

Standard 5-1: The student will demonstrate an understanding of Reconstruction and its impact on racial relations in the United States.

5-1.4 Compare the economic and social effects of Reconstruction on different populations, including the move from farms to factories and the change from the plantation system to sharecropping. (E, P)

Taxonomy Level: B 2 Understand/Conceptual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

In 8th grade, students will summarize Reconstruction and its effects on daily life in South Carolina, including the experiences of plantation owners, small farmers, freedmen, women, and northern immigrants. (8-4.2)

In United States history, students will summarize the progress made by African Americans during Reconstruction and the subsequent reversals brought by Reconstruction's end, including the creation of the Freedman's Bureau, gains in educational and political opportunity, and the rise of anti-African American factions and legislation. (USHC-4.5)

It is essential for students to know:

The end of slavery, not Reconstruction policy, changed society in the South. The southern elite wanted to quickly reestablish the commercial viability of cotton production and thus retain their social position and regain political domination. As a result of losing their enslaved work force and a lack of cash to hire free workers, Southern planters were forced to find another way to work their land. They entered into **sharecropping** relationships with freedmen (5-1.3). Because state taxes were raised in order to provide for schools and other public services, some land owners, who were unable to pay the taxes, lost their land. However, the impact of these taxes was exaggerated by those Southerners who opposed the Reconstruction governments. Most landowners continued to own their land and be the social elite of the South. They had economic control over the sharecroppers and they regained political control as a result of the end of Reconstruction.

African Americans defined freedom differently than did most Northerners and Southerners. To them freedom meant literally that they could leave the plantation and do whatever they wanted to do. Most sought every opportunity to reestablish family connections and provide the basic necessities of life for these families. Most Northerners and Southerners were interested in reestablishing a labor system that ensured high productivity at little cost to the investor. Consequently, freedmen were often denied the opportunity to own land. However, since African Americans preferred not to be under the direct control of the landowners, they were willing to enter into sharecropping agreements. They moved away from the Big House to the plot of land they would work. They refused to work in work gangs or have their wives and children work the fields from sun up to sun down as they had been forced to do under slavery. Thus they gained some measure of social independence although they remained economically dependent on the landowners for land and credit. Many sought the opportunity to attend school and to worship as they pleased. They voted and elected African Americans and white Republicans who supported their interests to political offices.

For poor whites, the Reconstruction period allowed some to have a political voice for the first time. Because they cooperated with the Republican government in the South, they were called 'scalawags' by the Southern elite and remained in a position of social inferiority. Some poor whites entered into sharecropping or tenant farming relationships with landowners. Like African-American sharecroppers, they were economically dependent on the land owner for land and credit. These poor farmers needed cash advances on the crop in order to feed their families while they waited for the harvest. Often the

harvest did not cover the debt or the farmer needed to borrow again the next year in order to sustain his family. This kept the sharecropper in a condition of constant debt and poverty and restricted his ability to improve his economic situation by either moving or changing crops.

Some Northerners moved to the South during Reconstruction. Southerners accused these Northerners of taking advantage of the South, devastated by the war, and called them “carpetbaggers.” This derisive name suggested that they were opportunists who had packed all of their belongings in a carpetbag and come south to line their own pockets. However, the historical record shows that most of the Northern migrants came as missionaries and entrepreneurs to help to educate the freedmen and rebuild the economy of the South.

The movement from farms to factories did not occur during Reconstruction, but rather during the last two decades of the 19th century, after Reconstruction had ended. Entrepreneurs began to build textile factories in the Upcountry and later in the Midlands and Lowcountry. As prices for cotton fell due to worldwide overproduction and decreased demand, the profitability of farming decreased significantly. Cotton depleted the soil and the boll weevil devastated cotton crops and forced more farmers from the land. Textile factories attracted white workers from the farms. However, most jobs at the mills were denied to African American workers.

It is not essential for students to know:

Students do not need to know the names of any specific northern migrants (carpetbaggers) or Southern Republicans (scalawags). Students do not need to know how the end of slavery and the development of the sharecropping arrangement impacted the production of cotton. Students do not need to know the name of the system of debt, the crop lien system, or that the farmers were required by the creditor to continue to plant the cash crop cotton, which contributed to overproduction, the fall in price and soil depletion.

Assessment guidelines:

Appropriate assessments require students to **compare** the economic and social effects of Reconstruction on the landowners, freedmen, poor whites, and Northerners. They should be able to **explain** how the sharecropping system worked to allow social independence but continued economic dependence.