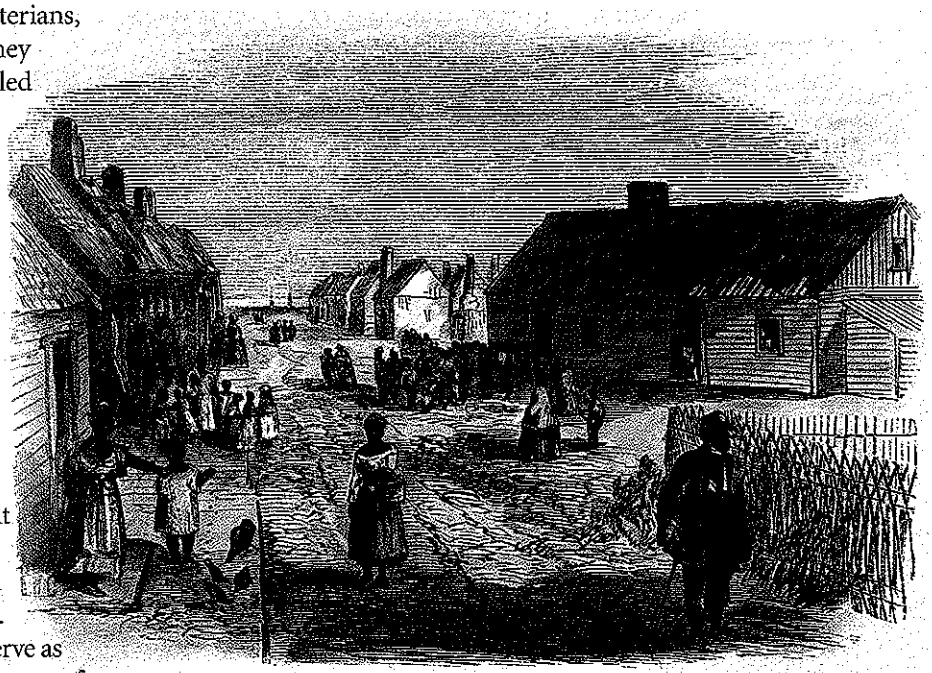
An even greater source of community leadership came from the vast network of black churches established during Reconstruction. Black churches had existed in the South before the Civil War, but most were part of larger white congregations and subject to strict white control. Southern whites usually insisted that white ministers lead black congregations and made certain that preaching never challenged the system of slavery and white domination.

When the war ended, countless African American congregations of Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, and other sects separated from white ones. They resented their inferior status in white-controlled churches and longed to practice a more emotional, expressive worship style disdained by whites. Most important, they wanted black clergymen who could address their spiritual and social needs.

Often churches assumed a central place in the lives of freedmen. Religious services provided spiritual and psychological support for blacks' daily struggles. Churches also ran schools and provided charitable services to the community. As this illustration (**14.6**) of a freedmen community at Trent River, North Carolina, demonstrates, African Americans built a church in the center that doubled as a schoolhouse and meeting place. Churches also offered African Americans a degree of self-government. Members of the congregation were elected to serve as trustees and on committees overseeing many aspects of parish life and budget management. African American women, in particular, filled numerous roles in planning and managing activities, raising money, and running programs such as temperance societies. Like their white counterparts, African American churches also sponsored countless initiatives, such as burial societies, fraternal organizations, drama clubs, and youth groups.

With the church taking so prominent a place in African American life, black ministers, like black teachers, assumed major leadership roles. White hostility convinced most ministers to concentrate on building up their communities from within. Still, many ministers entered politics in an effort to advance the cause of black equality, including more than one hundred ministers elected to Southern state legislatures during Reconstruction. Reverend Richard H. Cain, for example, went to Charleston, South Carolina, in 1865, where he assisted in the reorganization of a black church. Two years later he served as a delegate to the state constitutional convention, followed by terms in the state senate and U.S. House of Representatives.

African Americans' response to emancipation showed that they possessed a clear understanding of freedom. Not simply an end to slavery, freedom meant freedmen's right to free movement and travel, to labor for themselves under conditions of their own choosing, on land granted to them by the government. It meant self-improvement through education and self-help organizations. It meant establishing their own institutions and building their own communities. It also meant full civil and social equality with whites, including the right to vote and hold office.



14.6 ***The Black Church Anchors Freedmen Communities***
African Americans organized thousands of churches across the South to address both their spiritual and their social needs. In the freedmen settlement of Trent River, North Carolina, a simple structure served as a church, school, and meetinghouse (from *Harper's Weekly,* June 9, 1866).

How did the black church become such a vital institution in freedmen communities?

The Struggle to Define Reconstruction

As freedmen in the South worked to define, protect, and extend their freedoms, political leaders in Washington, D.C., debated the best course of action to take in reconstructing the South. The debate revealed sharply divergent visions of the postwar South's social, political, and economic order. Radical Republicans wanted to replace the old slavocracy with a multiracial democracy protected by federal authority. Conservatives sought to limit Reconstruction to granting ex-slaves freedom and opposed proposals to distribute land and to grant full equality to ex-slaves. Moderates held the balance of power in deciding most of these questions, but they lacked a clear vision of the postwar South and made their decisions such as black voting in response to events as they unfolded.

The Conservative Vision of Freedom: Presidential Reconstruction

Andrew Johnson, who assumed the presidency following Lincoln's assassination, was a complicated man. Although he once owned slaves, like many other poor whites from the back country of eastern Tennessee, he grew up deeply suspicious of the planter aristocracy. As a politician, he gained a wide following among poor farmers for his populist criticism of planter power. He opposed secession and was the only senator from a seceding state who did not withdraw from the Senate in early 1861. Lincoln appointed Johnson governor of Tennessee after the state came under Union occupation. In 1864 Republicans sought to appeal to Southern unionism and picked Johnson as Lincoln's vice presidential running mate.

> "We have turned loose ... four million slaves without a hut to shelter them or a cent in their pockets. ... This Congress is bound to provide for them until they can take care of themselves."
>
> Congressman THADDEUS STEVENS, December 18, 1865

Shortly after assuming the office of president after Lincoln's assassination in April 1865, Johnson indicated that he intended to deal harshly with the South. He spoke of punishing ex-Confederate leaders for their "treason" and indicated an apparent desire to assist the freedmen. Radical Republicans, who shared these views, were thrilled.

Their joy was soon replaced first by despair and then anger. First, despite his harsh antiplanter rhetoric, Johnson held racist views about African Americans and abhorred the notion of black equality. Committed to maintaining white supremacy in the South, Johnson outlined in May 1865 a lenient policy toward the South designed to rapidly reestablish Southern state governments and restore the Union. It offered "amnesty and pardon," including the return of all property, to Southerners who took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution and Union. Former Confederate leaders and wealthy planters possessing more than $20,000 in personal wealth, however, would have to apply to him personally for a pardon.

Second, Johnson recognized the reconstructed government of North Carolina and set out the terms for readmitting the remaining ten ex-Confederate states. Johnson would appoint a governor for each state who in turn would call a constitutional convention of elected delegates (chosen by those granted amnesty or pardons). If the convention ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, renounced secession, repudiated all Confederate debts, and held elections for state office and Congress, Johnson would recognize the state as a fully reconstructed member of the Union.

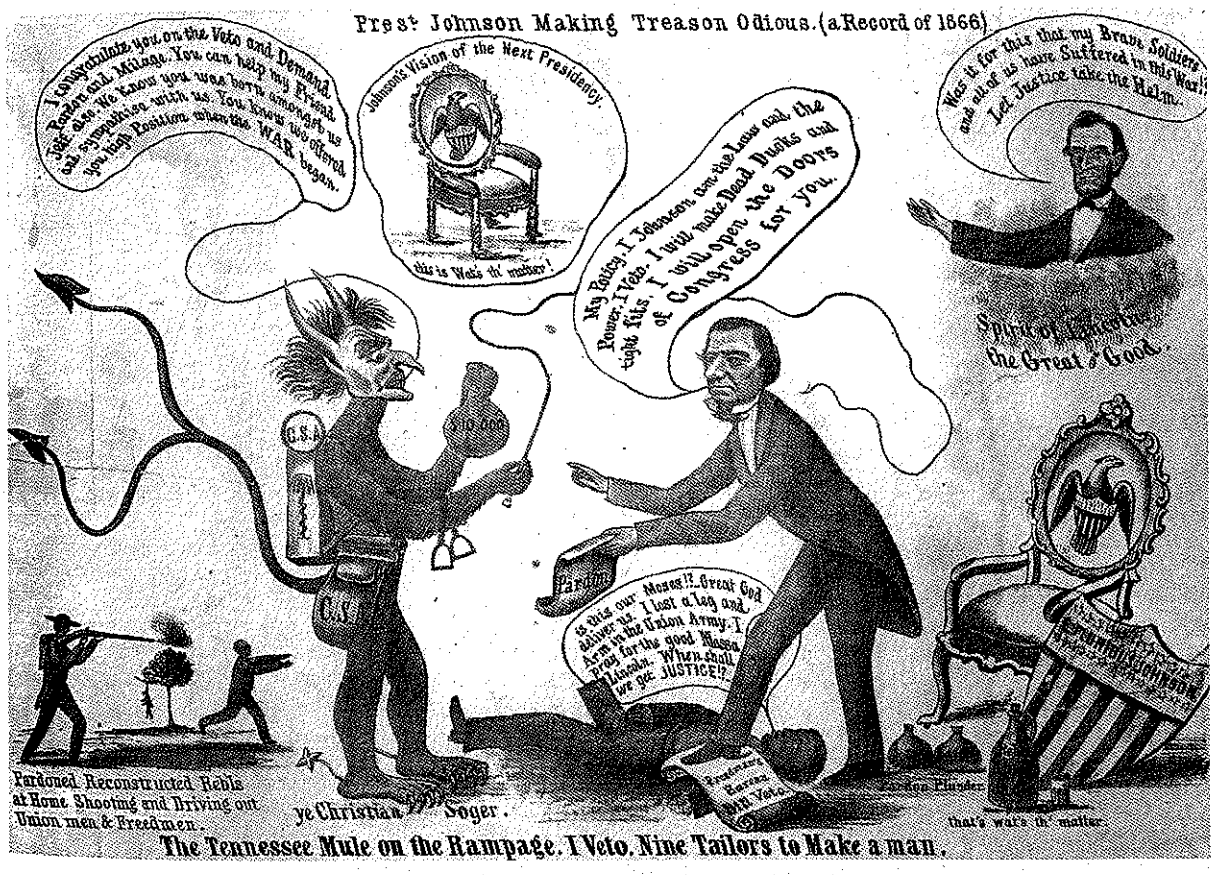
With Congress out of session, Johnson's plan faced little formal opposition. By the fall of 1865, he had granted pardons to all but a small number of planters and high-ranking ex-Confederates. With

What was Andrew Johnson's primary motivation in devising his lenient Reconstruction policy?

these pardons Southerners had restored to them virtually all their lands, including the vast tracts of land that had been set aside in 40-acre plots for freedmen. In December, with all eleven former Confederate states having established new governments under his terms, Johnson announced the Union was restored and Reconstruction was over.

Johnson's actions outraged Northern Republicans, including moderates. In this political cartoon (**14.7**), the artist shows Johnson accepting bags of cash from former Confederates (depicted as the devil) in exchange for a pardon, while a "Pardoned Reconstruction Rebel" in the lower left kills "Union men and freedmen." Three developments in the supposedly "reconstructed" South also stoked Republican discontent. First, many of the state constitutional conventions had failed explicitly to accept the Thirteenth Amendment some even demanded compensation for the financial losses incurred by emancipation. Second, and even more galling, in the state elections in November 1865 Southern voters elected dozens of ex-Confederate officials and army officers. Among them was Alexander Stephens, former vice president of the Confederacy, chosen to represent Georgia in the Senate. Third, new Southern state governments, beginning in late 1865 with Mississippi and South Carolina, passed laws known as **Black Codes** to limit the civil and economic rights of freedmen and create an exploitable workforce. Observing these developments in the eight months since Confederate general Robert E. Lee surendered, many Northerners wondered if the Civil War had been fought in vain. Had hundreds of thousands died to defeat the Confederacy only to see their leaders quickly resume power? Had slavery been abolished only to be replaced with a similar system of unfree labor?

One of the Mississippi Black Codes of 1865 established the vague charge of "vagrancy"—having



14.7 Johnson's Leniency Angers the North
Johnson's pledge to punish the South ("Treason must be made odious") is ridiculed in this 1866 political cartoon. His sweeping pardons of ex-Confederate leaders and planters and easy terms for readmission of Southern states provoked anger in the North.

What events in the South in 1865 angered Northern Republicans?

