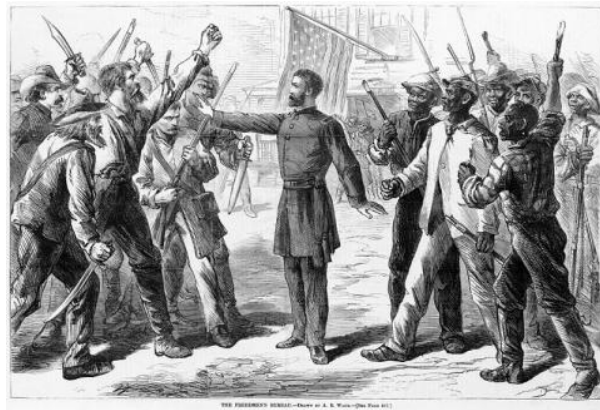




0. Reconstruction Policies in South Carolina - Story Preface

1. South Carolina - Beginnings

2. South Carolina - European Settlers

3. Free and Enslaved Africans in South Carolina

4. Natural Resources Led to Economic Prosperity in South Carolina

5. Pre-Revolutionary Period in South Carolina

6. The Patriot Movie and Conditions of Colonial Life in South Carolina

7. South Carolina - Causes and Effects of American Revolution

8. South Carolina and Adoption of the Declaration of Independence

9. South Carolina - Different Perspectives During the Revolution

10. Summary of the People and Battles in South Carolina during Revolution

11. Role of South Carolina after the Revolution

12. The Rebel Flag and a Shooting in Charleston

13. The Development of the New National Government

14. New Governments are Created

15. The Basic Principles of the US Constitution

16. Issues that Divide a Nation

17. Events Leading to the U.S. Civil War

18. Civil War Stirrings in South Carolina

19. 1860 Secession from the Union?

20. Military Strategy Impacts South Carolina

21. Reconstruction Policies in South Carolina

22. Economic Impact of Reconstruction in South Carolina

23. White Society Refuses Black Freedom

24. Governor Wade Hampton

25. South Carolina Industry Expansion

Alfred R. Waud created this illustration, entitled "The Freedmen's Bureau," which was published in the July 25, 1868 issue of *Harper's Weekly*. The [image depicts](#) an employee of the Freedmen's Bureau who "stands between armed groups of Euro-Americans and "Afro-Americans." Image online via the Library of Congress.

After America's Civil War, the Reconstruction policies of the federal government significantly impacted society and politics in South Carolina.

Among other issues, South Carolina faced massive economic problems. The federal government, however, did not believe it should have the responsibility to rebuild the South. Instead, the federal government believed that rebuilding was the responsibility of individuals and state and local governments. Therefore, the Reconstruction policies of the national government did not include the reconstruction of towns, factories, farms and

transportation systems.

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands—known as the Freedmen's Bureau—was established by Congress prior to the end of the Civil War. The Bureau was the first line of assistance to everyone affected by the war, including whites, as well as destitute freedmen.

This federal agency—under the control of the United States Army—provided food, clothing, medical care, education and some protection from the hostile white environment.

The Freedmen's Bureau helped many freedmen find jobs and established courts to protect the illiterate workers. The bureau was charged with distributing to freedmen those lands that had been abandoned during the war or that had been confiscated as punishment for disloyalty to the Union. However, when President Johnson pardoned the white owners and returned their property them, the Bureau was forced to take these lands back.

Congress would not pass legislation granting lands to freedmen because they respected the constitutional rights that southern whites had to their landed property. As a result, the great majority of African-Americans did not receive land that would have given them economic independence.

In lieu of having their own land, African-Americans—with the help of the Freedmen's Bureau—participated in a newly established sharecropping relationship with the worker-less plantation owner. This system meant that African-Americans, as well as landless poor whites, would be in economic dependence and poverty for generations.

Sharecropping, though, did play a major role in the economic reconstruction of South Carolina. One of the most important contributions of the Freedmen's Bureau was facilitating the establishment of more than one thousand schools throughout the South.

President Lincoln had a plan for reconstructing the South. It was designed, and promoted, by Lincoln Johnson, and Congress.

The purpose of President Lincoln's plan—which was formulated before the end of the fighting—was to end the war as quickly as possible and then reunite all of the states. By requiring that only ten percent of the population swear allegiance to the Union, before they could reconstitute their state governments and send representatives to Congress, Lincoln hoped to convince southern states, including South Carolina, to surrender.

Lincoln also required state governments to recognize the end of slavery.

