



# Reconstructing Society

## MAIN IDEA

Various groups contributed to the rebuilding of Southern society after the war.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many African-American institutions, including colleges and churches, were established during Reconstruction.

## Terms & Names

- scalawag
- carpetbagger
- Hiram Revels
- sharecropping
- tenant farming

## One American's Story

Robert G. Fitzgerald, an African American, was born free in Delaware in 1840. During the Civil War, he served in both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy. In 1866, the Freedmen's Bureau sent Fitzgerald to teach in a small Virginia town. His students were former slaves of all ages who were hungry to learn reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and geography.

### A PERSONAL VOICE ROBERT G. FITZGERALD

"I came to Virginia one year ago on the 22nd of this month. Erected a school, organized and named the Freedman's Chapel School. Now (June 29th) have about 60 who have been for several months engaged in the study of arithmetic, writing, etc. etc. This morning sent in my report accompanied with compositions from about 12 of my advanced writers instructed from the Alphabet up to their [present] condition, their progress has been surprisingly rapid."

—quoted in *Proud Shoes*

Fitzgerald was one of many who labored diligently against the illiteracy and poverty that slavery had forced upon most African Americans. The need to help former slaves, however, was just one of many issues the nation confronted during Reconstruction.

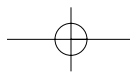


**VIDEO**

**TEACHER OF A  
FREED PEOPLE**  
Robert  
Fitzgerald and  
Reconstruction

## Conditions in the Postwar South

Under the congressional Reconstruction program, state constitutional conventions met and Southern voters elected new, Republican-dominated governments. In 1868, the former Confederate states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, and South Carolina reentered the Union (joining Tennessee, which had reentered earlier). The remaining four former Confederate states completed the process by 1870. However, even after all the states were back in the Union, the Republicans did not end the process of Reconstruction because they wanted to make economic changes in the South.



▲ **Clearing battlefields of human remains was just one of many tasks facing Reconstruction governments.**

**PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS** Because the Civil War was fought mostly on Southern soil, many of the new Southern state governments faced the challenge of physically rebuilding a battle-scarred region. The Union general William T. Sherman estimated that his troops alone had destroyed about \$100 million worth of Confederate property in Georgia and South Carolina. Charred buildings, twisted railroad tracks, demolished bridges, neglected roads, and abandoned farms had to be restored or replaced.

The economic effects of the war were devastating for the South. Property values had plummeted. Those who had invested in Confederate bonds had little hope of recovering their money. Many small farms were ruined or in disrepair. As a result of these and other factors, Southerners of every economic class were poorer than they had been at the start of the war. In one county of Alabama, for example, the wealth per capita among whites dropped from \$18,000 in 1860 to about \$3,000 in 1870.

Not only were many of the South's economic resources destroyed, but the region's population was devastated. More than one-fifth of the adult white men of the Confederacy died in the war. Many of those who did return from battle were maimed for life. Tens of thousands of Southern African-American men also died, either fighting for the Union or working in Confederate labor camps. **A**

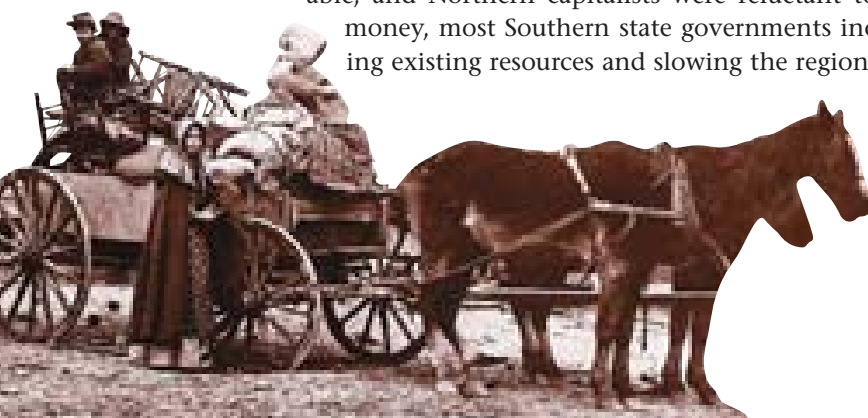
**PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMS** The Republican governments built roads, bridges, and railroads and established orphanages and institutions for the care of the mentally ill and disabled. They also created the first public school systems that most Southern states had ever had.

