

# Reconstruction, sharecropping, and the failure of the economic recovery

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## Reconstruction, Sharecropping, and the Failure of the Economic

Recovery That the period of Reconstruction was the time of the dramatic economic and social changes is difficult to deny. Immediately after the Civil War, tension ran high on both sides of the Mason Dixon, but black people cherished a hope that the Reconstruction would mark the beginning of their new life and would give them a chance to re-establish themselves in the new American society. The new system of sharecropping had to give the freedmen an opportunity to earn good income and to move up the social and economic ladder; in reality, however, sharecropping pushed the blacks even further down the tenancy structure, turning them into the outcasts of their own freedom. In the years following the end of the Civil War, sharecropping and tenancy turned into the way of life for thousands of the black freedman (Conrad 34). The number of sharecroppers grew alarmingly, and sharecropping gave the black people some hope to re-arrange their lives, to improve their social status, and to provide themselves with the basic means of living. To some extent, sharecropping was an effective means to involve the black people into the most important economic processes (i. e. agricultural production): in sharecropping, plantation owners would provide the freedman with a small tract of land, food and the necessary equipment (Norton et al. 40). Once harvested, the crop would be brought to the market and after deducting the costs, the sharecropper would be given half of the profit (Manes 84). Certainly, sharecropping was an excellent way for freedmen to earn their own income and to work to improve the country's economy. Unfortunately, only few sharecroppers were able to improve their social position. More often than not, sharecropping pushed the blacks even

further down the social ladder. The new system of sharecropping had to give the freedmen an opportunity to earn good income and to move up the social and economic ladder, however, the position of black people became worse and they did not get any new opportunities to improve their standard of living. Black people cherished a hope that the Reconstruction means the beginning of their new good life and would give them an opportunity to re-establish themselves in the new American society. Due to the bad life conditions and little opportunity to get education many of them lacked knowledge and skills necessary to manage their resources and profits successfully. Some sharecroppers lost their lands and farms, trying to deal with the ever growing costs of agricultural production (Franklin 22). Ill health, laziness, and low cotton prices added their share of complexity to the situation (Franklin 23). In 1864, a pound of cotton cost a little more than 10 cents, which made it virtually impossible for sharecroppers to earn any profits (Franklin 23). Most black farmers had to go deep into debt, to be able to make their ends meet (Conrad 38). Ultimately, more and more landowners chose to reduce the number of tenants and sharecroppers, and thousands of black freedmen had to search their happiness elsewhere. Works

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