

Sample research paper on the reconstruction of the south; post civil war

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



The tension between the North and antebellum South sparked during the boom of the cotton industry in the agricultural South. The demand for slave workers in Southern plantations was fueled by the 1793 invention of Eli Whitney which is called the cotton gin. This mechanized device removes the seeds from the raw cotton, allowing massive cotton production that requires greater labor force. Additionally, the Industrial Revolution in England gave birth to a new booming industry- the textile manufacturing that demanded massive supply of raw cotton. Thus, black slaves have composed a big percentage (almost one third) of the total population of the South.

With the boom of the cotton industry, African slaves became the foundation of the Southern economy and guarantee of a continuous and undemanding labor force.

While it is true that slavery is a catalyst of the disunion of the two regions, it is not the real cause that the North is trying to advance. Because behind their intention to stop slavery lies a much deeper goal- to keep their political power within the Union. It is important for both the South and the North to keep political balance through equal numbers of non-slave and slave states. This number is maintained by a legislative compromise called as the Missouri Compromise. This compromise have allowed Maine to be a new member of the Union as a non-slave state and approved Missouri as a slave state. However this approach did not work well in the Congress. The Northern majority on the lower house grew simultaneously with the growth of the region's population, industry and economy. Southern leaders view this advancement as a political threat. They predicted that the Northern representatives will outnumber theirs and they will be less powerful to

secure their political and economic interests- especially their industry that depends on slavery. The leaders of the North also holds the same perspective and presumed that the expansion of slavery in the newly admitted western territories would lessen their political influence. This opposition have urged seven Southern states to secede or withdraw from the Union and established the Confederacy (which was never recognised universally) On April 12, 1861 the South took their first violent move to ask for the independence of the Confederacy. They bombarded Union soldiers stationed at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. But the Northern military force outnumbered the Confederate soldiers leading to the North's victory. After the civil war, the Union prepared for the reconstruction of the South and used different means to reintegrate the region as part of the United States. Several changes were enacted in order to rebuild the South and rules were implemented that the South should follow to be able to re-enter the Union. Among these reconstruction measures are the 14th and 15th Amendment that gave rights and constitutional protection to the freed slaves and agrarian reform as a form of reparation. However, the South reacted to these changes with defiance and enacted state laws that are meant to restrict the freed slaves' newly acquired freedom.

On July 9 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified which " granted citizenship to all persons " born or naturalized in the United States," including former slaves, and provided all citizens with " equal protection under the laws," extending the provisions of the Bill of Rights to the states."

1 This was followed by the ratification of Fifteenth Amendment on February 3, 1870 which " prohibited states from disenfranchising voters " on account

of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” 2

In order to make amends with the former slaves, the Union thought of redistributing 400000 acres of abandoned land that was previously owned by the Confederates. The redistribution of Southern lands is also one way to break the South's economic power that springs from the institution of slavery. General William Tecumseh Sherman issued Special Order No. 15 to fulfill this promise and the order was immediately approved by President Lincoln. Sherman also ordered that the US army can lend mules to the newly freed slaves.

Many of the Southern states have denied the implementation of Amendment 14. As a result, the North was forced to send military forces to the South in order to initiate the laws and complete the Reconstruction. In 1871, the Congress enact the KKK Act or Ku Klux Klan which proclaims that the state officials are held liable for depriving the rights of the freed slaves and they will face charges in the federal court. The Congress also warned the Southern officials that they will be punished if found conspiring with the Ku Klux Klan- a terrorist group that promotes white supremacy. 3

Because of the new laws, it was very difficult for the Southerners to live their new lives after the Civil War. Their economic system was shattered as it fully depended on slave labor during the pre-war era. Labor shortage was their primary struggle that resulted to greater economic loss. President Lincoln in his speech after the war set the country's expectation that the road to South's Reconstruction would be a painful and exhausting journey. The South resented the North's reconstruction efforts but they had no choice but to keep and nurture their resentments until the assassination of Lincoln

gave them advantage. Southern representatives made use of their power to pass legislation that would work against the former slaves whom after the Civil War was allowed to taste a small bite of freedom. They passed local laws that would suppress this freedom. The legislation was called Jim Crow laws which proclaim the legalization of racial segregation in public facilities such as transportation, educational institutions, theaters, restaurants, libraries, waiting areas, hotels and even rest rooms. 4

Moreover, Sherman's Special Order No. 15 was overturned in 1865 by Andrew Johnson- a Southerner who succeeded Lincoln. Johnson ordered that the 400000 acres of land that extends from the coastline of South Carolina to Florida and Georgia returned to the original owners who have asked his forgiveness and begged for presidential pardon. Thus, the freed blacks had no choice but to either be sharecroppers in cotton plantations or work for meager wages.

As a response to the Fifteenth Amendment, southern states hindered the blacks from casting their votes by employing literacy tests and property requirements as qualifiers. Louisiana created the " grandfather clause," in 1898 that only allowed blacks to vote if their grandfathers are eligible voters in 1867. This was the most effective strategy to restrict the freedmen from voting; thus most of the southern states adopted it.

In an effort to fulfill the true definition of Reconstruction as inspired by Lincoln's aspirations, the Congress passed the Civil Rights Act in 1875. The 1875 Act ordered that discrimination in public facilities and services such as transportation, theaters, waiting areas and other services are illegal. The Civil Rights Act did not however include equal access to education and the

prohibitions of such Act were not effectively enforced. The Civil War and the Reconstruction of the New South have done little benefits to the former slaves. They remain as helpless victims of discrimination in employment, property and education and their struggle for equality seems to be a long and endless journey.

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