Competing Visions

DEMANDING RIGHTS, PROTECTING PRIVILEGE

In the aftermath of the Civil War, one question dominated the minds of Americans North and South: now that slavery was abolished, what would be the status of the freedmen? While newspaper editors, clergymen, and members of Congress debated the issue, white and black Southerners set out to answer the question themselves. As you read the following documents, one from a convention of freedmen and the other from the state legislature of Mississippi, consider the starkly contrasted visions for the future of Southern society. Why do the freedmen feel compelled to say they bear no ill will toward their "former oppressors." Why do Mississippi legislators define vagrancy in such vague terms?

"Address to the Loyal Citizens and Congress of the United States of America," Proceedings of the Convention of the Colored People of Virginia, Held in the City of Alexandria, August 2, 3, 4, 5, 1865.

We, the delegates of the colored people of the State of Virginia ... solemnly declaring that we desire to live upon the most friendly and agreeable terms with all men; we feel no ill-will or prejudice toward our former oppressors; are willing and desire to forgive and forget the past, and so shape our future conduct as shall promote our happiness and the interest of the community in which we live ...

We must, on the other hand, be allowed to aver and assert that we believe that we have among the white people of this State many who are our most inveterate enemies; who hate us as a class, who feel no sympathy with or for us; who despise us simply because we are black, and more especially, because we have been made free by the power of the United States Government ...

We claim, then, as citizens of this State, the laws of the Commonwealth [of Virginia] shall give to all men equal protection; that each and every man may appeal to the law for his equal rights without regard to the color of his skin; and we believe this can only be done by extending the franchise, which we believe to be our inalienable right as freemen, and which the Declaration of Independence guarantees to all free citizens of this Government and which is the privilege of this nation. We claim the right of suffrage:

1st. Because we can see no other safeguard for our protection.

2nd. Because we are citizens of the country and natives of this State.

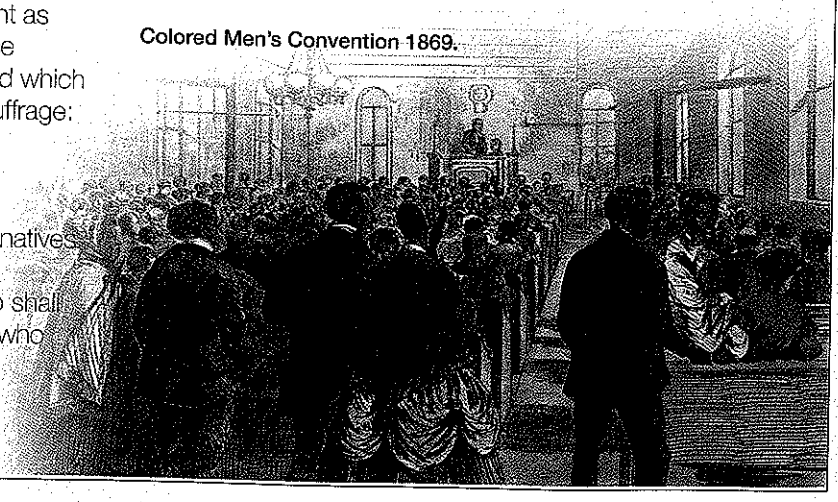
3rd. Because we are as well qualified to vote who shall be our rulers as many who do vote for that purpose who have no interest in us, and do not know our wants.

Mississippi legislators in December 1865 enacted the first "Black Codes" to limit the freedoms of African Americans. Defining vagrancy in such vague terms allowed white Southerners to arrest freedmen at will and to curtail their freedom of movement. These measures were quickly copied in the remaining ex-Confederate states.

Section 1. All rogues and vagabonds, idle and dissipated persons, ... persons who neglect their calling or employment, misspend what they earn, or do not provide for the support of themselves or their families, or dependents shall be deemed and considered vagrants, ... and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not exceeding one hundred dollars, with all accruing costs, and be imprisoned ... not exceeding ten days. ...

Section 5. ...In case of any freedman, free negro or mulatto shall fail for five days after the imposition of any or forfeiture upon him or her for violation of any of the provisions of this act to pay the same, that it shall be, and is hereby, made the duty of the sheriff of the proper county to hire out said freedman, free negro or mulatto, to any person who will, for the shortest period of service, pay said fine and forfeiture and all costs ...

Colored Men's Convention 1869.



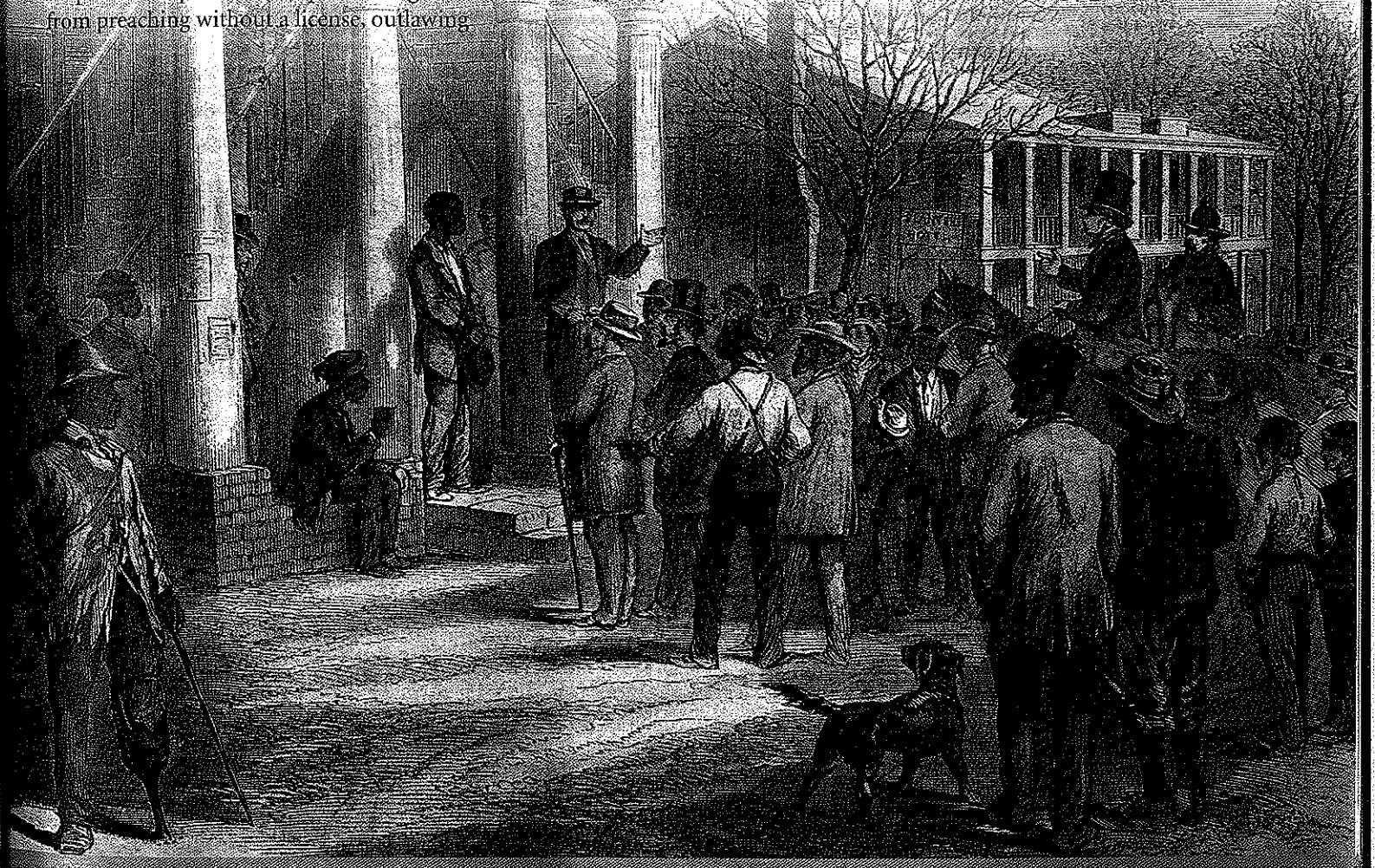
What is significant about the freedmen's use of the term citizen?

no regular home or employment—as a pretext for controlling freedmen. (See *Competing Visions: Demanding Rights, Protecting Privilege.*) Any freedman who hit the road seeking new opportunities could be arrested as a vagrant and fined. If a freedman could not pay his fine, he could be hired out for a period of time to a local plantation owner willing to pay his fine. As this drawing (**14.8**) dramatically shows, in some cases the contracts for such labor were auctioned off to local planters. The artist's intent was to conjure in the minds of Northerners a grim scene reminiscent of a slave auction, suggesting that one of the war's chief accomplishments, emancipation, was being undermined. Some Black Codes required that the children of "vagrant" freedmen be forced to accept apprenticeships that bound them to an employer until age twenty-one. Other stipulations encouraged blacks to sign long-term work contracts as proof of employment. This left them at the mercy of their employers, who were not required to pay them for any work performed if they quit before the contract expired. Other codes included laws restricting freedmen to renting land only in rural areas (to keep them on plantations), prohibiting ministers from preaching without a license, outlawing interracial marriages, and barring blacks from serving on juries.

Congressional Reconstruction and the Fourteenth Amendment

Republicans in Congress, both moderate and Radical, vowed to block Johnson's rapid and lenient Reconstruction program for both idealistic and practical reasons. Excepting emancipation, none of the Republicans' goals for changing Southern society had been accomplished, and the former slavocracy appeared poised to resume power—a result that would lead to the rebirth of the Democratic Party. A slower process of Reconstruction would allow time for the Republican Party to take root in the South, especially if African Americans were granted the right to vote, as many Radicals like Thaddeus Stephens demanded.

The confrontation began in January 1866 when Congress reconvened. Congressional Republicans, led by Sumner and Stephens, refused to admit the senators and representatives from the former Confederate states declared reconstructed by Johnson. Next they established the Joint Committee on



14.8 ***The Black Codes in Action*** Unable to pay his fine for "vagrancy" as defined in the Black Codes of Florida, a freedman is auctioned off. The high bidder won the right to a freedman's labor for months or years.

How did Black Codes calling for freedmen to sign labor contracts curtail their freedom?

14.9 ***Race Riot in Memphis***
White mobs, unrestrained by local police, terrorized the freedmen community in Memphis, Tennessee on May 1–2, 1866, killing forty-six blacks. News of the atrocities, conveyed in images such as this one, stoked Northern public opinion against Johnson's lenient Reconstruction policies.

Reconstruction to investigate conditions in the South. It found widespread evidence of chaos, resistance to Northern authority, and abuse of freedmen's rights.

To counteract Southern resistance and the oppression of freedmen, Congress passed two bills. The first authorized the Freedmen's Bureau to continue operation for two more years. The second, the Civil Rights Bill, went much further. It declared African Americans and all persons born in the United States (except Native Americans) national citizens. It also defined the rights of all citizens regardless of race—for example, the right to sue and to make contracts. Taking direct aim at the Black Codes, the law prohibited state governments from depriving any citizen of these "fundamental rights." Johnson, infuriated at Congress's rejection of his Reconstruction program and determined to thwart efforts to establish racial equality, vetoed both bills.

Although Congress eventually overrode the vetoes and the bills became law, by June 1866 Republicans decided bolder action was necessary. Johnson remained opposed to freedmen's rights, and violence against the freedmen was on the rise in the South. The worst incident, depicted in the image (**14.9**), was a brutal race riot in Memphis, Tennessee, on May 1–2 that left forty-six blacks, most of them Union army veterans, and two whites dead. This drawing appeared in *Harper's Weekly,* a widely read publication that favored freedmen's rights, and was intended to arouse anger in the North over Southern intransigence and support for congressional action. The recently passed Civil Rights Bill was an unprecedented piece of legislation, but its supporters knew that it could easily be overturned by a later Congress. An amendment, on the other hand, became a permanent part of the Constitution.

On June 13, 1866, moderate and Radical Republicans passed the **Fourteenth Amendment** to the Constitution. The Fourteenth Amendment represented a radical redefining of the role of the federal government as the guarantor of individual civil rights. A complex amendment, it contained five

Why did Republicans deem the Fourteenth Amendment necessary so soon after passing the Civil Rights Act?

main provisions. First, it declared all persons born or naturalized in the United States as citizens, a definition that necessarily included all freedmen. Second, all citizens were entitled to "equal protection of the laws" of the states where they lived. Third, states that denied adult male citizens, including African Americans, the right to vote would be penalized by having their representation in Congress reduced. Fourth, all high-ranking former Confederates were prohibited from holding public office, unless pardoned by act of Congress. Fifth, it repudiated the Confederate debt (thus punishing those who lent money to the Confederacy) and denied all claims for compensation by ex–slave owners.

