

After emancipation, how did ex-slaves exercise their new freedoms, and how did white Southerners attempt to limit them?

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When the dust from the civil war in the United States subsided, it remained to be seen how the emancipation of slaves would take form in the South. The end of slave labor meant a step in the right direction for African Americans but still felt like slave labor to be called "free labor." As Roark states (2020), "African Americans found the new regime too similar to slavery to be called free labor. Its chief deficiency, they believed, was the failure to provide them with land of their own. Freedmen believed they had a moral right to the land because they and their ancestors had worked it without pay for centuries"(pg. 178). Freedman's Bureau in 1865 provided former slaves with 1-acre plots for rent. It was eventually understood these one-acre plots would be able to be purchased. These land plots made it possible for African Americans to have the right to new opportunities, including the freedom to govern their household, movement, and controlling their labor. One example Roark (2020) reinforces this statement is, "They could then, for example, make their own decisions about whether women and children would labor in the fields"(pg.226). African Americans started using sharecropping as a way to get by until they harvested their crop; unfortunately, the lien on the crop tended to be relatively high, leaving the farmers to keep borrowing through this vicious cycle.

During this time, African Americans gained voting rights in 1865 and have to members make it to congress Senator Hiram Revels of Mississippi and Representative Joseph Rainey of South Carolina.

Many white southerners were displeased with the outcome of the emancipation of slaves. White southerners worked tirelessly to keep hold of their ex-slaves' power and adopted the black codes that denied blacks' rights. With the black codes, many northerners and blacks alike considered this to be the same as slavery with just extra steps. President Johnson not feeling the need to intervene; while also believing the south was meant to be governed by white men. African American's in 1865 were granted the right to vote, which angered southerners with this outrage; they formed the redeemers that set out to save the way of life they had become accustomed too. These redeemers went after the republican government while galvanizing white southerners against the republicans and making them have to rely on African American voters, who were outnumbered in the south compared to whites. Roark(2020) states one way they increased southern whites voting democrat by "Because few freedmen succeeded in acquiring land, they rarely paid taxes. In Georgia, in 1874, blacks made up 45 percent of the population but paid only 2 percent of the taxes. From the perspective of a small white farmer, Republican rule meant that he

was not only paying more taxes but paying them to aid blacks'(pg.245). During this time, Whites also rigged elections, and if African American men disputed the resulted, it often resulted in death for the black men and no consequences for the white men as they would not prosecute their neighbors.

During this time, African Americans gained some rights, such as voting, land ownership, and freedom. White southerners made sure to hold on to their ways of life as long as possible and push back what republicans and the north had put into place. They succeeded for some time as Andrew Johnson wasn't enforcing the emancipation in the south. Southern Republicans continued forcing the issue, which resulted in the Ku Klux klan act that made it a felony to interfere with voting. Although minor stepping stones, it was the start of freedom for African Americans

Resources

Roark, J.L, Johnson, M.P., Furstenburg, F., Stage, W., & Igo, S.E. (2020). Reconstruction. In *The American Promise: a History of the United States*. New York, NY: Bedford/St, Martin.