

**After Emancipation, How did Ex-Slaves Exercise their New Freedoms, and How did White
Southerners Attempt to Limit them?**

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Ex-slaves and Black people have been fighting for their rights and lives since the beginning of slavery and even today. Unfortunately, Black people from this era had so many challenges to overcome to be seen as a human being instead of a working machine. One moment everything seemed to be turning up for ex-slaves, and the next they were fighting nail and teeth to be heard and seen. These White supremacists went so far out of their way to make sure that even though these ex-slaves were free, they wouldn't be letting them off easy.

After Emancipation, it was already clear that White people were upset by this new change of Black people able to leave the plantations and be on their own. It's strange that Roark (2020) says Black people "had reverted to their natural condition: lazy, irresponsible and wild," (p. 110). Aren't these the same people that worked day until night on fields for their masters, getting reprimanded for taking breaks, and literally helped build America during this time? After Lincoln was assassinated, Black people weren't ready for what was to come next.

Johnson himself was a wall against ex-slaves and Black people. He first "returned all confiscated and abandoned land to pardoned ex-Confederates, even if it was in the hands of freedmen," (Roark et al, p. 120). So even if ex-slaves had acquired some land after being free and it had belonged to an ex-confederate, it went back to them. Seems fair, right? Mississippi and Alabama rejected the idea of the Thirteenth Amendment, which was the amendment of abolishing slavery. Then the South created the black codes: "the codes sought to keep ex-slaves subordinate to whites by subjecting them to every sort of discrimination," (Roark et al, p. 121). At this point with these laws, a free black man could not own a gun, could not be on jury duty,

could not vote, certain language and gestures could be considered a crime, and last they made labor outside of farm work almost impossible by taxing it to obscene amounts.

The Civil Rights Act of 1866 was created to help void the black codes assure Black people to “full and equal benefit of all laws” (Roark et al, p. 124). Somehow from this, Johnson saw it as going against the constitution and tried to veto it, but failed. The Fourteenth Amendment let all those born in the U.S. and naturalized people many rights; a big part letting Black people feel equal. Naturally, Johnson used trying to get rid of the Fourteenth Amendment a way to get the South on his side for the 1866 elections. This led to the slaughter of eighty total Black people in New Orleans and Memphis by White southerners. After Johnson had done enough damage to the U.S., specifically ex-slaves, he was the first president impeached. He claimed “that he was merely defending the violated Constitution,” (Roark et al, p. 136). After this, he stayed away from meddling with Congress in regards to ex-slaves.

The Fifteenth Amendment was passed, letting any male citizen the right to vote, despite race. After Black people were legally allowed to vote, the Confederate veterans of the south thought that enough was enough with Black people having rights now, like voting, living on their own, and being able to go to school, and took matters into their own hands, thus forming the Ku Klux Klan. Since ex-slaves were taxed so high to work somewhere outside a plantation, it led them having to go back, but not without a change. Sharecropping was created, neither really being fair for Black people or ex-masters. Yes, it gave more freedom to ex-slaves without the 24/7 supervision, they had their family cabins, and were able to keep some part of the profit, but it relied too heavily on the landlord. They got half of the crop at the end of the harvest and living there on the plantation was never guaranteed by the landlord at the end, too.

The Democrats tried hard and hard to end this Reconstruction era many times, and eventually succeeding when Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes was elected as president. Since the Democrats controlled the House, they had plans to overthrow and ruin Hayes. Thus, the Compromise of 1877 was formed. This led to Hayes “from using the army to uphold the remaining Republican regimes in the South and to provide the South with substantial federal subsidies for railroads,” (Roark et al, p. 171). Blacks and ex-slaves had fought for years to be considered a human, and just like that with one compromise, it seemed lost. After this, the Jim Crow era was unfortunately started, thus an even longer time of suffrage for Black people and ex-slaves began.

References

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* (pp. 110-171). New York, NY: Bedford/St, Martin.