Johnson greeted the unprecedented amendment with an unprecedented response: he went on the campaign trail to urge its defeat. Hoping to make the midterm state and congressional elections in November 1866 a referendum on the amendment, Johnson and his allies played on white racism, conjuring up images of racial equality and racial intermarriage designed to alarm Northern whites. Republicans responded in kind, portraying Johnson and the Democrats as traitors who waged war on the Union. Republicans won a sweeping victory in November. Northern voters, while still leery of racial equality, clearly rejected Johnson's lenient form of Reconstruction because it required too little of Southerners and allowed for the restoration of planter rule.

Radical Republicans Take Control

Emboldened by their legislative and electoral success, congressional Republicans moved to take complete control of Reconstruction policy. In March 1867 Congress passed the first of four Reconstruction Acts. It divided the South (except Tennessee) into five military districts, each governed by a military commander empowered with wide authority to keep order and protect individuals, especially freedmen. As soon as order was established, the ex-Confederate states could begin a new, stricter readmission process. The act called for elections to select delegates to state constitutional conventions—elections that permitted African American men to vote, but barred Southerners who served in the Confederate government and army. The new state constitutions drawn up by these conventions had to allow universal male suffrage, regardless of race. As soon as a state's voters approved the new constitution, the state could hold elections to fill government offices. Finally, if Congress approved the state's constitution and the state legislature ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, the state would be readmitted to the Union.

Fully two years after the end of the Civil War, the federal government had finally adopted a clear Reconstruction plan. The delay was understandable, given Lincoln's assassination and the lack of any precedent. Yet delay granted Southerners time in which to recover from the war and mount an effective resistance to federal intervention.

> "The President has no power to control or influence anybody and legislation will be carried on entirely regardless of his opinion or wishes."
>
> Republican Senator JAMES W. GRIMES, Iowa, January 1867

Passage of the Reconstruction Acts further exacerbated the conflict between President Johnson and congressional Republicans. Johnson promptly vetoed the acts, and Congress passed them again over his veto. Some of the more radical Republicans had grown so embittered by the president's actions and words, they attempted to remove him from office. When Johnson dismissed Secretary of War Stanton in August 1867, Republicans charged him with violating the Tenure of Office Act, a constitutionally questionable measure they had passed back in March. It required the president to seek congressional approval before removing a cabinet official. The House voted to impeach the president, charging him with eleven offenses. The trial began in March 1868 and after two months of heated debate and accusation, the Senate failed—by one vote—to convict Johnson and remove him from office.

Johnson was saved by moderate Republicans who feared that a bad precedent would be set if they supported a largely politically motivated campaign to remove a president from office. They also knew that Johnson had less than a year left in office. Finally, many moderate Republicans had begun to lose confidence in the Radicals' Reconstruction program. Had Johnson been removed from office, the power of the Radical Republicans would have been greatly increased as one of their own, Benjamin Wade, would have succeeded him as president.

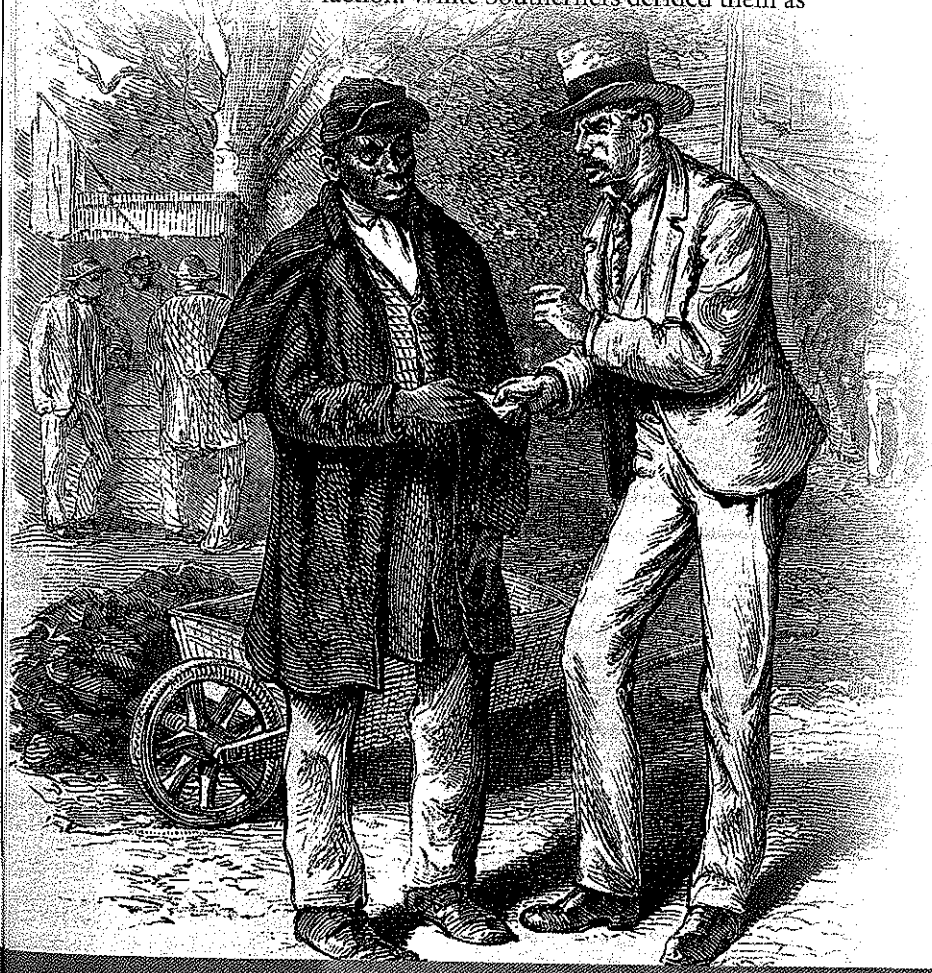
Why did moderate Republicans decide not to remove Johnson from office?

Implementing Reconstruction

As Congress engaged in its impeachment struggle with President Johnson in 1867–1868, the Reconstruction Acts took effect. A coalition of African Americans, poor up-country whites, and economically ambitious merchants (many originally from the North) and white planters came together to form the Republican Party in the South. They seized the opportunity presented by the congressional Reconstruction program and dominated the process of electing state governments and gaining readmission to the Union. The task would not be easy, especially as their different goals came into conflict with each other and with those of a majority of white Southerners who would clearly oppose—politically, economically, and violently—any attempt to establish what they called "Negro rule" in the former Confederacy.

The Republican Party in the South

The process of remaking state governments under the Reconstruction Act fell to the Republican Party, an organization comprising three distinct and in some cases antagonistic groups. Northerners who settled in the South after the war constituted one faction. White Southerners derided them as **carpetbaggers,** a term suggesting they were penniless adventurers who came south with all their possessions in a cheap suitcase, or carpetbag, intent on enriching themselves at the expense of Southerners still reeling from the war. In reality most were middle class, often former Union soldiers or merchants, ministers, artisans, and professionals who viewed the South as a region of opportunity and planned to settle permanently. Others came as idealistic relief workers, sent by Northern charitable and religious societies, intent upon aiding ex-slaves in their transition to freedom.



14.10 The Hated Scalawag Scalawags became despised figures in the popular Southern mind. Here a scalawag is depicted as an opportunist seeking political power by manipulating the black vote.

The Republican Party in the South also contained a significant number of white Southerners known derisively as **scalawags.** Most white Southerners considered them traitors to their region and race, men eager to enrich themselves and to garner political power by manipulating black voters (**14.10**). Most scalawags came from the less developed backcountry regions of the South, especially eastern Tennessee and Kentucky, northern Alabama and Georgia, and western North Carolina. They shared the view of carpetbaggers that the Republican Party offered them the best hope for economic betterment. They did not, as a rule, however, share some carpetbaggers' views on freedmen uplift and racial equality.

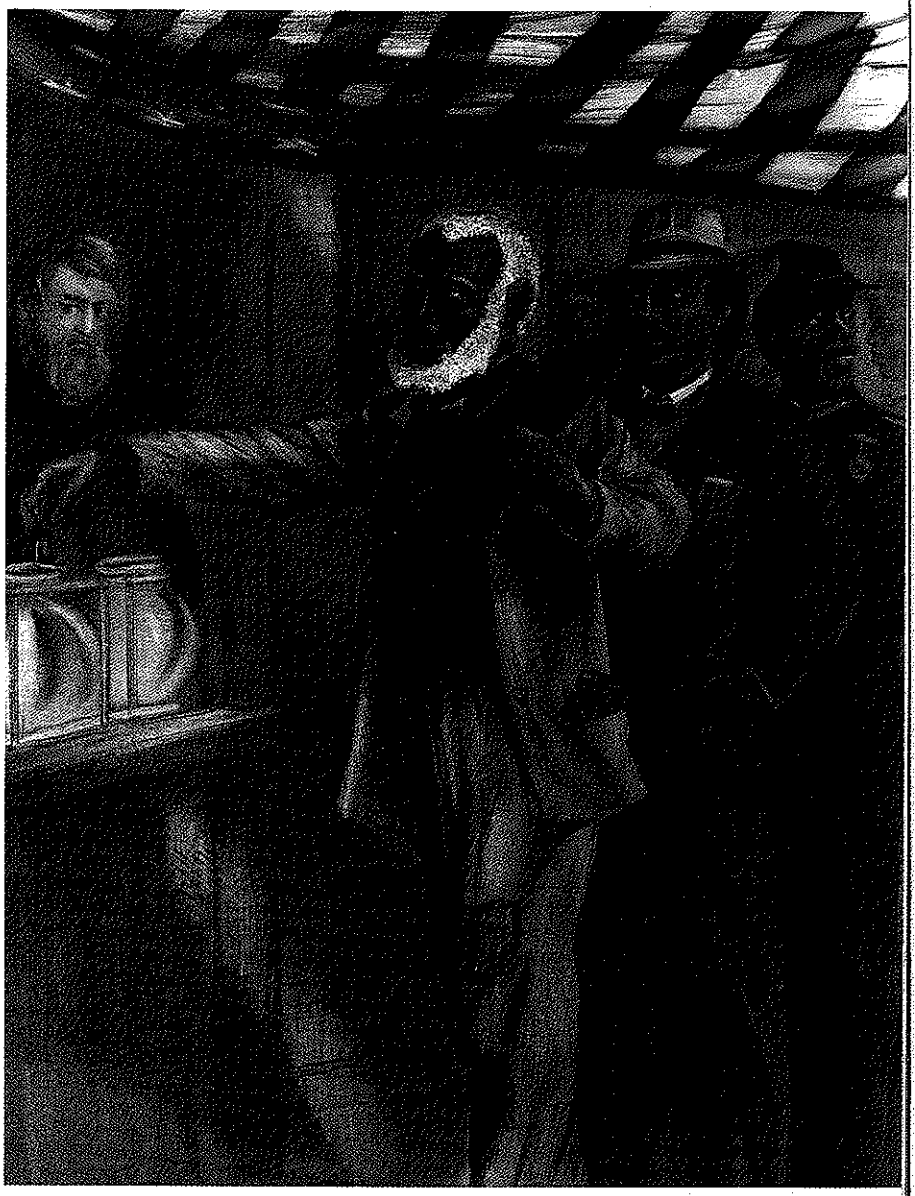
Former slaves made up the largest, most significant segment of the South's Republican Party. Empowered with the vote by the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and Reconstruction Act of 1867, they moved swiftly to make their political voice heard. In the fall of 1867, as Southern states held elections to select delegates to constitutional conventions, African Americans turned out in huge numbers to exercise their right to vote for the first time. For supporters

What motivated Northerners to move south after the Civil War?

> "But be sure to vote for no Southern men that was a rebel or secessionist; for, if you do, you are pulling them hemp to hang yourself with."
>
> R. I. CROMWELL, advising his fellow freedmen, *New Orleans Tribune,* April 25, 1867

of black suffrage, this extraordinary moment—persons only recently considered property now exercising the right to vote—was captured in this drawing (**14.11**). Published in *Harper's Weekly,* the hopeful, dignified scene depicts three African American voters who symbolically represent a spectrum of blacks that includes common laborers, educated blacks who were free before the war, and Union army veterans. Most of the African American political leaders that soon emerged came from the second group. They tended to come from the North and possessed more wealth and education than the average freedman.

The three factions of the Republican Party—carpetbaggers, scalawags, and freedmen—formed an uneasy alliance as they came together to reestablish Southern state governments. Nonetheless, their combined votes in the fall 1867 elections for delegates to state constitutional conventions led to a sweeping Republican victory. White Republicans won most of the seats, but 265 were won by freedmen. In South Carolina and Louisiana, freedmen constituted a majority of the delegates elected. The number was far below the proportion of African Americans in the South, but it was a striking accomplishment considering that only recently they had been considered property and incapable of citizenship.



