

# Civil war and reconstruction

[War](#), [Civil War](#)



The America we know today is a very different place than the America this country once knew during the Reconstruction period. In today's society everybody has equal rights and opportunities to do as they please. People today have a right to do basically anything their heart desires, but years ago it was a different story. African Americans didn't have many rights at all. The people and groups involved in Reconstruction had many different ideas for freedom and equality. In 1861 the Civil War broke out and became an ongoing battle for the next four years.

At the end of the war 600,000 people were dead and four million slaves were freed. After the war Abraham Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction began. With this plan Lincoln's main goal was to bring the North and South together and bring the South back into the Union. The Civil War ended in 1865 and that same year on April 15th Lincoln was assassinated. After Lincoln's death the 13th amendment was ratified on December 6th 1865. This amendment abolished slavery in the United States, but at the same time it still didn't make it easy for African Americans to succeed in America.

This struggle for African Americans was told in an interview of Felix Haywood a former slave from San Antonio, Texas. The slaves at that time believed that when they became free that they would become wealthier than the white people and all their worries would disappear. " We thought we was going to be richer than the white folks, ' cause we was stronger and knowed how to work, and the whites didn't, and they didn't have us to work with them anymore. But it didn't turn out that way. We soon found out that freedom could make folks proud, but it didn't make ' em rich. 1 Another interview with Warren McKinney a former slave from Hazen, Arkansas

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McKinney explains how tough it was for his people to cope with freedom. “ The government gave out rations there. My ma washed and ironed. People died in piles. I don’t know till yet what was the matter. They said it was the change of living. ” 2 African Americans were now free from slavery, but in a sense it was even tougher for them to survive because they were on there own. They had no money for food or a house, no education, and there were many restrictions on what African Americans could do.

Many White people during Reconstruction had intentions of controlling and restricting African Americans. In many southern states “ black codes” were enforced. These codes did just that. The Louisiana black codes Section 8 “ No freedman shall sell, barter, or exchange any articles of merchandise or traffic within the limits of Opelousas without special permission of his employer, in writing, and approved by the mayor or president of the board. ” 3 It was almost like Louisiana and several other southern states with black codes treated African American people like children.

Another example of a black code, Section 3 “ No negro or freedman shall be permitted to rent or keep a house within the limits of the town under any circumstances, and any one thus offending shall be ejected and compelled to find an employer or leave the town within twenty four hours. ” 4 Anytime African Americans wanted to do something they always needed permission from the mayor or president of the board. The White people wanted to seclude them from white society, but at the same time still wanted to control there every move.

Whether it was the location of where they wanted to buy a house, or the time and reason in which they were in the local town, there were always restrictions and severe punishments. After Lincoln's assassination Andrew Johnson was appointed president. Johnson was a former democrat turned republican. He was born in the northern part of Tennessee. Growing up he was poor and didn't get a great education so he could barely read or write. He was a racist tailor who hated rich people. While in office Johnson's main intention was to keep black people oppressed.

His Restoration plan pardons restored property, granted pardons to rich and confederate officials, gave no provisions or protections for freedmen, and the southern whites started voting again and gained control of local governments. Johnson would do anything to keep the blacks down, he vetoed the Civil Rights Act which gave African Americans citizenship and guarantee of equal rights. He then vetoed the Freedmen's Bureau which wanted to provide aid to African Americans who needed medicine, food, housing, and a right to an education. At this time the Radical Republicans had enough and in 1866 became the majority in Congress.

The Congress eventually overrides Johnson's vetoes. The Radicals wanted equality for the black people and in 1867 Radical Reconstruction began. Congressman Thaddeus Stevens states " everyman, no matter what his race or color; every earthly being who has an immortal soul, has an equal right to justice, honesty, and fair play with every other man; and the law should secure him those rights. " 1 Stevens is basically saying all men are created equally, but at the same time he also suggests that it is up to the white man

to decide for himself whether or not to associate himself with African Americans and it isn't in the hands of the law.

After Steven's doctrine in 1867 the Radicals had control of Congress and they were soon able to impeach President Johnson. Being that Johnson was impeached and the Radical Republicans were the majority in Congress it still didn't seem like the future was any brighter for African Americans. Wide spread Anti-Black violence began. Groups like the Ku Klux Klan formed. They began lynching blacks, raping their women, burning down their schools and churches. Elias Hill, an African American man, recounts a nighttime visit from the Ku Klux Klan in 1871. " He had a horse whip, and he told me to pull up my shirt, and he hit me.

He told me at every lick, " Hold up your shirt. " I made a moan every time he cut with the horse whip. I reckon he struck me eight cuts right on the hip bone. " 1 For Elias the KKK was always a threat to him and his family, just as they were to all African Americans. The people and groups involved in Reconstruction had many different ideas for freedom and equality. There were presidents like Lincoln who wanted to help African Americans and on the other hand there was Johnson who wanted nothing more than to keep them as slaves and did everything in his power to keep it that way.

Then there were political parties like the Radical Republicans who also wanted to see through slavery and lend aid to African Americans and then you had organizations like the KKK causing extreme violent acts towards African Americans. There is no question that the Reconstruction period was a chaotic time where people had to struggle with freedom and equality and

today in the United States of America people might be free, but I still think that there are some forms of inequality.