These ambitious projects—and the larger state governments that were required to administer them—were expensive. Few financial resources were available, and Northern capitalists were reluctant to invest in the region. To raise money, most Southern state governments increased taxes of all kinds, draining existing resources and slowing the region's recovery.

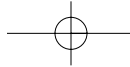
#### MAIN IDEA

##### Identifying Problems

**A** What were the main postwar problems that Reconstruction governments in the South had to solve?



◀ **Southern families like this one lost their homes and most of their possessions because of economic problems after the Civil War.**



## Politics in the Postwar South

Another difficulty facing the new Republican governments was that different groups within the Republican Party in the South often had conflicting goals.

**SCALAWAGS AND CARPETBAGGERS** Although the terms *scalawag* and *carpetbagger* were negative labels imposed by political enemies, historians still use the terms when referring to the two groups. Democrats, opposed to the Republicans' plan for Reconstruction, called white Southerners who joined the Republican Party **scalawags**. Some scalawags hoped to gain political offices with the help of the African-American vote and then use those offices to enrich themselves. Southern Democrats unfairly pointed to these unscrupulous individuals as representative of all white Southern Republicans. Some so-called scalawags honestly thought that a Republican government offered the best chances for the South to rebuild and industrialize. The majority were small farmers who wanted to improve their economic and political position and to prevent the former wealthy planters from regaining power.

The Democrats used an equally unflattering name for the Northerners who moved to the South after the war—**carpetbaggers**. The name referred to the belief that Northerners arrived with so few belongings that everything could fit in a carpetbag, a small piece of luggage made of carpeting. Most white Southerners believed that the carpetbaggers wanted to exploit the South's postwar turmoil for their own profit. However, like the scalawags, carpetbaggers had mixed motives. Some were Freedmen's Bureau agents, teachers, and ministers who felt a moral duty to help former slaves. Others wanted to buy land or hoped to start new industries legitimately. Still others truly were the dishonest businesspeople whom the Southerners scorned. **B**

### MAIN IDEA

#### Comparing

**B** What were some similarities in the goals of scalawags and carpetbaggers? of carpetbaggers and African Americans?

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## Analyzing Political Cartoons

### UNWELCOME GUEST

Of all the political cartoonists of the 19th century, Thomas Nast (1840–1902) had the greatest and most long-lasting influence. Nast created symbols that have become part of America's visual heritage, symbols that include the Democratic donkey, the Republican elephant, and Santa Claus.

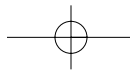
This cartoon from a Southern Democratic newspaper depicts Carl Schurz, a liberal Republican who advocated legal equality for African Americans. Schurz is shown as a carpetbagger trudging down a dusty Southern road as a crowd of people watch his arrival.

#### SKILLBUILDER Analyzing Political Cartoons

1. Is Schurz shown in a positive or negative light? How can you tell?
2. Why do you think the cartoonist portrays the Southern people standing in a group, far away from Schurz?

 SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R24.





▲ Thomas Waterman Wood portrayed a new African-American voter in this 1868 painting.

## AFRICAN AMERICANS AS VOTERS

African Americans—who made up the largest group of Southern Republicans—gained voting rights as a result of the Fifteenth Amendment. During Reconstruction, African-American men registered to vote for the first time; nine out of ten of them supported the Republican Party. Although most former slaves had little experience with politics, they were eager to exercise their voting rights.

### A PERSONAL VOICE

WILLIAM BEVERLY NASH

**“We are not prepared for this suffrage. But we can learn. Give a man tools and let him commence to use them and in time he will earn a trade. So it is with voting. We may not understand it at the start, but in time we shall learn to do our duty.”**

—quoted in *The Trouble They Seen: Black People Tell the Story of Reconstruction*

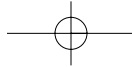
In many areas of the South, almost 90 percent of the qualified African-American voters voted. Early in 1868, a Northerner in Alabama observed that “in defiance of fatigue, hardship, hunger, and threats of employers,” African Americans still flocked to the polls.