14.11 Casting Their First Votes
For supporters of racial equality like the Northern publication *Harper's Weekly,* whose cover featured this drawing, the large turnout of black voters in the fall of 1867 elections was exhilarating.

Creating Reconstruction Governments in the South

In ex-Confederate states delegates drafted new state constitutions according to the guidelines established by the Reconstruction Acts. In a few states, notably Virginia and Texas, conservatives managed to delay the process for more than a year. Nonetheless, by the end of 1868 seven Southern states had ratified new state constitutions, created new state governments, and gained readmission to the Union.

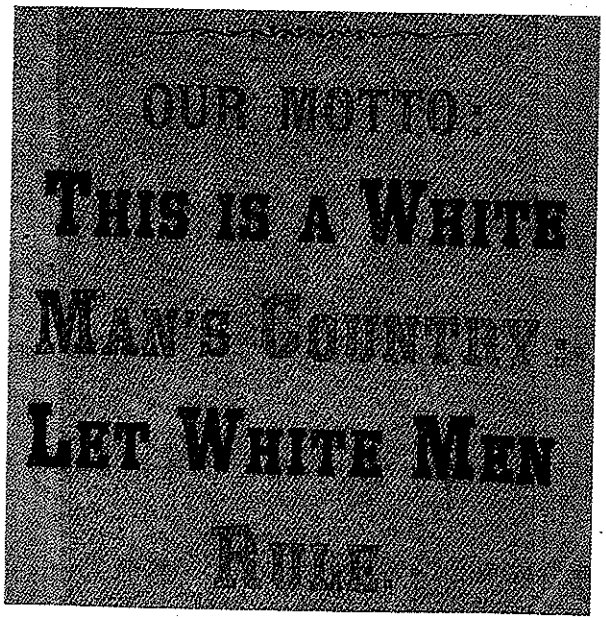
In the coming years these Republican governments achieved remarkable results. To begin with they represented a revolutionary advance in the status of the freedmen. Held as slaves and denied citizenship only a few years before, African Americans now enjoyed the right to vote and to hold office. Between 1869 and 1901 twenty-two African Americans would serve in the U.S. Congress (twenty representatives and two senators). More than six hundred won seats in state legislatures and to other state and local offices.

What impact did African American voting have on the political situation in the South in 1867–1868?

While embittered white Southerners decried what they termed "Negro rule," statistics plainly show that white Republicans held a far greater share of offices than blacks. No African American was elected as governor, and no state legislature ever had a majority of black members (the lower house of the South Carolina legislature briefly had a black majority). What white Southerners really objected to was Republican rule and what it stood for: African American equality and empowerment.

Republican-controlled Southern state governments also achieved several significant reforms. In contrast to the tightfisted governments of the antebellum era, They funded public works projects, established hospitals and orphanages, and built thousands of schools (or took over those created by the Freedmen's Bureau). They also established more equitable tax codes and passed laws to help indebted farmers keep their land. Opponents of Republican rule denounced these initiatives (and the higher taxes needed to fund them) as wasteful and poorly managed. Fundamentally, they objected to their social and racial implications, since many of the projects were designed to aid the poor and freedmen.

But the charges of corruption, mismanagement, and debt lodged by the opponents of Reconstruction governments were not entirely groundless. The rapid expansion of government services and expenditures caused many states to run up huge budget deficits and created opportunities for graft and bribery. Many Reconstruction legislators took advantage.



14.12 Campaign of Fear Campaigning against General Ulysses Grant, Democratic presidential candidate Horatio Seymour attempted to exploit Northern racism and anxiety about racial equality with banners such as this one.

Democratic opponents railed against these abuses as alleged evidence that blacks were incapable of holding public office and that their Northern carpetbagger allies were interested only in plunder. In reality the corruption found in Southern state governments paled in comparison to that found in the North. New York's Tammany Hall political machine, for example, under William "Boss" Tweed, stole anywhere between $20 million and $200 million from 1869 to 1871. Moreover, the amount of spending by Southern state governments on social programs looked large only in comparison to the paltry expenditures on education, health care, and public works before the war. Nonetheless, charges of corruption and excess spending, coupled with increased taxes, diminished popular support for the Southern Republican governments and created unfavorable public opinion in the North.

"We cannot vote without all sorts of threats and intimidations. Freedmen are shot with impunity."

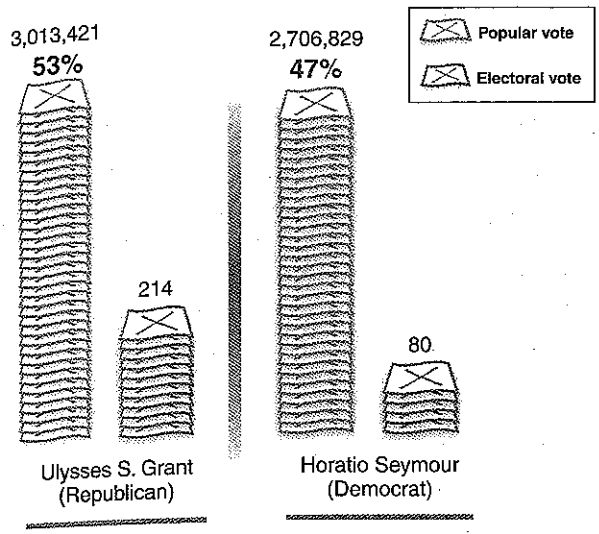
Report of a Republican official, 1868

The Election of 1868

By the summer of 1868, there was little doubt whom the Republican Party would nominate for president. General Ulysses S. Grant enjoyed widespread popularity across the North and among Southern Republicans for defeating Robert E. Lee and ending the Civil War. Grant conveyed a tone of moderation in a time of partisan and sectional acrimony. His plea, "let us have peace," from his acceptance of the Republican nomination, became his campaign slogan.

Democrats, still weak in the aftermath of the war and the disenfranchisement of many ex-Confederates, faced an uphill battle against the popular General Grant. As their racist campaign banner makes clear (**14.12**), their nominee, Governor Horatio Seymour of New York, ran an aggressive campaign designed to arouse fears that the Republican Party and black suffrage threatened

Why did Southerners charge that Reconstruction governments were corrupt?



14.13 The Election of 1868
Votes from nearly 500,000 recently enfranchised African Americans proved crucial to Grant's victory in the election. (Several ex-Confederate states not yet reconstructed did not participate.)

the rights of white Americans. Republicans, the campaign claimed, must be defeated to prevent them from spreading the disastrous experiment in black political empowerment into the North.

Projecting an image of moderation, suggesting an even-handed approach to Reconstruction and fiscal responsibility, Grant won the election, garnering 214 electoral votes to Seymour's 80. The popular vote, however, was much closer: 53 percent for Grant, 47 percent for Seymour (**14.13**). This outcome reflected three things. First, it indicated the wide appeal of Seymour's blatantly racist message to conservative whites in both the North and the South. Second, it showed how vital the freedmen vote was to the future of the Republican Party. Grant received 500,000 African American votes, but won by only 300,000 votes. Third, the election outcome revealed the effectiveness of violence as a weapon in electoral politics. The reign of terror unleashed by groups of violent whites in the months before the election, especially in Georgia and Louisiana, kept thousands of black voters away from the polls.

The Fifteenth Amendment

In the wake of the 1868 election, congressional Republicans decided that black suffrage required an explicit constitutional guarantee. Black male suffrage was implied in the Fourteenth Amendment's phrase, "all male citizens," but with Southern resistance on the rise, many Republicans in Congress argued that an additional amendment was necessary to guarantee unequivocally the right of African Americans to vote.

Numerous women's rights activists agreed, but many also argued that the time had come to establish universal suffrage—the vote for all adult citizens regardless of race or gender. Bitterly disappointed over the reference to only "male citizens" in the Fourteenth Amendment, many feminists, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, demanded that any subsequent amendment guarantee universal suffrage.

Their demand was met by strong opposition from former abolitionists and Radical Republicans, including some fellow feminists like Lucy Stone and Frances Harper, who argued that gaining the right to vote for African American men was a higher priority. Extending the vote to women, they argued, would lead to the amendment's rejection because the nation was not ready for such radical change. The cause of women's suffrage could be taken up immediately after black suffrage was secured. Stanton and Anthony rejected this reasoning. Most Republicans in Congress, however, agreed with Frederick Douglass's assertion that this was the "Negro's Hour" and consequently they drafted the **Fifteenth Amendment** to read succinctly: "The right of citizens of the United States shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

Passed by Congress in late 1869 and ratified in 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment presented a striking contradiction. It established a revolutionary experiment in multiracial democracy, something no other slave society, such as those in the Caribbean or Latin America, did so soon and so completely after emancipation. Yet its spare wording left wide open the possibility that states could devise clever ways to deny blacks the right to vote that did not directly invoke "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

The Rise of White Resistance

The secret white terrorist organizations that first arose in 1866 and that wrought havoc in parts of the South during the 1868 election grew still bolder and more violent by 1870–1871, especially during

Why did some women's rights activists oppose ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment?

election season. Known by various names, including the White Brotherhood, Knights of the White Camelia, and especially the **Ku Klux Klan**, they functioned in much the same manner. As illustrated in a popular Northern newspaper (**14.14**), Klansmen often operated at night, wearing hoods, robes, and other regalia designed to both hide their identities and overawe the freedmen. Blacks (and occasionally carpetbaggers and scalawags) targeted for "punishment" were beaten and frequently killed. Some had their crops or homes burned or their mules killed. Klansmen also targeted symbols of black self-improvement and independence, such as black churches, businesses, and schools.

Klan terrorism served a number of purposes. For the poor whites who made up the bulk of Klansmen, the violent suppression of African Americans provided them with the psychological reassurance that they were not at the bottom of the social order. For white elites who approved of and often assisted the violence, it prevented a political alliance between poor whites and blacks and maintained a large, exploitable workforce for Southern plantations and industry by keeping African Americans powerless and poor. Klan violence also discouraged African American voting and thus threatened the Republican Party in the South.

In response to surging violence in the South, Republicans in Congress, with strong support from the Grant administration, passed several Enforcement Acts in 1870 outlawing "armed combinations" that deprived anyone of their civil or political rights. Grant's attorney general, Amos T. Ackerman, vigorously enforced these laws across the South, arresting and prosecuting thousands and leaving the Klan and similar organizations decimated by 1872. While it demonstrated that federal authority could effectively protect the rights of freedmen, it also revealed the vulnerability of freedmen should the federal commitment to Reconstruction ever wane.

14.14 *Another Victim of the Klan* Terrorist violence by white vigilante groups soared in the early 1870s. In this scene from Moore County, North Carolina, a freedman pleads for his life, surrounded by Klansmen in full regalia.

What was the purpose behind anti-black violence waged by groups like the Klan?

Reconstruction Abandoned

By the end of Grant's first term in office, supporters of Reconstruction and freedmen's rights could look with some satisfaction at the many extraordinary changes that had taken place in the South. Yet ominous signs soon appeared that suggested Reconstruction was in trouble. Despite the crackdown on the Klan, white Southerners increasingly demonstrated their commitment to seizing power and imposing a new form of servitude on African Americans. Northerners, by contrast, seemed less and less willing to support a vigorous Reconstruction policy. Slowly, between 1872 and 1877, the extraordinary experiment in multiracial democracy and progressive government in the South was dismantled in favor of oligarchy and white supremacy.

Corruption and Scandal

A major factor in the pullback from Reconstruction was a series of corruption scandals that plagued the Grant administration. Grant himself was honest, but also politically naive and given to a hands-off style of leadership that gave officials in his administration an unusual degree of independence. Many of them took advantage of Grant's implicit trust to enrich themselves in a variety of illegal schemes.

For example, in 1869 Jay Gould and Jim Fisk, two Wall Street titans, conspired with Grant's brother-in-law in a scheme to corner the gold market. The plan eventually collapsed on September 24, 1869, a day dubbed "Black Friday, but not before hundreds of innocent investors were ruined and countless workers thrown out of work in the ensuing national economic turmoil. Fisk and Gould were pilloried in the press, but emerged unscathed. When the Credit Mobilier scandal became public, it was revealed that Grant's vice president and several high-ranking members of Congress had taken large bribes from the company involved in the completion of the government-subsidized Union Pacific Railroad. Other scandals found that three of Grant's cabinet members used their office for illegal financial gain. In the so-called "Whiskey Ring" scandal, for example, Treasury secretary Orville E. Babcock made a small fortune by illegally allowing whiskey distillers to avoid paying excise taxes. Secretary of War William W. Belknap likewise accepted bribes from companies engaged in corrupt activities on Indian reservations.

