

The success of the elite white south

[Psychology](#), [Success](#)



During the 12 year period after the Civil War (1865-1877) four main groups of people, Southern Whites, Recently Freed Blacks, Northern Democrats, and Northern Republicans, were all competing to rebuild the war ravaged South to their advantage or ideals, but it was the Southern Whites whose needs were most closely met.

Because the freedmen were never given social equality, education, means of economic success, or full participation in government operations the plantation owners of the south were able to bring about conditions after the civil war which were not far from those of the prewar, with the whites controlling the laws and the money and the blacks performing all of the labor needed to fuel an agrarian economy. After the Civil War many Negroes thought they would soon be entitled to nearly full, if not complete, social equality because of congressional action such as the formation of the freedman's bureau and the passing of the civil rights act.

However, they soon learned that the Southern whites were not about to let this happen, and that blacks would be kept in the inferior position they had known for the hundreds of years that preceded the war. Soon after the war most Southern states wrote into the books new laws pertaining to Negroes called the "Black Codes." These laws, which were often identical to prewar laws save the word "slave" was replaced with the word "freedman", limited almost every conceivable right of the black man. They were denied the ability to congregate in groups, stay at certain motels or inns, and eat at many restaurants.

They were required to carry special passes and given a curfew. Because the white South was so opposed to black equality, any law passed to grant Negroes rights were either ignored, or were bypassed using certain loopholes. Congress could do almost nothing to stop these maltreatments from happening. In 1875 they did pass the Civil Rights Act, but poor enforcement and a Supreme Court ruling 8 years later led the bill practically useless to the blacks. All in all white resistance and government control led to almost no integration of blacks into white society.

Lack of good education for blacks was another important factor that prevented them from achieving any status higher than servant after the war. Although blacks schools were set up from primary to college, they were sparsely funded and almost completely segregated, leaving the blacks with either no education or a very poor one. Congress did make attempts at, and succeed in, creating state funded schools in the South, they allowed them to be segregated, which permitted the whites to control which race got what kind of education.

Their prejudices of course pointed them in the direction of inferior education for blacks. Black schools were almost always poorly funded and inadequately staffed. The teachers at these schools, usually Northern whites, were often given such a horrible social stigma that they were forced to leave the South, and teaching there, completely. They were ostracized by the whites, and often beaten or tarred and feathered by the Ku Klux Klan. Some states attempted to integrate state colleges, or create all black colleges, but these ventures met with little success.

In Arkansas, for example, the state college was declared open to all races, but only one black person registered and he was taught privately off campus. Not only did the prospect of segregation allow for poor black education, but it also caused their demoralization. Almost a hundred years later when the Supreme Court finally ruled segregation unconstitutional, one of the strongest arguments was that separating the blacks from the whites caused a great feeling of self hatred and inferiority among the blacks.

Had the blacks not faced these practical and psychological barriers, they would have been far more likely to contend with white southerners in the job market. One of the most important things denied blacks during reconstruction was the means to make a living either of subsistence farming or in jobs requiring skilled labor. Early on in the civil war there were rumors of a post-war land redistribution which would give blacks the means to start farms of their own, but these rumors predicted a much greater turn over of land than was actually seen.

At first it seemed as if they might be true however. Upon capturing the sea islands south of Charleston, General Sherman gave the 485, 000 acres to 40, 000 black families to run. These blacks believed they had been given legal ownership of the land, and worked it profitably for over 4 years until the original white owners stepped in and demanded, and were granted, their old deeds back. Other plans were initiated to give poor blacks more land, but few of them met with success.

In some states thousands of acres were acquired through either purchase, taxation (States taxed land highly if one person owned more than a certain

amount. This required many large land owners to give up some, but not all of their land.), or confiscation, but when attempts were made to sell this land off at low prices, it was picked up mostly by speculators or people with close ties to the government looking for a summer home. Fewer than 40, 000 acres were ever actually given to poor blacks.

Not only were blacks kept out of subsistence farming, but they were also removed from almost all forms of skilled labor. The black codes imposed strict restrictions on what jobs blacks could do, so that even if they did pick up a trade, either through schooling or from previous experience on the plantation, they could not use it. The whites did allow them to enter the skilled workforce, but only through apprenticeships under white masters which were almost no better than slavery. Apprentices were not allowed to leave their masters, and could be whipped if the masters deemed it necessary.

With the end of efforts to get the black man his own land and the inability for him to enter the skilled work force the black man was destined to a life of subservience to the whites. After reconstruction the only option left to most of the blacks was a system of sharecropping which was practically identical to slavery. And just as demoralizing. All of these restrictions could easily have been lifted if the freedmen had been given the right to vote early on, as the 15th amendment seemed to promise, but this never happened.

Although the 15th amendment guaranteed the right to vote to everyone regardless of race or creed, it's vague wording allowed whites to find other ways to deny the freedmen suffrage. Southern states adopted poll taxes,

education requirements, land requirements, grandfather clauses, or a mixture of any of those in order to successfully keep the blacks from the polls without actually stating that blacks could not vote. This allowed the whites to stay ahead politically as well as economically.

Although in some states this did not happen, and blacks were even elected to political office, they never achieved high ranks in either state or federal governments, and their numbers in the house were well below what percentage of the population they represented. Without the right to vote or any representatives in the government, the blacks found themselves powerless to change the laws that held them down. They could not get equal rights, decent education, or job opportunities because these were all the responsibility of the government, a government which they played almost no part in.

Without a voice in legislation the black man was powerless to direct his destiny, and the white man was able to guide him down a path of further servitude. This fact alone proves that slavery did not die with the end of slavery. With a large portion of the population writing laws keeping a smaller portion in a lesser state, slavery still exists. All of these factors contributed to keep the whites on top of the blacks for many years after reconstruction. It wasn't until the civil rights movement of the 1960's that true change was brought about.

The black man was kept out of white social circles, was not given education, was kept out of the job market, and was not allowed to participate in the government. All of these factors added up to a man who was supposedly

free, but had few options to choose from. Everywhere the black man turned paths were off limits to him, and the only one that seemed to be open was one of lower class citizen whose life was still basically determined by the white man. The outcome of the reconstruction truly favored the whites in that all power was given to them. They were able to control the destiny of not only themselves, but of the blacks as well.