**POLITICAL DIFFERENCES** Conflicting goals among Republican Party members led to disunity in the party’s ranks. In particular, few scalawags shared the Republican commitment to civil rights and suffrage for African Americans. Over time, many of them returned to the Democratic Party.

In addition, some Republican governors began to appoint white Democrats to office in an attempt to persuade more white voters to vote Republican. This policy backfired—it convinced very few white Democrats to change parties, and it made blacks feel betrayed.

The new status of African Americans required fundamental changes in the attitudes of most Southern whites. Some whites supported the Republicans during Reconstruction and thought that the end of slavery would ultimately benefit the South. In addition, some Southern farmers and merchants thought that investment by Northerners would help the South recover from the war. Many white Southerners, though, refused to accept blacks’ new status and resisted the idea of equal rights. A Freedmen’s Bureau agent noted that some “Southern whites are quite indignant if they are not treated with the same deference as they were accustomed to” under the system of slavery.

Moreover, white Southerners had to accept defeat and the day-to-day involvement of Northerners in their lives. Eva B. Jones, the wife of a former Confederate officer, understood how difficult that adjustment was for many. In a letter to her mother-in-law, she expressed emotions that were typical of those felt by many ex-Confederates.



### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Motives

**C** What do you think the former Confederates who emigrated hoped to accomplish?

### A PERSONAL VOICE EVA B. JONES

**“A joyless future of probable ignominy, poverty, and want is all that spreads before us. . . . You see, it is with no resigned spirit that I yield to the iron yoke our conqueror forges for his fallen and powerless foe. The degradation of a whole country and a proud people is indeed a mighty, an all-enveloping sorrow.”**

—quoted in *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*

Not all white Southerners were willing to remain in the South. Several thousand planters emigrated to Europe, Mexico, and Brazil after the war. **C**

## Former Slaves Face Many Challenges

Amid the turmoil of the South during Reconstruction, African Americans looked forward to new opportunities. Slaves had been forbidden to travel without permission, to marry legally, to attend school, and to live and work as they chose. After the war, the 4 million former slaves gained the chance to take control of their lives.

**NEW-WON FREEDOMS** At first, many former slaves were cautious about testing the limits of their freedom. One freedman explained, “We was afraid to move. Just like . . . turtles after emancipation. Just stick our heads out to see how the land lay.” As the reality of freedom sank in, freed African Americans faced many decisions. Without land, jobs, tools, money, and with few skills besides those of farming, what were they to do? How would they feed and clothe themselves? How and where would they live?

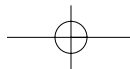
During slavery, slaves were forbidden to travel without a pass. White planters had enforced that rule by patrolling the roads. During Reconstruction, African Americans took advantage of their new freedom to go where they wanted. One former slave from Texas explained the passion for traveling: “They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they’d know what it was—like it was a place or a city.”

The majority of freed African Americans who moved, however, were not just testing their freedom. Thousands were eager to leave plantations that they associated with oppression and move to Southern towns and cities where they could find jobs. From 1865 to 1870, the African-American population of the ten largest Southern cities doubled.