The North Retreats

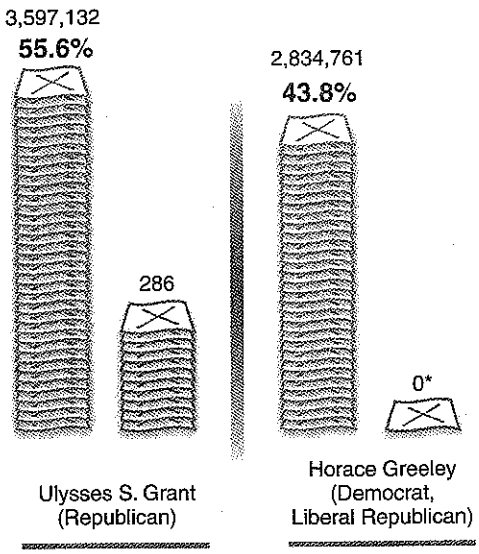
Corruption scandals undermined the authority of Grant's administration. Grant soon found that to secure reelection and keep the Republican Party in power he would have to minimize political controversies. With so much negative publicity stirred up by corruption scandals, Grant's administration took steps to minimize political controversies. To secure his reelection and keep the Republican Party in power, Grant adopted a more conservative approach to Reconstruction, by now a frequent source of rancor in Washington.

In the summer of 1872, for example, Grant lobbied Congress for and then signed into law the Amnesty Act, granting a general pardon to all but a few hundred former Confederate leaders. Now eligible to vote and hold office, these planters, ex-army officers, and ex-Confederate officials wasted little time in reasserting their authority.

> "It seems to me that we are drifting, drifting back under the leadership of the slaveholders. Our former masters are fast taking the reins of government."
>
> GEORGE M. ARNOLD, African American Republican

The retreat from Reconstruction in the 1870s was also hastened by growing dissention within the Republican Party. Many Republicans, including former Radicals, began to question the wisdom of maintaining a strong federal role in the affairs of Southern states. Some Republicans now believed the fundamental goals of Reconstruction—citizenship, civil rights, and suffrage for the freedmen—had been accomplished. There was, they believed, a constitutional and moral limit to what the federal government could do on behalf of the freedmen. Now was the time, they argued, for the freedmen to elevate themselves economically, socially, and politically using their new rights.

What impact did the scandals of the Grant administration have on Reconstruction?



14.15 The Election of 1872 Opposed by a weak candidate, Democrat Horace Greeley, Ulysses Grant easily won reelection. Scandals and economic turmoil soon undermined his popularity and power.

Others, for less optimistic reasons, argued for an end to Reconstruction. Many Republicans, even some of the strongest advocates of abolition before the war and freedmen's rights in the first years that followed, had soured on Reconstruction. These Liberal Republicans, as they came to be called, were tired of the political strife produced by debates over freedmen's rights, concerned about the growing power of the federal government, and disgusted with the effort to impeach Johnson.

They also had grown disgusted by the corruption and mismanagement of Southern Reconstruction governments. They accepted the argument of Southerners that freedmen and their white allies were incapable of honest and effective government. No one embodied this dramatic change of heart more than Horace Greeley, the progressive editor of the *New York Tribune*. Once the outspoken champion of abolition and freedmen's rights, he was by the early 1870s an advocate of returning the South to white rule. Blacks, he wrote in 1870, were a "worthless race," unwilling to help themselves when given the option of accepting charity. Southern Reconstruction governments, as a consequence, were based on "ignorance and degradation." A similar transformation from a progressive to a reactionary view of Reconstruction was revealed in the political cartoons of Thomas Nast (see *Images as History: Political Cartoons Reflect the Shift in Public Opinion*).

The Election of 1872

The dissatisfaction of Liberal Republicans reached full bloom in the summer of 1872. Disturbed by the prospect of Grant being renominated for a second term, they broke from the Republican Party. Liberal Republicans held their own convention in Cincinnati and nominated Greeley as their candidate for president. A divided Democratic Party subsequently endorsed Greeley as well.

The election of 1872 proved disastrous for Greeley and his backers. The public viewed Greeley as an eccentric who during his long career in public life had supported many fringe causes such as vegetarianism, spiritualism, and utopianism. Even his appearance—small eyes set in a round face covered in a tangle of wispy chin whiskers—diminished him in the eyes of the public, especially in contrast to the handsome, noble bearing of Grant. Greeley's call for an end to Reconstruction and reconciliation between North and South also repelled many Northern voters who remained leery of Southerners and the Democratic Party.

In Grant's sweeping victory over Greeley in the November election (**14.15**), Republicans had good reason to cheer. The Democrats' and Liberal Republicans' call for ending Reconstruction and returning the South to white rule had been rejected. Moreover, the Grant administration's crackdown on the Klan had allowed African Americans unprecedented freedom to vote. Still, Northerners and Republicans in Congress were not prepared to support federal intervention in the South indefinitely. As new pressing issues emerged after 1872, support for Reconstruction rapidly eroded.

Hard Times

After a period of readjustment following the Civil War and conversion to peacetime production, the American economy boomed. Hundreds of thousands of new businesses were established. These included a growing number of massive factories that employed hundreds, in some cases thousands, of workers. Aiding this economic growth was the dramatic expansion of the railroad and telegraph systems and increased availability of capital through banks and stock sales.

The booming economy encouraged businesses to expand and investors to take bigger risks. When these trends reached a critical point in the fall of 1873, a panic on Wall Street ensued. Some of the nation's most prominent financial houses and banks went bankrupt. As credit became scarce businesses began to fail. Hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs. By early 1874 the nation's economy had plunged into a deep depression that lasted until 1877.

The **Panic of 1873** had a direct impact on Reconstruction. As hard times set in, and hundreds of thousands of workers lost their jobs, the fate of the freedmen became less of a concern to Northerners. Economic issues like currency reform and the tariff took precedence over civil rights and white vigilante violence against freedmen. The public, declared one Republican, is tired of hearing about Southern violence against the freedmen. "Hard times and heavy

Why did Liberal Republicans lose faith in Reconstruction by the early 1870s?

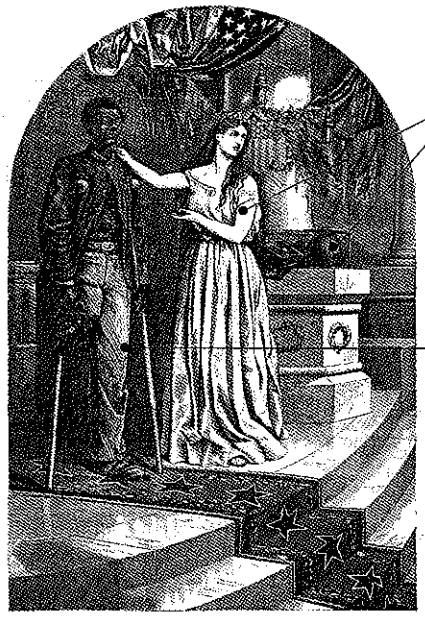
Images as History

POLITICAL CARTOONS REFLECT THE SHIFT IN PUBLIC OPINION

One of the nation's most skilled and popular political cartoonists in the Reconstruction era was Thomas Nast. An immigrant from Germany, he landed a job in 1861 at *Harper's Weekly,* the nation's leading journal of politics and society. Nast's artistic talent, combined with *Harper's* vast circulation, soon turned him into one of the most influential illustrators of his day. As a staunch Republican and Unionist, his drawings during the Civil War were as intensely patriotic and pro-Lincoln as they were anti-Confederate.

After the war, Nast's widely distributed cartoons continued to shape Northern opinion concerning Reconstruction and the issue of freedmen's rights. Cartoons like *And Not This Man?* (August 5, 1865) proclaimed the dignity and humanity of the freedmen and their moral right to full citizenship and suffrage. In others, like *This is a White Man's Government* (September 5, 1868), he stressed the violent intent of white Southerners to reclaim power and the absolute necessity of federal authority in carrying out the goals of Reconstruction.

Nevertheless, Nast's cartoons eventually reflected the growing disillusionment of Northern Republicans regarding Reconstruction. While he rejected the Liberal Republican call for ending Reconstruction, Nast nonetheless expressed the fear that African Americans were incapable of responsible government. Note the contrast between his earlier depictions of freedmen and that in *Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State.*



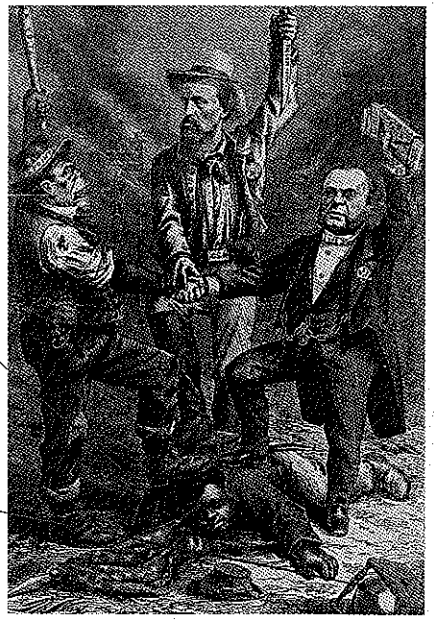
"Columbia," an early symbol of America and democracy, advocates black suffrage. The globe is actually a nineteenth-century ballot box.

By showing African Americans in Union army uniforms, Nast sought to remind Americans that blacks had earned the right to full citizenship through their service and sacrifice (note the missing leg) in the war.

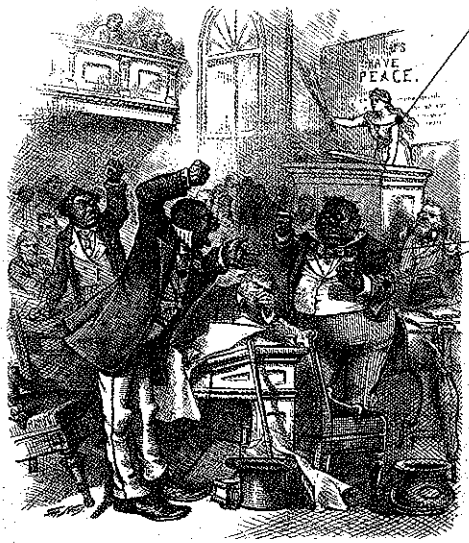
And Not This Man?

A freedman wearing a Union army uniform is crushed beneath an Irish immigrant (left), a white supremacist ex-Confederate (center), and a Northern capitalist (right). Nast saw these three groups as members of an opportunistic alliance.

A ballot box, representing the freedman's claim on citizenship and voting rights, has been kicked aside.



This is a White Man's Government



Reflecting Nast's disillusionment, "Columbia" chastises African American political leaders.

In 1874, frustrated with what he saw as inept and selfish African American political leadership in the South, Nash changed his depiction of blacks from noble individuals worthy of citizenship to racist caricatures.

Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State

What makes political cartoons so popular and effective?

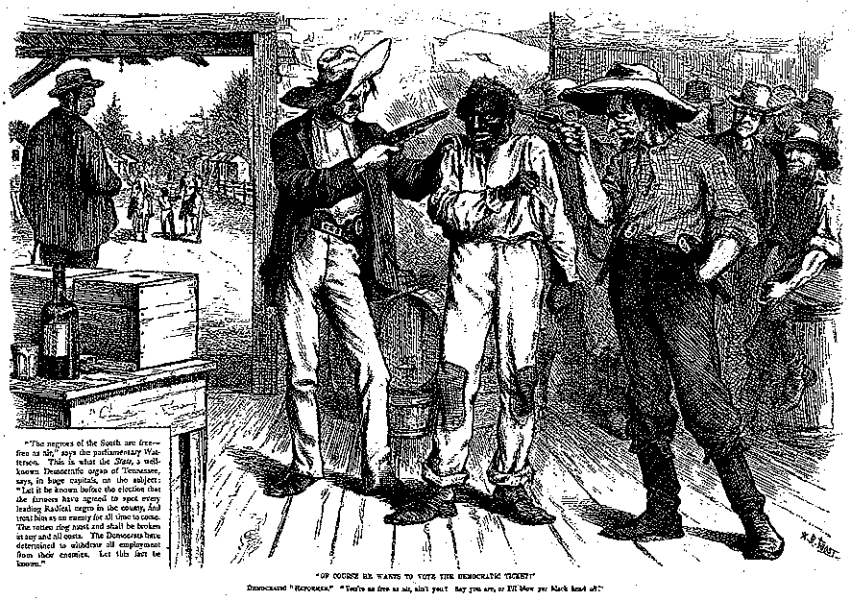
taxes make them wish the 'everlasting nigger' were in hell or Africa." The public expressed its discontent in the congressional elections of 1874 by voting in a Democratic majority for the first time since the war.