Then Lincoln was assassinated, and President Johnson basically continued Lincoln's ten-percent policy. However ... the new president also decided that he wanted to add some things to the reconstruction plan. He wanted to humiliate the southern elite by requiring that they individually request a pardon from President Johnson and ratify the 13th amendment that freed the slaves.

Johnson quickly granted pardons to the prominent southerners who requested them.

Among the reasons why Congress passed the Reconstruction plan that it actually passed were these:

- To protect the rights of the newly freed slaves; and
- To protect the Republican's political power.

During the months after General Lee's surrender at Appomattox, however—when Congress was not in session—the South Carolina legislature followed a different course. It—and the legislatures in other southern states—passed Black Codes and elected former Confederates to Congress. This ran afoul of Congress' Reconstruction plan and ideals.

Congress responded by refusing to admit returning Southern officials to Congress. Increased violence against the freedmen—and President Johnson's opposition to Congressional efforts to secure the rights of the freedmen by his veto of the extension of the Freedman's Bureau and his opposition to the 14th Amendment—significantly changed the course of Reconstruction policy.

"Radical Republicans" won a majority in the congressional elections of 1866, and they passed a congressional plan for Reconstruction. This congressional plan called for military occupation of the former Confederacy, splitting it into five military districts. South Carolina was in the second military district.

Each district had a military governor, and the U.S. Army was used to enforce its provisions. Congress then impeached President Johnson to ensure that, as commander-in-chief, he could not undermine its efforts. Johnson was not removed from office—a single vote saved him from that humiliation—but his power was curtailed.

The Union army attempted to enforce the Congressional Reconstruction policy and the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. Ratification of the amendments, and assurances that they would abide by the 13th amendment, was required of southern states before they could form new state governments.

The 13th amendment, which Congress had passed not long before President Lincoln's death, affected emancipation of the slaves throughout the United States and brought profound social change for southern African-Americans. Freedmen worked to:

- Consolidate their families and communities;

- Establish a network of churches and other autonomous institutions;
- Claim equal citizenship;
- Get an education; and
- Carve-out as much independence as possible in their lives.

Although freedom brought significant social change for African-Americans, initially there was little change for the white population. Social classes remained fairly stable despite the loss of economic status by the planter elite. The Black Codes demonstrated that white South Carolinians were unwilling to recognize the social and political rights of the newly freed slaves. Both groups preferred to maintain a social distance that slavery had not allowed.

African-Americans left the white churches for congregations of their own. They moved from the slave quarters to plots of land away from the Big House and established their own communities.

This separation and loss of control over African-Americans caused already-existing anxiety, among whites, to escalate:

- White South Carolinians resented African-Americans who were now free of the imposed submissiveness of slavery and some white southerners feared retaliation by their former slaves.
- The formation of terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan reflected mounting racial tension.
- The white population was determined to keep the African American population in "its place" socially, politically and economically.

The 14th amendment was designed to protect the political and social rights of freedmen from the terror of the Ku Klux Klan. This amendment:

- Recognized the citizenship of African-Americans;
- Upheld the right of all citizens to "equal protection" before the laws and "due process" of law;
- Overturned the Dred Scott decision;
- Required a two-thirds Congressional vote to grant amnesty to ex-Confederates before they could hold public office.

The 14th Amendment also included a provision that was designed to force states to grant political rights to freedmen by reducing representation for states that did not allow African-Americans to vote. This provision, however, proved ineffective. The 15th Amendment was passed to ensure that the right of all male citizens to vote in the North, and in the South, would not be denied based on "race, creed or previous condition of servitude."

The 15th Amendment was also motivated by the desire, of the Republican Party, to secure its political power in the South. The Southern vote, largely made up of the vote of African-Americans, had contributed to Grant's election in 1868.

These three key amendments—the 13th, 14th and 15th—are collectively known as the "Civil War Amendments." Would South Carolina ratify all three of them, after they were passed by Congress?

South Carolina refused to ratify the 14th and 15th Amendments. The military governor, of Military District 2, required South Carolina to hold a convention to write a new state constitution that would recognize both of those amendments.

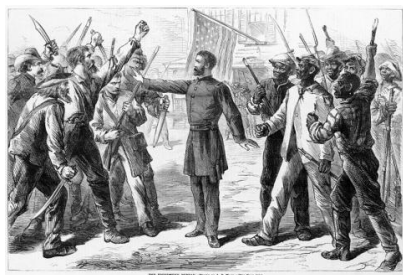
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

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<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Reconstruction-Policies-in-South-Carolina-South-Carolina-History>

Media Stream



The Freedmen's Bureau

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