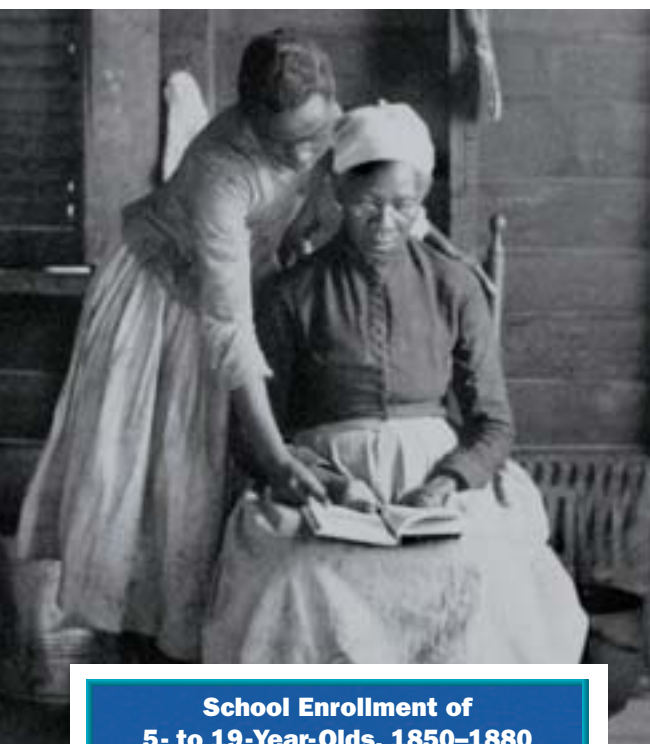
**REUNIFICATION OF FAMILIES** Slavery had split many African-American families apart; spouses sometimes lived on different plantations, and children were often separated from their parents. During Reconstruction, many freed African Americans took advantage of their new mobility to search for loved ones. In 1865, for example, one man walked more than 600 miles from Georgia to North Carolina, looking for his wife and children.

Many former slaves bought charts like this one to keep track of their family histories.





Among former slaves, younger generations sometimes helped educate their elders. A young woman in Mt. Meigs, Alabama, teaches her mother to read.



The Freedmen's Bureau worked to reunite families, and African-American newspapers printed poignant "Information Wanted" notices about missing relatives. Tragically, in many cases the lost family members were never found. However, freed persons, who had been denied legal unions under slavery, could now marry legally, and raise children without the fear that someone would sell them. For African Americans, reconstructing their families was an important part of establishing an identity as a free people.

**EDUCATION** Because slaves had been punished if they tried to learn how to read and write, nearly 80 percent of freed African Americans over the age of 20 were illiterate in 1870. During Reconstruction, however, freed people of all ages—grandparents, parents, and children alike—sought education.

African Americans established educational institutions with assistance from a number of public and private organizations, including the Freedmen's Bureau and African-American churches. One college founded during Reconstruction was Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia. By 1870, African Americans had spent more than \$1 million on education. Initially, most teachers in black schools were Northern whites, about half of whom were women. However, educated African Americans like Robert G. Fitzgerald also became teachers, and by 1869, black teachers outnumbered whites in these schools.

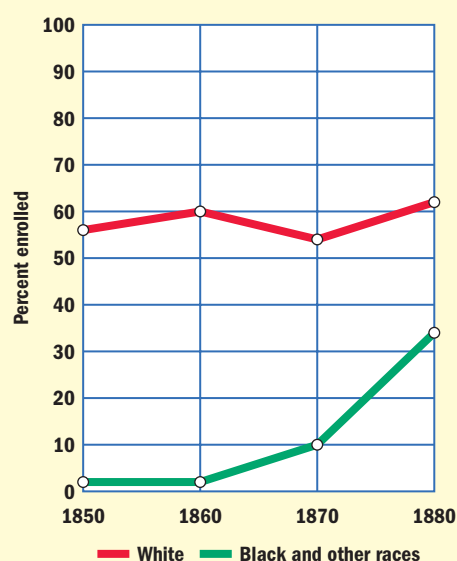
Some white Southerners, outraged by the idea of educated African Americans, responded violently. In one instance, the former slave Washington Eager was murdered because, as his brother explained, he had become "too big a man . . . he [could] write and read and put it down himself." Despite the threat of violence, freed people were determined to learn. By 1877, more than 600,000 African Americans were enrolled in elementary schools.

### CHURCHES AND VOLUNTEER GROUPS

During slavery many plantation slaves had attended white churches and camp meetings with their owners. Resenting the preachers who urged them to obey their masters, the slaves had also held their own religious gatherings called "praise meetings."

After the war many African Americans founded their own churches, which were usually Baptist or Methodist, and held services similar to the earlier praise meetings. Because churches were the principal institutions that African Americans fully controlled, African-American ministers emerged as influential community leaders. They often played an important role in the broader political life of the country as well.