The Return of Terrorism

Reconstruction was also undone by a resumption of violence waged by white terrorist groups like the Klan. As the Grant administration bowed to political pressure to reduce federal intervention in Southern affairs, advocates of white supremacy seized the opportunity. In one notorious incident in 1873 a large band of heavily armed whites overran Colfax, Mississippi and slaughtered over one hundred African Americans.

As was the case in the late 1860s, white vigilante violence had two goals: to strip away the freedmen's hard-won economic, social, and legal rights and to prevent them from voting and holding office. This effort reached full development in Mississippi in 1875 when armed groups of whites closely allied with the Democratic Party waged a campaign of terror that came to be known as the **Mississippi Plan.** Through threats, beatings, and killings, they delivered an unambiguous message: blacks and their white allies who dared vote Republican risked their lives. But when Mississippi governor Adelbert Ames asked the Grant administration to send troops to keep the peace and protect the polls, his request was rejected.

Not surprisingly, more than sixty thousand Mississippi voters—nearly all black and Republican—stayed away from the polls on election day. Democrats swept to victory and took control of the state legislature for the first time since the Civil War.



14.16 The Mississippi Plan in Action
In many parts of the South, violence kept most freedmen away from the polls. Here a freedman is threatened with death unless he votes for the Democratic Party.

Immediately they threatened Governor Ames with impeachment and forced him to resign.The success of the Mississippi Plan in intimidating black voters and demolishing the base of the Republican Party is indicated in this 1876 image, *Of Course He Wants to Vote the Democratic Ticket* (**14.16**). The artist vividly depicted the ruthless character of the white supremacy movement and the vulnerability of freedmen left without federal protection.

Other Southern states soon employed their own version of the Mississippi Plan. One by one the remaining Reconstruction governments fell to a new class of political leaders known as **Redeemers.** As the name suggests they cast themselves in almost biblical terms as saviors of Southern society. By 1876 only South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida remained under Republican control—largely because of the presence of federal troops. The removal of these troops in 1877 opened the way for a complete "redemption" of the former Confederacy and the restoration of white supremacy.

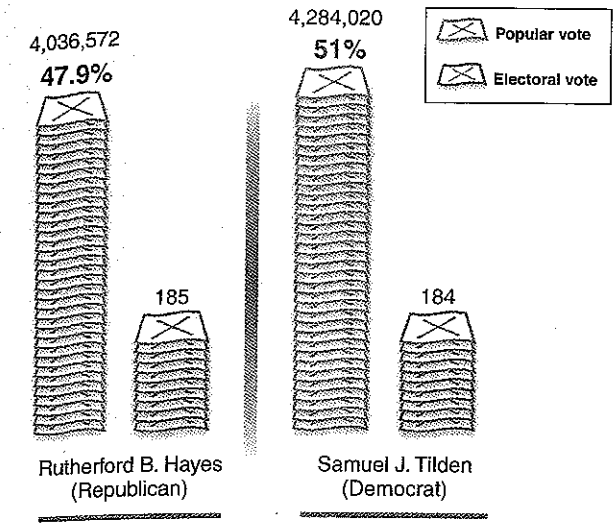
Defenders of Reconstruction and the rights of freedmen in Congress were appalled at the rising tide of Redeemer oppression. In response they managed one final measure designed to bolster the rights of freedmen, the **Civil Rights Act of 1875.** Among its several points it required that state governments provide equal access in public facilities such as schools and allow African Americans to serve on juries. The act became law in 1875, but was largely ignored. In 1883 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional.

The End of Reconstruction

The final blow to Reconstruction occurred as the result of the presidential election of 1876.With the Democratic Party reinvigorated by gaining a majority in the House in 1874 and control of most Southern state governments by 1876, a close election was expected. The Democrats nominated Samuel J. Tilden, governor of New York and a well-known reformer. Republicans nominated Ohio governor and Civil War veteran Rutherford B. Hayes. The issues centered on political corruption, the failed economy, and of course, Reconstruction.

On election day, Tilden received nearly a quarter million more popular votes than Hayes (**14.17**). But the electoral vote—the tally that actually determines the victor—was unclear. Voting irregularities in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida left both sides claiming victory—and the twenty electoral votes at stake. Tilden needed to be declared the winner in only one of the three disputed states to win a majority of

What was the political impact of the resurgence of white vigilante violence?



14.17 The Election of 1876
In one of the most controversial presidential elections in U.S. history, Samuel B. Tilden won the popular vote (4,284,020 to 4,036,572), but lost the electoral vote to Rutherford B. Hayes, 185 to 184.

electoral votes and thus the presidency. Hayes needed to win all three states to put him one electoral vote ahead of Tilden and into the White House.

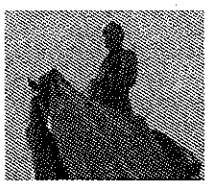
Both sides refused to budge, and a constitutional crisis loomed. Eventually they agreed to abide by the decision of a bipartisan commission. The commission authorized an investigation and heard testimony. Behind the scenes members of Congress and leaders from both parties conducted intense negotiations. On March 2, 1877, the commission issued its decision, known as the **Compromise of 1877**. By a vote of 8 to 7, the fifteen-member commission awarded all 20 disputed electoral votes to Hayes, giving him a 185 to 184 electoral vote victory over Tilden.

Democrats cried foul and denounced the "stolen election." Yet the election result proved beneficial to the party. Hayes's presidency was weakened by the aura of illegitimacy (detractors referred to him as "his fraudulency"). More important, he oversaw the dismantling of the last remnants of Reconstruction policy. By the end of 1877, the last federal troops were removed from the South, and as the map (**14.18**) indicates, the last Reconstruction governments fell to Democratic redeemers.

14.18 The Readmission of Southern States and Return of White Rule
Most former Confederate states were readmitted to the Union under the direction of Republican-controlled state governments. But as the dates in parentheses indicate, in most cases, conservative white Democratic governments soon seized control.

Why is the eventual result of the election of 1877 considered the end of Reconstruction?

The New South



The optimism with which white Southerners greeted the end of Reconstruction gave rise to the term **New South.** It reflected the South's development of a new system of race relations based on segregation and white supremacy. Even more so, the New South pointed to a profound economic transformation that swept across the region, bringing with it a boom in manufacturing, railroad construction, and urbanization.

Redeemer Rule

The Redeemer governments that took control of Southern states by 1877 represented the arrival of a new ruling oligarchy. Before the war a small and powerful class of planters dominated Southern politics. Now in the aftermath of Reconstruction, a new elite took control. Although some were planters and former planters, most were men who drew their wealth and power from a new Southern economy based on industry, finance, commerce, and railroad construction.

As men of business their politics reflected the dominant economic theory of the era, laissez-faire (from the French "let do," meaning let things alone). It argued that the best form of government was small, frugal, and pro-business. Accordingly, Redeemer governments slashed taxes and spending on social programs and public education created during Reconstruction.

> "What I want here is Negroes who can make cotton and they don't need education to help them make cotton."
>
> A Southern planter

Redeemer politics also championed a return to white supremacy. The return of one-party (Democratic) rule in many Southern states resulted in a steady decline in office holding by African Americans and Republicans. Intimidation and violence likewise led to a marked decrease in black voting across the South. Despite these setbacks, however, African Americans in many Southern states managed to vote and hold office in appreciable numbers into the 1880s and 1890s.

Redeemers dominated state politics, but their rule did not go unchallenged. In several Southern states anger among poor farmers coalesced into full-fledged political challenges to oligarchic rule. The insurgents denounced the new elite as "Bourbons" (the name of the French royal family), a derogatory term that implied aristocratic ambitions. In Virginia, for example, a coalition of Republicans and disaffected Democrats called Readjusters turned out the Redeemer government in 1879. All of these challenges to Redeemer rule, however, ultimately failed.

The Lost Cause

Southerners after 1877 embraced not only Redeemer rule, but also an image of the prewar South as an ideal society and the Confederate bid for independence a valiant Lost Cause. Southerners clung to this image because it provided them with a psychologically soothing explanation for why they lost the war. According to the Lost Cause idea, as expressed in poems, plays, songs, speeches, sermons, and books, Confederate society was more virtuous than the North and its soldiers more brave, but the South lost because the Yankees possessed overwhelming advantages in population, industry, arms, and ruthlessness. Defeat, while bitter and painful, was also a glorious martyrdom for a people and a way of life.

The Lost Cause carried with it an obligation to keep alive the memory of Confederate glory. Southerners built elegant battlefield cemeteries to inter the war dead and monuments to celebrate Confederate victories. White Southern women, many widowed by the war, played a major role in these efforts, founding organizations such as the Ladies Memorial Association (1867) and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (1894). Southerners also erected thousands of statues honoring Southern legends like Generals Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Nathan Bedford Forrest. The photograph (**14.19**) vividly demonstrates how enthusiasm for the Lost Cause only grew the further the Civil War receded into history. Lee had discouraged efforts to

Who made up the political leadership of the New South?

raise monuments to the Confederate cause, but soon after he died in 1870 they sprang up all across the South, including this monumental rendering unveiled in Richmond in 1890. Thousands turned out for the dedication of the heroic statue by French sculptor Antonin Mercie and to hear Colonel Archer Anderson laud Lee for his "courage, will, energy . . . fortitude, hopefulness, joy in battle . . . [and] unconquerable soul." Nothing that day, certainly not the speeches or Lee's triumphant pose, recalled the fact that Lee had lost the war.

But the Lost Cause legend served a second purpose beyond helping Southerners cope with their defeat in the war. It celebrated a nostalgic vision of the prewar South that supported their arguments for a resumption of white rule and African American subservience. Through literature, art, and music, Southerners (and some Northerners) fashioned romantic depictions of the "Old South" as a harmonious paradise where benevolent masters treated loyal, contented slaves with kindness, where chivalrous Southern gentlemen protected delicate, charming Southern women, and where everyone revered tradition, family, and the Bible. Yet even as they glorified slavery, the proponents of the Lost Cause downplayed the importance of slavery as a cause of secession. The real issue, they insisted, was "states' rights" and attempts by Northerners to run roughshod over them in the 1850s.

The Lost Cause thus presented Southerners as victims of misguided and unjustified Yankee aggression who, in the wake of devastating war and humiliating Reconstruction, ought to be left alone to run their own affairs. The overt racism and self-serving depictions of slavery in Lost Cause rhetoric and imagery served to justify a resumption of white rule and the return of African Americans to the status of powerless, exploitable laborers.

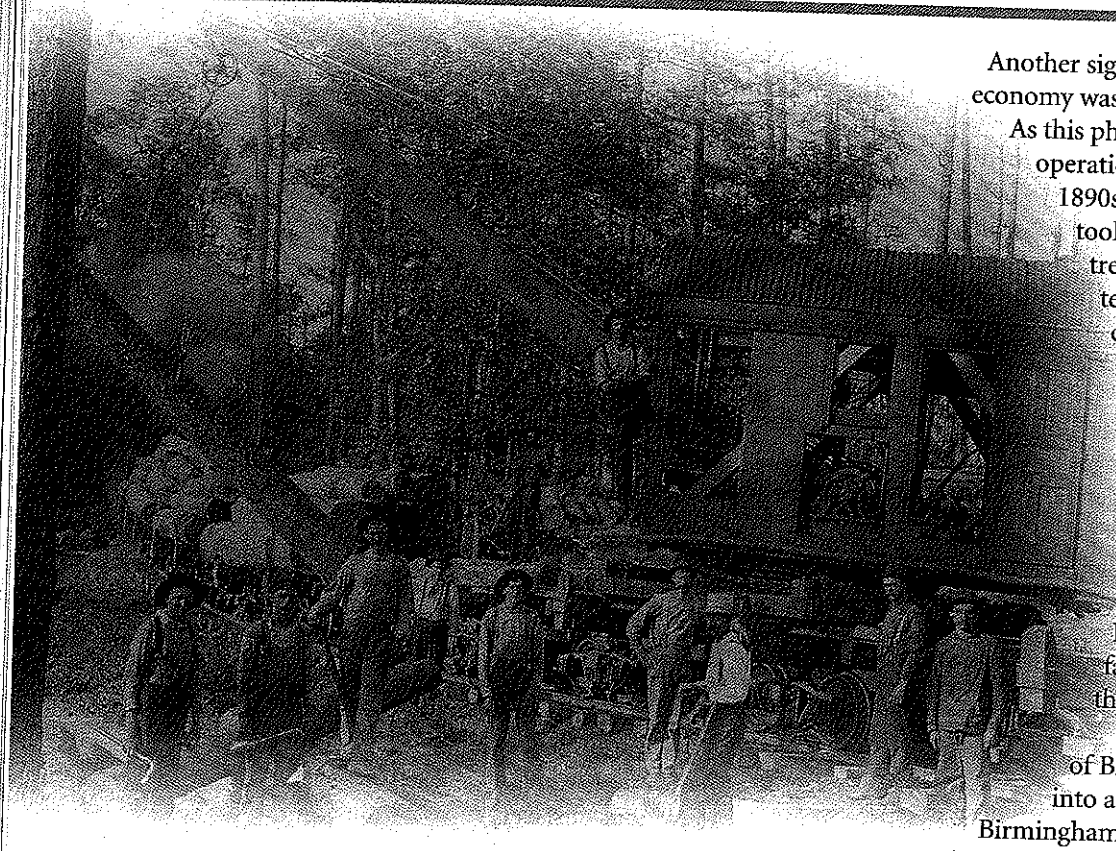
14.19 Celebrating the Lost Cause As the commemorative ribbon indicates, this monument to Robert E. Lee was erected in the former Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia in 1890. It was one of thousands of monuments to the Confederacy erected across the South. [*Source*: (ribbon) Lee Monument Unveiling Ribbon Accession #TBMR 277-1 (2). The Museum of the Confederacy]

The New South Economy

Even as Southerners revered the Lost Cause and Old South, their new leadership steered the region's economy into an industrial future. In the 1870s and 1880s, they joined with Northern entrepreneurs who settled in the South during Reconstruction to develop a modern, market-oriented, and diversified economy. This effort entailed not simply the establishment of banks, textile mills, and railroads, but also the celebration and spreading of capitalist values, such as hard work, risk taking, thrift, and the profit motive.

