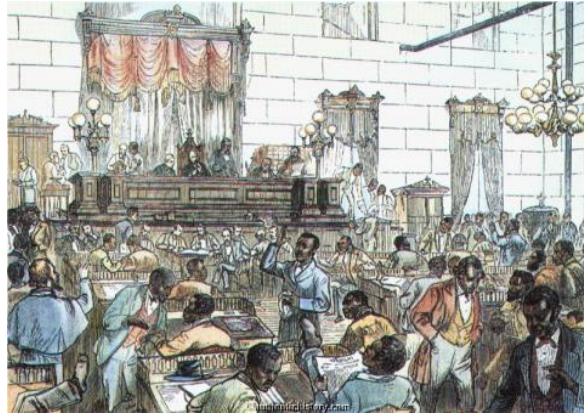




0. White Society Refuses Black Freedom - Story Preface

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

This drawing—a colorized version of an original illustration published on January 6, 1877 in *The London Illustrated News* ([at page 21](#))—depicts African-Americans in South Carolina's state house, in Columbia, after the election of 1876. History tells us that the 1876 election, for South Carolina's governor, was one of the most-fraudulent in American history.

The white society, of South Carolina, refused to accept the freedom of African-Americans and the authority of the federal government in the years after the Civil War ended. South Carolina, for example, had refused to ratify [the 14th](#) and [15th amendments](#) (guaranteeing equal rights, and the right-to-vote, to African American men).

Consequently:

- Under Congressional Reconstruction, southern states, including SC, were required to call a convention and write new state constitutions.
- Most whites boycotted the election of delegates to these constitutional conventions.
- African-Americans were the majority of the population in SC so African-Americans were well-represented in the convention.
- Slightly more than half of the delegates to the convention were African-American and half of those were newly freed slaves.
- Recent immigrants to South Carolina were also selected to write the document.

By not participating in the process to create a new South Carolina Constitution, in 1868, members of the white society ended-up with a new constitution reflecting their non-participation:

- Under the Constitution of 1868, African-American men were allowed to vote and hold office and did so in large numbers.
- African-Americans had greater political power in South Carolina than they did in any other southern state.
- Reflecting their numbers in the population, African-Americans held every office in the state with the exception of the governorship and were a majority in the state legislature throughout the Reconstruction period.
- South Carolina sent six African Americans to the US House of Representatives.

White propaganda often characterized the African-American elected officials as ignorant ex-slaves. Although they were inexperienced in governance, as were many whites, most African-Americans who served were literate members of the middle class, many of whom had been free before the Civil War.

Despite the corruption of some individuals, the Reconstruction state government established social-service programs (such as state-supported institutions for the blind and deaf) and made public health care a concern of South Carolina's government.

The Reconstruction government also established public schools for all children, white and African-American, for the first time. These services also raised taxes that whites claimed were bankrupting them.

Exaggerating the corruption of the inexperienced African-American legislators, and playing on Northern racism, white South Carolinians effectively manipulated the Northern press with propaganda about the incompetence of the Republican government. Among other things, they blamed the rising tax rate on corruption when it was largely due to new state services.

Consequently the Northern public tired of Reconstruction and gave up hope of ever changing Southern attitudes and the Southern way of life.

The opening of educational opportunities for former slaves, however, was an enduring legacy of the Reconstruction period. Prior to the end of slavery, some blacks had secretly established schools. After emancipation, African-Americans openly flocked to:

- Freedom schools, established through the Freedmen's Bureau;
- Schools privately supported by northern philanthropists; and the
- New public schools established by the Reconstruction state governments.

Religious denominations, and Northern philanthropists, provided support for the establishment of colleges for African-Americans in South Carolina (Clafin College and Benedict College). The Northern Aid Society created the Penn School in Beaufort. Both male and female missionaries traveled to the South to serve as teachers (mocked, however, as "carpetbaggers" by Southerners).

Literacy rates among African-Americans and all Southerners rose steadily. African-American gains created a backlash among white South Carolinians.

Outnumbered by the African-American political majority, white South Carolinians refused to participate in the

new state government. Instead they carried on a campaign of terror against African-American and the white Republicans who were perceived as assisting them.

Vigilantism increased when federal troops withdrew and the state militia disbanded after the 1868 Constitution. Vigilante groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Riflemen and the Red Shirts, were free to engage in harassment, intimidation and murder.

The federal government responded by passing the Ku Klux Klan Act, and President Grant again sent federal soldiers to South Carolina. The federal government's insufficient efforts only had the effect of encouraging the insurgency. By 1876, the white insurgents were ready to contest the political control of the Republicans in an election.

Reconstruction ended in South Carolina with violence and controversy:

- The Hamburg Massacre (also known as the Hamburg Riot) of 1876 took place in a predominantly African-American town in Aiken County. Six black militia members were killed by a white mob. This incident marked an intensification of the white campaign to "redeem" South Carolina's government.
- White Democrats called "Red Shirts," led by former Confederate General Wade Hampton, coordinated a campaign of violence, intimidation and fraud in order to win the election of 1876.
- President Grant sent more federal troops but they could not assure a free and fair election.
- Voting irregularities threw the governor's election into the General Assembly, but there were also disputes about who was elected to the state legislature.
- Two rival governments were established, one Republican and one white Democrat. There was a stand-off as white taxpayers refused to support the Republican government.

Election irregularities also plagued the national election. The electoral votes of three southern states, including South Carolina, were in dispute. The resolve of Congress to protect the freedmen had waned in the face of continuing resistance of Southerners as well as the corruption of the Grant administration, economic depression in the North and issues related to increased migration to the West.

Democrats and Republicans reached a compromise whereby Democrats would recognize the election of Republican President Hayes in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South. President Hayes withdrew the last of the federal troops from South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana.

The Conservative Democratic Party, under former Confederate General—now Governor—Wade Hampton took control of the government of South Carolina. African-Americans were left to fend for themselves in a hostile environment.

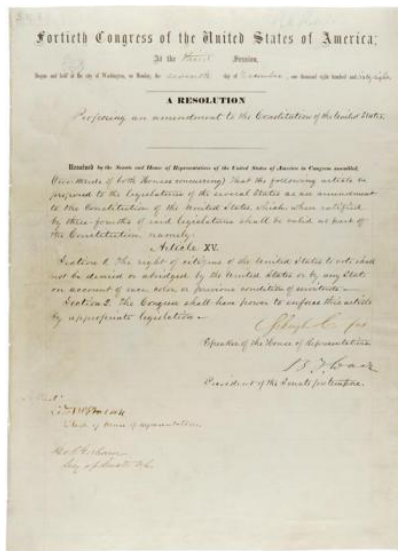
See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/White-Society-Refuses-Black-Freedom-South-Carolina-History>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/White-Society-Refuses-Black-Freedom-South-Carolina-History>

Media Stream



U.S. Constitution - 15th Amendment

This image depicts the Congressional Resolution which led to passage of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Online via the U.S. National Archives. Public Domain.

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