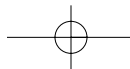
**School Enrollment of 5- to 19-Year-Olds, 1850–1880**



Source: Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970

### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Graphs

How might you explain why white school enrollment decreased between 1860 and 1870 while enrollment of others increased?



Besides organizing their own schools and churches, freed African Americans formed thousands of volunteer organizations. They established their own fire companies, trade associations, political organizations, and drama groups, to name just a few. These groups not only fostered independence but also provided financial and emotional support for their members, while offering African Americans opportunities to gain the leadership skills that slavery had often denied them.

**POLITICS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS** The period from 1865 to 1877 saw growing African-American involvement in politics at all levels. For the first time, African Americans held office in local, state, and federal government. At first, most African Americans in politics were freeborn. Many of these black officeholders were ministers or teachers who had been educated in the North. By 1867, however, former slaves were playing an increasing role in political organizations and were winning a greater number of offices.

Nevertheless, even though there were more black voters than white voters in the South, African-American officeholders remained in the minority. Only South Carolina had a black majority in the state legislature. No Southern state elected an African-American governor. Moreover, out of 125 Southerners elected to the U.S. Congress during congressional Reconstruction, only 16 were African Americans. Among these was **Hiram Revels**, the first African-American senator. **D**

**LAWS AGAINST SEGREGATION** By the end of 1866, most of the Republican Southern state governments had repealed the black codes. African-American legislators took social equality a step further by proposing bills to desegregate public transportation. In 1871, Texas passed a law prohibiting railroads from making distinctions between groups of passengers, and several other states followed suit. However, many antisegregation laws were not enforced. State orphanages, for example, usually had separate facilities for white and black children.

African Americans themselves focused more on building up the black community than on total integration. By establishing separate African-American institutions—such as schools, churches, and political and social organizations—they were able to focus on African-American leadership and escape the interference of the whites who had so long dominated their lives.



## KEY PLAYER

### HIRAM REVELS 1822–1901

Hiram Revels of Mississippi (pictured above on the far left, with—left to right—the African-American representatives Benjamin S. Turner of Alabama, Robert C. De Large of South Carolina, Josiah T. Walls of Florida, Jefferson M. Long of Georgia, Joseph H. Rainey of South Carolina, and Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina) was born of free parents in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Because he could not obtain an education in the South, he attended Knox College in Illinois. As an African Methodist Episcopal minister, he recruited African Americans to fight for the Union during the Civil War and also served as an army chaplain.

In 1865, Revels settled in Mississippi. He served on the Natchez city council and then was elected to Mississippi's state senate in 1869. In 1870, Revels became the first African American elected to the U.S. Senate. Ironically, he held the seat that had once belonged to Jefferson Davis.

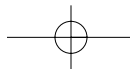
## MAIN IDEA

### Summarizing

**D** How did freed African Americans try to improve their lives?

## Changes in the Southern Economy

When asked to explain the idea of freedom, Garrison Frazier, a former slave turned Baptist minister, said that freedom consisted in “placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor.” To accomplish this, Frazier said, freed African Americans needed “to have land, and turn it and till it.” Few former slaves, however, had enough money to buy land, and those who did have cash were frequently frustrated by whites’ refusal to sell property to them.



### REPARATIONS FOR SLAVERY

In the year 1867, Representative Thaddeus Stevens introduced a bill that, had it been successful, would have granted each freed adult male slave 40 acres of land and \$100. Since then, a number of other attempts have been made to legislate reparations—amends, usually financial—for the evils of slavery.

In 1989, Representative John Conyers of Michigan (shown above) proposed the first in a series of bills that would create a commission to study the impact of slavery. If the committee found that reparations were called for, it would recommend appropriate measures for Congress to take. In 1999, Conyers introduced a bill that would require the government to issue a formal apology for slavery. So far, these proposals and others like them have not been passed into law.

However, a group of prominent class-action lawyers met in 2000 to begin studying the issue, intending to bring suit against the government and against businesses that profited from slavery.