The leading figure in this movement to establish a New South economy was Henry Grady, editor

How was the Lost Cause a useful myth for Southerners?



14.20 Logging Near Laurel, Mississippi
Logging became a major industry in the New South, but like mining and cotton cultivation, it was a low-skill industry that produced a raw material rather than a finished product.

Another significant aspect of the New South economy was the lumber and furniture industry. As this photograph (**14.20**) of a logging operation near Laurel, Mississippi, in the 1890s indicates, New South entrepreneurs took advantage of the region's tremendous forest reserves and new technologies, such as rotary saws and dry kilns, and an expanded railroad system (shown here), and soon made the South the leading producer of lumber. In Mississippi alone the number of lumber mills jumped from 295 in 1880 to 608 in 1899. The furniture industry likewise boomed in the New South, especially in places like High Point, North Carolina, where a single factory opened in 1889, followed by thirty more over the next decade.

The lower South, especially the city of Birmingham, Alabama, developed into a major iron and steel producer. Birmingham had only a few hundred residents when founded in 1871, but its position at the junction of two major railroads and nearby deposits of coal, iron, and limestone soon attracted iron and steel factories and the nickname, "Pittsburgh of the South." By 1890 the South produced 20 percent of U.S. iron and steel.

of the *Atlanta Constitution*. Beginning in the mid-1870s, he wrote editorials and delivered speeches proclaiming industrialization as the solution to the South's devastated postwar economy. His message appealed to many Southerners, especially those who had never been part of the planter elite. It inspired them to start businesses, invest, and support pro-business policies. Grady also attracted the attention of many Northerners, convincing them to invest in New South enterprises.

> "The growth of the iron interests of the South during the last few years has been the marvel of the age, attracting the attention of the entire business world."
>
> New South booster,
> M. B. HILLYARD, 1887

The vast expansion of manufacturing represented the most stunning change in the New South. Drawn by low taxes, cheap labor, ample water power, proximity to cotton supplies, and the absence of unions, textile manufacturers moved their operations from New England to the South, especially the Carolinas. By 1900 the South surpassed New England in output to become the nation's leading producer of textiles. A similar transformation occurred in the tobacco industry, as the South went from merely producing raw tobacco to become the nation's leading producer of finished tobacco products like cigarettes.

As in the North the expansion of industry in the South relied upon the existence of a large pool of cheap labor. But unlike the North, where millions of immigrants and their children made up much of the workforce, the South relied on a rising population of poor white farming families pushed off the land by indebtedness, falling crop prices, and crop failure. In the rare instances where African Americans secured industrial employment, it was usually in the most menial, dangerous, and poorly paid jobs.

What weaknesses limited the success of the New South economy?

The low wages paid Southern workers reveals the limited success of the New South economy in overcoming the region's poverty and social problems. Despite decades of impressive growth in industry, mining, and railroads, the South in 1900 lagged far behind the North in virtually every category of economic and social progress. The majority of Southern industry, for example, was small-scale and focused on low-skill labor. Per capita incomes in the South remained stagnant from 1880 to 1900.

Other indications of backwardness and underdevelopment abounded. The cuts in funding for public education imposed by Redeemer governments reduced per pupil spending to half the average in the North. Rates for illiteracy and infant mortality far exceeded the national average.

14.21 Poverty and Independence
Sharecropping condemned most African Americans to a life of poverty, but it also helped to free them of immediate white control. No longer confined to slave cabins, they also worked on their own, free of white oversight and coercion.

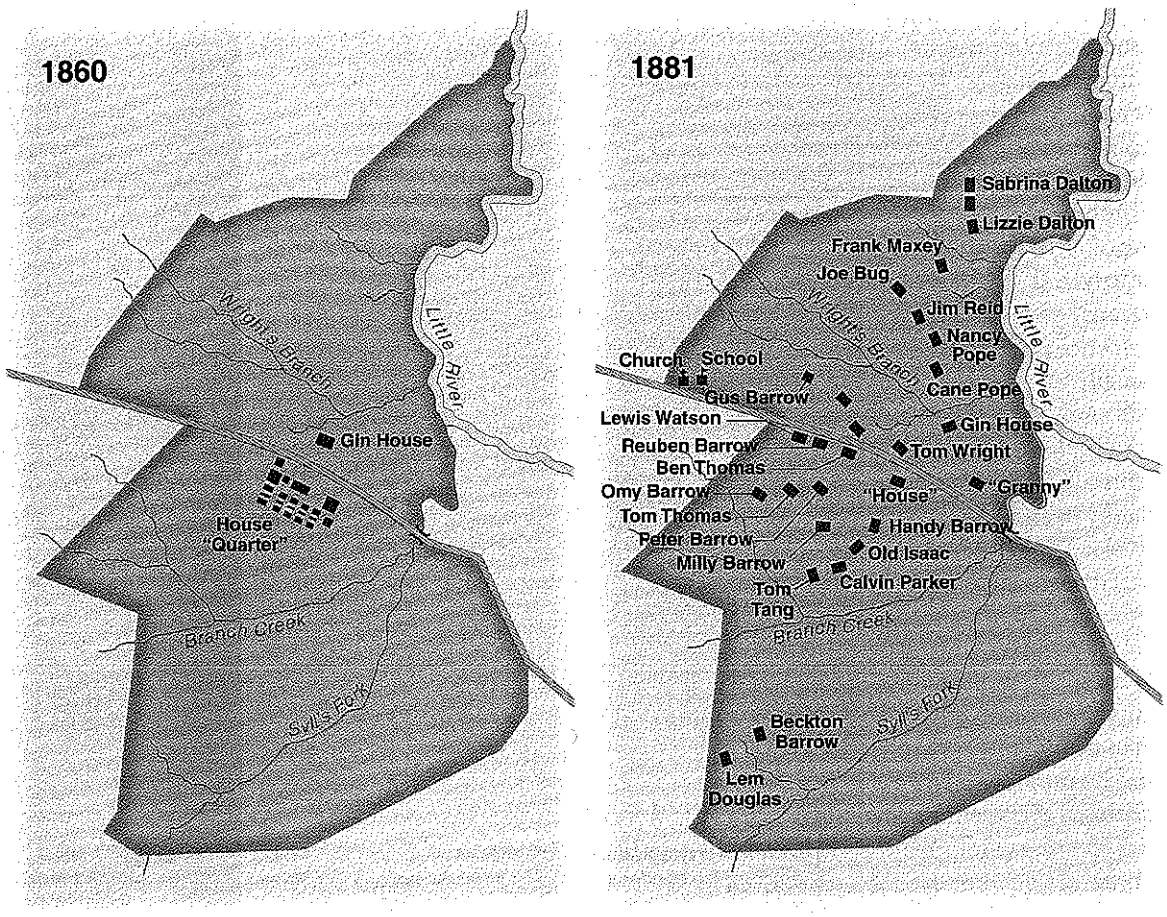
The Rise of Sharecropping

Most revealing about the limitations of the New South economy was the preponderance, even by 1900, of Southern laborers still in agriculture. Only 6 percent of the Southern workforce in 1900 was employed in manufacturing. The region's economy remained fundamentally tied to the production of cash crops, particularly tobacco, sugar, rice, and of course, cotton.

The condition of Southern farmers, both white and black, deteriorated sharply in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. While cotton production soared the price plummeted, from eighteen cents per pound in the early 1870s to five cents per pound in 1894. Shrinking profits forced many Southern farmers to forfeit title to their land and became tenant farmers. Some rented land for a set fee and then were free to grow whatever crops they desired. But most tenant farmers resorted to the sharecropping system, whereby they received the right to farm a plot of land in exchange for rent paid in the form of a share (generally one-third to one-half) of the harvest. By 1900 more than 70 percent of the South's farmers (white and black) earned their living in this manner.

Sharecropping granted African Americans some important measure of independence. White landlords generally left their tenants alone, allowing them to control their own time and to set their own work routines. The people shown in this photograph (**14.21**) are poor and live in a ramshackle house, but like most sharecroppers they work as families free of direct white supervision. Given their slavery experience of gang labor under the brutal control of overseers, freedmen cherished this independence. And yet, as a closer look at this image shows, there is a well-dressed white man in the background—probably the landlord who arranged for the photograph to be taken. Sharecroppers were not slaves, but as this photograph makes clear, they lived under the control of their white landlords.

How did sharecropping provide a limited measure of independence to freedmen?



14.22 Moving from Slavery to Freedom: The Barrow Plantation, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1860 and 1881
Under slavery the Barrows confined their slaves' housing to a narrow section of the plantation. Sixteen years after emancipation, African Americans on the plantation, living beyond the immediate oversight of the Barrows, established a church and school.

The transformation from the tightly controlled plantation system to the relative independence of sharecropping can be seen in this map (**14.22**) of a Georgia plantation. The 1860 map shows the Barrow Family Plantation before the abolition of slavery. Notice the layout of the slave quarters—in tight rows clustered within sight and earshot of the master. Seeking maximum control over their enslaved laborers, the Barrows kept them close at hand.

Twenty-one years later, many of the Barrow's former slaves and their descendents still lived on the plantation. But as the 1881 map indicates (see 14.22), the relationship between the Barrows and their workers had changed considerably, reflecting a sharp conflict in visions regarding the social order in the postwar South. Initially the Barrows had tried, like so many other former slave owners, to limit the freedom of their former slaves, hiring them as wage workers bound by annual labor contracts and trying to coerce them into accepting gang labor under an overseer. The freedmen, however, refused these demands and eventually negotiated to work as tenant farmers. By 1881 most ex-slaves lived in separate households scattered on the former plantation. They worked as sharecroppers on 25- to 30-acre farms, doing the work as families on their own terms rather than as gang laborers. At harvest they paid a portion of their annual crop as rent. The 1881 map also indicates the presence of two key institutions of African American freedom—a church and a school. Within the narrow limits allowed by hostile whites, freedmen enjoyed privileges they had been deprived of under slavery.

Nonetheless, tenancy exploited the freedmen. Landlords demanded they grow cash crops like tobacco, wheat, and especially cotton. Because they often needed to buy seed, tools, and animals on credit (usually on unfavorable terms) from their landlords or local suppliers, most tenants found themselves in a condition of ever-mounting debt which prevented them from moving to better land or to a landlord offering better terms. It also exposed freedmen to economic reprisals should they try to vote or stand up for their rights.

