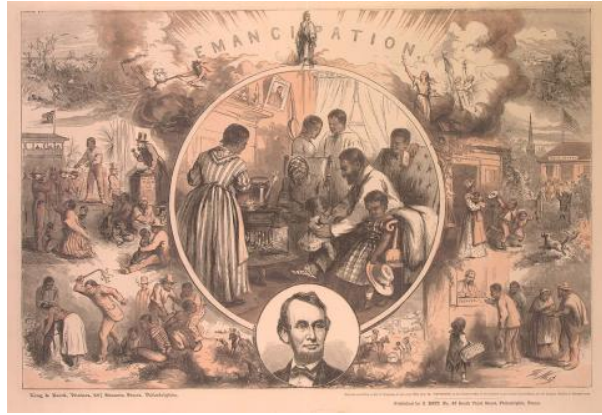




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When America's Civil War was over, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect in the Southern states (which were part of the Confederacy when the Proclamation was issued in 1862). Thomas Nast created this illustration in 1865. Engraved by King & Baird—and published, in Philadelphia, by S. Bott, circa 1865—the illustration depicts a very optimistic view of the future for the newly freed slaves. Online via the Library of Congress.

Reconstruction policy, after the U.S. Civil War, had little economic impact on the South's recovery from the devastating conflict. The economy continued to rest on agriculture and cotton, but now it depended on sharecropping instead of on slave labor.

Until the 20th century, the national government did not see its role as taking an active hand in managing the

economy. The South remained in a state of economic depression well into the 20th century:

- Plantation owners lost their labor force, and a very large part of their wealth, due to the war and [the 13th Amendment](#).
- Many were astonished that their former slaves, who they thought were loyal to them, left the plantations.
- Feeling betrayed, and resentful of the former slaves' attitudes, many white Southerners became more hostile to the freedmen.
- Now they were forced to perform all of the normal household and farm duties themselves or pay their workers to do those jobs.
- Investments in Confederate dollars were worthless.

All they (the white Southerners) had was the land. Many entered into [sharecropping relationships](#) with freedmen and reestablished their former position as master through a new means. Sharecroppers tilled the land that belonged to their former masters in exchange for a share of the crop. The planter elite tried to hold onto slave-like conditions (through the Black Codes) and control over the state's government (through [the Constitution of 1865](#)).

The Congressional reconstruction plan brought a temporary end to the political control of South Carolina's planter elite. But ... plantation owners, and the middle class, engaged in violence and intimidation against African-Americans throughout Reconstruction.

Small farmers who had never owned slaves were not directly affected, financially, by their liberation. Small farmers, however, had to compete with African-American sharecroppers when they marketed their crops.

Many people who had felt a sense of social superiority to slaves now felt that superiority threatened. They reacted with anger and resentment and joined the ranks of the vigilante groups who terrorized African-Americans.

Scalawags—some small farmers, from non-slaveholding districts, who cooperated with the Republicans—thought they would benefit from the educational and economic opportunities they were offered.

Freedmen were both liberated and displaced in the Reconstruction period:

- At the end of the war, many freedmen left the plantation looking for relatives sold “down the river” or seeking a taste of freedom.
- Most freedmen soon returned to the area they knew best—their former plantations.
- With the assistance of the Freedman's Bureau, and their own determination, they worked to consolidate their families and communities and establish a network of churches and other autonomous institutions.

Unable to secure their own land to farm, many African-Americans entered into agreements with southern landowners, who were land-rich and cash-poor:

- In sharecropping, the landowner supplied the seed, tools and land.
- The sharecropper supplied the labor.
- Both then shared the crop that was produced.
- Although the sharecropper was able to move away from the old slave quarters, the sharecropper remained economically dependent on the landowner.

In bad years, the shared crop might be very little. Sharecroppers would then take out a loan, in the form of a lien on the next year's crop, so they could buy supplies lasting until the next harvest. This crop-lien system placed the sharecropper into a cycle of debt and dependence on the landowners and lien holders.

Although African-Americans suffered from white violence and intimidation, throughout the Reconstruction period, they continued to claim equal citizenship and carve-out as much independence as possible in their lives.

The wives of elite plantation owners and small farmers alike shared their husbands' loss of social status and fear of economic competition from the freedmen. Elite white women had to negotiate household services from former slave women or perform household tasks themselves. The large number of men killed in the war between the states—and the many others who were physically and/or mentally impaired during the Civil War—meant that many white women took on non-traditional roles.

Former slaves, "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" pushed for some women's rights. The Constitution of 1868 gave women some rights, including the right to own property in their own name after marriage. The 1868 South Carolina Constitution also abolished the Black Codes.

Northern immigrants, both men and women, came to South Carolina as teachers, missionaries or entrepreneurs. Some came as Union soldiers. Those who stayed were reviled as "carpetbaggers" and were not accepted by most of white South Carolina society.

Some found political opportunity in the Reconstruction governments, others found economic opportunity.

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

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Economic-Impact-of-Reconstruction-in-South-Carolina-South-Carolina-History>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

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