Some victims of postslavery racism have actually been granted reparations. Early in 2001, a state commission in Oklahoma awarded \$12 million to black survivors and victims' descendants of a deadly 1921 Tulsa race riot.

**40 ACRES AND A MULE** In January 1865, during the Civil War, General Sherman had promised the freed slaves who followed his army 40 acres per family and the use of army mules. Soon afterward, about 40,000 freed persons settled on 400,000 abandoned or forfeited acres in coastal Georgia and South Carolina. The freed African Americans farmed their plots until August 1865, when President Johnson ordered that the original landowners be allowed to reclaim their land and evict the former slaves.

Many freed African Americans asserted that they deserved part of the planters' land. An Alabama black convention declared, "The property which they hold was nearly all earned by the sweat of *our* brows." Some Radical Republicans agreed. Thaddeus Stevens called for the government to confiscate plantations and to redistribute part of the land to former slaves. However, many Republicans considered it wrong to seize citizens' private property. As a result, Congress either rejected land-reform proposals or passed weak legislation. An example was the 1866 Southern Homestead Act. Although it set aside 44 million acres in the South for freed blacks and loyal whites, the land was swampy and unsuitable for farming. Furthermore, few homesteaders had the resources—seed, tools, plows, and horses—to farm successfully. **E**

**RESTORATION OF PLANTATIONS** Although African Americans and poor whites wanted to own small farms, the planter class wanted to restore the plantation system, in which many acres were devoted to a single profitable cash crop, such as cotton. Some wealthy Northern merchants and owners of textile mills encouraged the planters in their efforts to reestablish plantations and resume widespread cotton production.

Planters claimed that to make the plantation system work, they needed to have almost complete control over their laborers.

Before the abolition of slavery, planters had forced young and old and men and women to work in the fields for extremely long hours. Now the planters feared that they might not be able to make a profit, since they had to pay their laborers and could no longer force field hands to put in such brutally long workdays. In addition, many former slaveholders deeply resented having to negotiate for the services of former slaves.

Planters also faced a labor shortage, caused by a number of factors. The high death toll of the war had reduced the number of able-bodied workers. Many African-American women and children refused to work in the fields after they

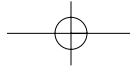
were freed. Finally, many freed persons felt that raising cotton under the direction of white overseers was too much like slavery.

As an alternative, some former slaves worked in mills or on railroad-construction crews. Others tried subsistence farming—growing just enough food for their own families. To stop this trend, white planters were determined to keep the former slaves from getting land that they could use to support themselves.

### MAIN IDEA

#### Identifying Problems

**E** What caused land-reform proposals to fail?



**SHARECROPPING AND TENANT FARMING** Without their own land, freed African Americans could not grow crops to sell or to feed their families. Economic necessity thus forced many former slaves to sign labor contracts with planters. In exchange for wages, housing, and food, freedmen worked in the fields. Although the Freedmen's Bureau promoted this wage-labor system, the arrangement did not satisfy either freedmen or planters. On the one hand, freedmen thought that the wages were too low and that white employers had too much control over them. On the other hand, planters often lacked sufficient cash to pay workers. These conditions led planters and laborers to experiment with two alternative arrangements: sharecropping and tenant farming.

In the system of **sharecropping**, landowners divided their land and gave each worker—either freed African American or poor white—a few acres, along with seed and tools. At harvest time, each worker gave a share of his crop, usually half, to the landowner. This share paid the owner back and ended the arrangement until it was renewed the following year.

In theory, “croppers” who saved a little and bought their own tools could drive a better bargain with landowners. They might even rent land for cash from the planters, and keep all their harvest, in a system known as **tenant farming**. Eventually they might move up the economic ladder to become outright owners of their farms.