Jim Crow

While life in the New South for the great majority of African Americans meant poverty and exploitation as sharecroppers, some managed to achieve a remarkable degree of economic success. Despite racism, poverty, and an often hostile white business community they bought property and started small businesses. Some of these endeavors blossomed into large, prosperous enterprises. North Carolina Mutual and Provident Insurance Company, for example, was founded by two African American men in Durham in 1898. By 1907 the company boasted more than 100,000 policy holders. Other African Americans took

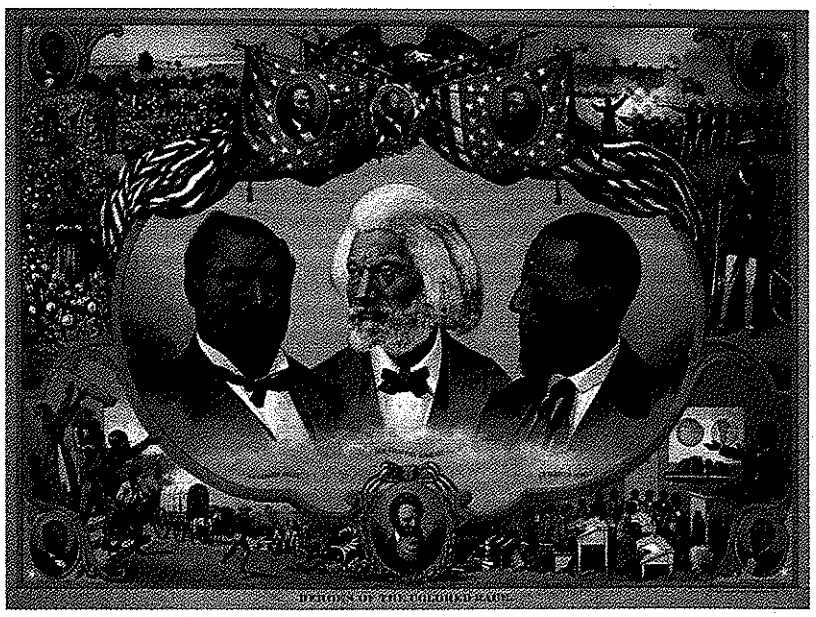
What role did the black middle class play in the Jim Crow South?

advantage of the many black schools and colleges established during Reconstruction to enter the professions as teachers, professors, lawyers, doctors, nurses, and ministers. Overwhelmingly, these members of a black middle class worked in segregated settings providing services to their fellow African Americans.

These educated and relatively affluent African Americans provided leadership and direction for their communities, building social networks of churches, fraternal societies, and self-help organizations. The directors of the aforementioned North Carolina Mutual and Provident Insurance Company, for example, used their financial resources to support schools and establish a hospital, bank, and library to serve the black community of Durham. As *Heroes of the Colored Race* (**14.23**) suggests, middle-class blacks also cultivated pride in the accomplishments of African Americans after emancipation. This lithograph was published in 1881 for commercial sale to African Americans. Note its emphasis on the role of African Americans in the Civil War and later as members of Congress, as well as the significance of education.

But in the late 1870s and early 1880s, Southern political leaders began to create a social and legal system of segregation that came to be called Jim Crow (named for a derogatory black character in a popular minstrel show). It reflected their awareness that as long as some African Americans possessed civil, economic, and political rights, especially the right to vote, the idea of white supremacy was called into question. Redeemer politicians also came to recognize the political benefits of stoking racial animosity. It maintained their privileged status as a ruling elite by deflecting the frustration and anger of poor Southern whites away from them and onto African Americans. The ultimate purpose of Jim Crow was to foment racial divisions by segregating African Americans from as many aspects of everyday life as possible. Initial efforts focused on barring African Americans from hotels, restaurants, and railroad cars. Blacks denounced these violations of their constitutional rights and challenged them in court.

But an extremely conservative Supreme Court issued several decisions that sharply restricted the authority of the Fourteenth Amendment and its guarantee of equal protection. In *Hall v. DeCuir* (1878), for example, the Court ruled that a Louisiana law prohibiting racial discrimination on steamboats was unconstitutional because the vessel was engaged in interstate commerce (running routes between Louisiana and Mississippi), a realm of business that only Congress possessed the power to regulate. Five years later, in the Civil Rights Cases, the Court declared the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional, asserting that the Fourteenth Amendment did not empower Congress to outlaw racial discrimination by private individuals and organizations. The ruling cleared the way for private individuals such as hotel owners and institutions such as men's clubs to bar African Americans, but left standing the right of Congress to prohibit discrimination by state government institutions. As explained in *Choices and Consequences: Sanctioning Separation* (page 434), this matter came before the Court in an 1896 case, ***Plessy v. Ferguson.***



14.23 ***Heroes of the Colored Race*** African Americans kept alive their hopes for a better future by cultivating an appreciation for their history.

Hand in hand with the spread of segregation came an effort to eradicate the remaining vestiges of black political power by circumventing the Fifteenth Amendment. Violence and intimidation in the 1870s had reduced black voting and office holding significantly, but not completely. In Mississippi, for example, black voter turnout averaged 39 percent in the 1880s. But a rising fear among Redeemer politicians over the voting power of both blacks and disgruntled poor whites led them to commence a program of disenfranchisement.

Given the sparse and direct language of the Fifteenth Amendment, the proponents of disenfranchisement needed to devise laws that deprived African Americans of the right to vote without making specific mention of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." In 1889 Tennessee became the first of many Southern states to enact a poll tax,

How did Southerners manage to undermine the Fifteenth Amendment?

Choices and Consequences

SANCTIONING SEPARATION

In 1890 Louisiana passed a law requiring separate cars for black and white passengers on all railroads in the state. Determined to challenge the law, an African American carpenter named Homer A. Plessy bought a first-class ticket on the East Louisiana Railroad and sat in the whites-only first-class car. As expected he was arrested. Plessy argued before a local judge named John H. Ferguson that the law violated the Thirteenth Amendment's prohibition of slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause. Ferguson ruled in favor of the railroad, stating that separation did not violate Plessy's rights, a decision subsequently upheld by the state's Supreme Court. When Plessy appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court, the justices considered three major options:

Choices

1. Refuse to hear the case and thus not render a judgment on the constitutionality of segregation, letting stand the Louisiana State Supreme Court decision.
2. Rule in favor of Plessy and declare Louisiana's segregation law unconstitutional.
3. Reject Plessy's appeal and uphold Louisiana's segregation law as constitutional.

Decision

On May 18, 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court by a vote of 7 to 1 chose the third option and rejected Plessy's claim that the law violated his constitutional rights. The Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, argued the majority, were never intended to establish full social equality of the races. Furthermore legal separation of the races, a doctrine subsequently known as "separate but equal," was constitutional so long as states provided equal facilities. The lone dissenting justice, John Marshall Harlan, blasted the majority opinion, declaring the law a racist violation of the nation's "color-blind" Constitution.

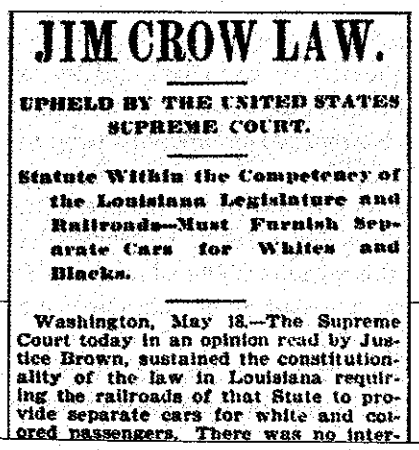
Consequences

In sharply limiting the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection provisions, the court allowed Southern state governments to establish separate schools, hospitals, parks, theaters, restaurants, and public transportation across the South. The decision also opened the way for segregation laws aimed at Mexicans in the Southwest and Asians in California. In practice "separate but equal" proved only half accurate as segregated facilities were indeed separate, but never equal in terms of funding, staffing, and supplies.

Continuing Controversies

How should African Americans respond to the imposition of Jim Crow laws?

Black leaders in the 1890s were divided over the best strategy to oppose segregation. Booker T. Washington, the nation's most prominent African American leader, argued that efforts to overturn segregation were doomed to failure due to black Americans' lack of political and economic power. Instead he recommended blacks focus their energy and resources on self-improvement, especially in education, a strategy that would one day empower them to challenge segregation. Founding member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), W. E. B. Dubois, rejected this policy and instead insisted that African Americans keep up a sustained legal and political effort to end segregation. Ultimately it was Dubois's vision and NAACP attorneys that ended legalized segregation. In the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision the Supreme Court overturned *Plessy* and rejected entirely the concept of "separate but equal."



JIM CROW LAW.

UPHELD BY THE UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT.

Statute Within the Competency of the Louisiana Legislature and Railroads—Must Furnish Separate Cars for Whites and Blacks.

Washington, May 18.—The Supreme Court today in an opinion read by Justice Brown, sustained the constitutionality of the law in Louisiana requiring the railroads of that State to provide separate cars for white and colored passengers. There was no inter-

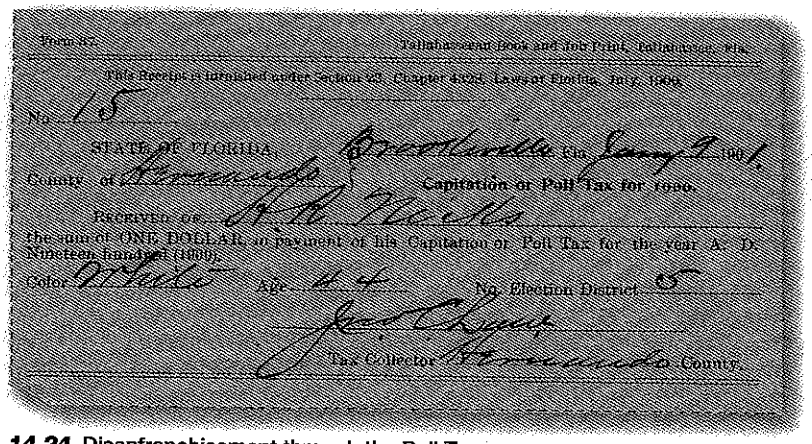
How did the U.S. Supreme Court play a role in the imposition of segregation?

an annual tax imposed on all adult citizens in the state. Those who failed to pay it could not vote. As the image (**14.24**) of a Florida poll tax receipt for 1900 shows, the tax of one dollar was low enough so that most white voters like Henry R. Nicks could pay it, but high enough to disenfranchise thousands of impoverished African Americans. Most states also required that all unpaid poll taxes from previous years be paid off before a citizen could vote, meaning that a black man who had fallen behind in his taxes for five years would need to pay five dollars before entering a polling place.

In 1890 Mississippi enacted a poll tax and an additional measure to facilitate disenfranchisement: the literacy test. It allowed state and local officials to bar from voting anyone who failed a literacy test. The test usually required a potential voter to read a complicated section of the state constitution and explain its meaning—a provision aimed at excluding African Americans given their low levels of education.

In the mid-1890s Southern states added a third disenfranchisement policy, the so-called grandfather clause. It guaranteed the vote to anyone, even if they could not pass a literacy test, if their grandfather had been eligible to vote before 1867. Since no African Americans could vote before 1867, it left them as the only ones subject to literacy tests.

Adding to the effectiveness of the segregation and disenfranchisement movements was a stepped-up campaign of violence against African Americans. Vigilante groups across the South composed largely of poor whites, but often aided by local law officers and prominent citizens, launched an unprecedented wave of beatings, humiliations, and murders intended to intimidate blacks and "put them in their place." Often an unsubstantiated accusation of rape or murder was enough to bring out a community's lynch mob, but many killings were prompted by minor incidents of alleged disrespect such as arguing with a white man. Lynchings in the 1890s soared to an average of 187 per year, or roughly one killing every two days.


Form 45 Tallahassee Book and Job Print, Tallahassee, Fla.

This Receipt is furnished under Section 97, Chapter 4324, Laws of Florida, Acts of 1901.

No. 185

STATE OF FLORIDA, County of Hernando } Brooksville Fla. Jany 5 1901

Received of H. R. Nicks Capitation or Poll Tax for 1900.

The sum of ONE DOLLAR, in payment of his Capitation or Poll Tax for the year A. D. Nineteen hundred (1900).

Color White Age 44 No. Election District 5

Tax Collector Hernando County.

14.24 Disenfranchisement through the Poll Tax
Because H. R. Nicks, a white man living in Hernando County, Florida, in 1900, was able to pay his poll tax of one dollar, he was eligible to vote. Mired in poverty, many African Americans could not afford the fee and lost their right to vote.

By the end of the 1890s, the cumulative effect of these disenfranchisement policies reduced overall black voting in the South by 62 percent. In some states black voting was effectively eliminated. In Louisiana, for example, the number of black voters dropped from 130,334 in 1896 to 1,342 in 1904—a reduction of 99 percent. Disenfranchisement also impacted thousands of poor whites, reducing the total white vote by 27 percent by 1900. White supremacy had triumphed.

Conclusion

Reconstruction was a period of extraordinary contrasts. For the nearly four million former slaves and their supporters, it began as an era full of promise. Despite opposition, often violent, from white Southerners, by 1870 the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were ratified, declaring African Americans as citizens entitled to full civil rights, including voting, and equal protection before the law. Hundreds of thousands of freedmen joined thousands of Southern whites attracted by the progressive ideology of the Republican Party to build a reconstructed society based on democracy and equal opportunity, and social and civil equality for all. By the late-1870s, however, white Southerners who rejected this vision regained control of their state governments and began to slowly dismantle Reconstruction and impose a new form of white supremacy. Simultaneously, they guided the South toward a dramatic economic transformation. But the boom in industry, railroad construction, and urban growth that characterized the "New South" benefited mainly a small elite, leaving the South mired in poverty, illiteracy, and inequality.

How did the poll tax and literacy test allow Southerners to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment?