

# The Reconstruction Era: An Eternal Deficiency for African Americans Post Emancipation



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Competition Category: Humanities

## Introduction

- The Reconstruction Era in the United States lasted from 1863-1877. This period was developed to build the country back from damage that the Civil War caused.
- The purpose of this research was to show that Reconstruction had deficiencies and did not fulfill its goal of integrating African Americans into society or ensuring their rights were not infringed.
- My original research question was: “What was Reconstruction like for African Americans and what were its consequences?”
- What I found in my research is that African Americans did not receive true emancipation because the United States did not completely uphold their constitutional rights and the white supremacy in action blocked political and economic advancement.

## Materials and Methods

This research was conducted using a variety of primary sources. They range from state law archives to statements from government officials. There are also personal statements from former slaves who described their Reconstruction experience and white supremacists who threatened Black people. These sources provide direct evidence from the nineteenth century. It shows the thoughts of the people who lived Reconstruction.

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## Results



1. **African Americans lacked access to land:** During the war Union General William T. Sherman promised land distribution by stating that Blacks were “proverbially entitled 40 Acres and A Mule.” But this and other promises were not fulfilled.
- “The impression prevails to a great extent among the freedmen that on the 1st of January, 1866, the U.S Government is to give them lands- homesteads of forty acres- and that for the coming year it is not necessary for them to contract with their former masters, or other employers, for their labor. To correct his error, all Officers and Agents of this Bureau in South Carolina and Georgia, are hereby directed to give notice to the freedmen within their jurisdiction, that such expectations on their part are erroneous, and that the U.S Government has no lands to divide among them.”



2. **African Americans faced domestic terrorism while trying to integrate themselves into society:** White supremacists did not want to see Blacks as equal. They wanted to have control over their lives. This inspired vigilantly groups, one being the KKK.

- “Believing this to be a white mans Country we are bitterly opposed to negroes settieng up to farming for themselves...therefore you will have to share the sam fate of the ballance so you had better get reddy to emigrate north of the ohio river...but if not we will honor you with our presence pretty soon and if we have to come we will come with a colts pistole in one hand and a fire brand in the other.” (Henry County, Ky., Feb. 1867)

One former slave, Calvin Holly, called out such violence to the Freedman's Bureau:

- “Sir Suffer me to address you a few lines in reguard to the colered people in this State, from all I can learn and see, I think the colered people are in a great many ways being outraged beyound humanity, houses have been tourn down from over the heades of women and Children.” (Vicksburg, Ms. Dec. 1865)



3. **African Americans had to deal with discriminatory laws through Black Codes:** Below are some of the 1865 Mississippi Black Codes. It limited their rights and had them in constant fear because any minor move would put them in danger. They would re-enslave them after they had been declared “free.” These Codes were Jim Crow’s precursor.
- **Civil Rights:** “No freedman...[shall] rent or lease any lands or tenements except in incorporated cities or towns, in which places the corporate authorities shall control the same...”
- **Vagrancy Laws:** “..That all rogues and vagabonds...shall be deemed and considered vagrants...and upon conviction thereof shall be fined not exceeding one hundred dollars...and be imprisoned, at the discretion of the court.”
- **Apprentice Laws:** “...all freedmen...under the age of eighteen, in their respective counties...orphans, or whose parent or parents have not the means or who refuse to provide for and support said minors:...it shall be the duty of said probate court to order the clerk of said court to apprentice said minors to some competent and suitable person on such terms as the court may direct.”
- **Penal Codes:** “Be it further enacted, that if any freedman...convicted of any of the misdemeanors provided against in this act shall fail-or refuse, for the space of five days after conviction, to pay the fine and costs imposed, such person shall be hired out by the sheriff or other officer.”

## Conclusions

All of these acts not only contributed to the denial of humanity toward Black people, but also as free citizens in the United States. It was seen in the period of Reconstruction, the Jim Crow era, and well into the twentieth century. There was no union, or a possibility of it, because most whites did not want to have an integrated society. They instead reinforced white supremacy because it was a convenience for the white majority.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the History Department for making my experience at MSSU unforgettable. Special thanks to Dr. Fischer for his patience and guidance throughout this project, as well as Dr. Bever for her constant encouragement.