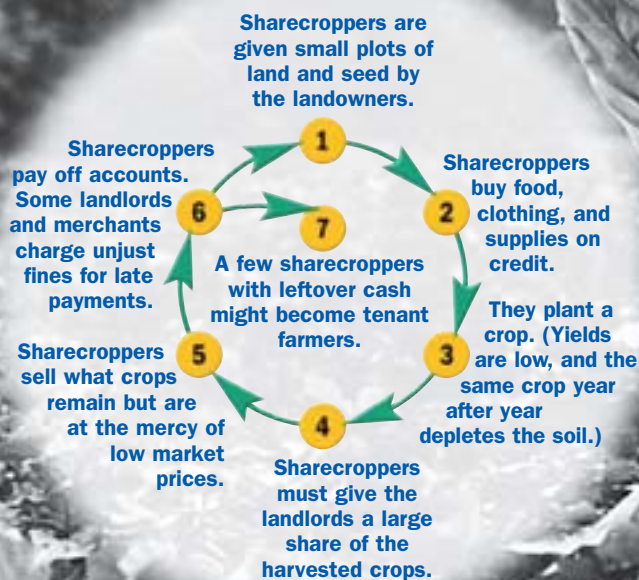
## Sharecropping

A sharecropper works a Georgia cotton field in 1870.



### A CYCLE OF POVERTY

Sharecroppers were supposed to have a chance to climb the economic ladder, but by the time they had shared their crops and paid their debts, they rarely had any money left. A sharecropper often became tied to one plantation, having no choice but to work until his or her debts were paid.

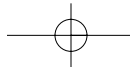


### SKILLBUILDER Interpreting Charts

How did the sharecropping system make it hard for small farmers to improve their standard of living?



SEE SKILLBUILDER HANDBOOK, PAGE R27.



▲ One successful Southern industry was the manufacture of tobacco products.

The arrangement seldom worked that way in practice, however. Most tenant farmers bought their supplies on credit, often from merchants who charged them inflated prices. Farmers rarely harvested enough crops to pay for both past debts and future supplies. The end result was that very few farmers saved enough cash to buy land.

**COTTON NO LONGER KING** Another economic change turned Southern agriculture upside down: cotton was no longer king. During the war, demand for Southern cotton had begun to drop as other countries increased their cotton production. As a result, prices plummeted after the war. In 1869, the price of cotton was 16.5 cents per pound. By the late 1870s, the price had fallen to about 8 cents per pound. Instead of diversifying—or varying—their crops, Southern planters tried to make up for the lower prices by growing more cotton—an oversupply that only drove down prices even further.

The South's agricultural problems did lead to attempts to diversify the region's economy. Textile mills sprang up, and a new industry—tobacco-product manufacturing—took hold. Diversification helped raise the average wage in the South, though it was still much lower than that of Northern workers.

At the end of the Civil War, most of the state banks in the South were saddled with Confederate debts—loans made to the Confederate government. The banks awaited repayment that, in most cases, would never come. In the following years, falling cotton prices and mounting planters' debts caused many banks to fail. The only credit that Southerners in rural areas could get was that offered by local merchants. Despite efforts to improve the Southern economy, the devastating economic impact of the Civil War rippled through Southern life into the 20th century. **F**

Many whites, frustrated by their loss of political power and by the South's economic stagnation, took out their anger on African Americans. In the late 1860s and early 1870s, certain white groups embarked on a campaign to terrorize African Americans into giving up their political rights and their efforts at economic improvement.

#### MAIN IDEA

#### Analyzing Causes

**F** What factors contributed to the stagnation of the Southern economy?

## 2

### ASSESSMENT

**1. TERMS & NAMES** For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

- scalawag
- Hiram Revels
- tenant farming
- carpetbagger
- sharecropping

#### MAIN IDEA

##### 2. TAKING NOTES

In a chart like the one shown, list five problems facing the South after the Civil War and at least one attempted solution for each one.

Problem	Attempted Solution

#### CRITICAL THINKING

##### 3. FORMING GENERALIZATIONS

How did the Civil War weaken the Southern economy? Give examples to support your answer.

##### 4. ANALYZING ISSUES

Thaddeus Stevens believed that giving land to former slaves was more important than giving them the vote. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

##### 5. EVALUATING

Which accomplishment of African Americans during Reconstruction do you consider most significant? Explain your choice. **Think About:**

- the development of a free African-American community
- the lingering effects of slavery
- opportunities for leadership