



The Granger Collection, New York

This painting shows a new South rising from the ashes of the Civil War. Although southern leaders hoped this would be the future of the South, most whites and African Americans continued to live in poverty.

23.6 Reconstruction Reversed

With Reconstruction over, southern leaders talked of building a “New South” humming with mills, factories, and cities. Between 1880 and 1900, the number of textile mills in the South grew rapidly. Birmingham, Alabama, became a major iron-making center. Still, most southerners, black and white, remained trapped in an “Old South” of poverty.

Losing Ground in Education During Reconstruction, freedmen had pinned their hopes for a better life on education provided by the South’s first public schools. When southern Democrats regained control of states, however, they cut spending on education. “Free schools are not a necessity,” explained the governor of Virginia. Schools, he said, “are a luxury...to be paid for, like any other luxury, by the people who wish their benefits.”

As public funding dried up, many schools closed. Those that stayed open often charged fees. By the 1880s, only about half of all black children in the South attended school.

Losing Voting Rights Southern Democrats also reversed the political gains made by freedmen after the war. Many southern states passed laws requiring citizens who wanted to vote to pay a poll tax. The tax was set high enough that voting, like education, became a luxury that many black southerners could not afford.

Some southern states also required citizens to pass a literacy test to show that they could read before allowing them to vote. These tests were rigged (set up) to fail any African American, regardless of his education.

In theory, these laws applied equally to blacks and whites and, for that reason, did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment. In practice, however, whites were excused from paying poll taxes or taking literacy tests by a “grandfather clause” in the laws. This clause said the taxes and tests did not apply to any man whose father or grandfather could vote on January 1, 1867. Since no blacks could vote on that date, the grandfather clause applied only to whites.

African Americans protested that these laws denied them their Constitutional right to vote. The Supreme Court, however, ruled that the new voting laws did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment because they did not deny anyone the right to vote on the basis of race.

Drawing a "Color Line" During Reconstruction, most southern states had outlawed segregation in public places. When Democrats returned to power, they reversed these laws and drew a "color line" between blacks and whites in public life. Whites called the new segregation acts **Jim Crow laws**.

Not all white southerners supported segregation. When a Jim Crow law was proposed in South Carolina, the *Charleston News and Courier* tried to show how silly it was by taking segregation to ridiculous extremes.

If there must be Jim Crow cars on railroads, there should be Jim Crow cars on the street railways. Also on all passenger boats.... There should be Jim Crow waiting saloons [waiting rooms] at all stations, and Jim Crow eating houses.... There should be Jim Crow sections of the jury box, and a separate Jim Crow...witness stand in every court—and a Jim Crow Bible for colored witnesses to kiss.

Instead of being a joke, as intended, most of these "silly" suggestions soon became laws.

Plessy v. Ferguson African Americans argued that segregation laws violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of "equal protection of the laws." Homer Plessy, who was arrested for refusing to obey a Jim Crow law, took his protest all the way to the Supreme Court. His case is known as *Plessy v. Ferguson*.

In 1896, the majority of Supreme Court justices ruled that segregation laws did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as the facilities available to both races were roughly equal. Justice John Marshall Harlan, a former slaveholder, disagreed. "Our Constitution is color blind," he wrote, "and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens."

After the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson*, more Jim Crow laws were passed. Blacks and whites attended separate schools, played in separate parks, and sat in separate sections in theaters. But despite the Court's ruling that these separate facilities must be equal, those set aside for African Americans were almost always inferior to facilities labeled "whites only."

Jim Crow laws Laws enforcing segregation of blacks and whites in the South after the Civil War. "Jim Crow" was a black character in an entertainer's act in the mid-1800s.

In the cartoon below, Thomas Nast attacks the Ku Klux Klan and other white supremacist groups. According to this cartoon, what did supremacist groups do to African Americans? What does the label "Worse Than Slavery" mean?



The Granger Collection, New York

23.7 Responding to Segregation

African Americans responded to segregation in many ways. The boldest protested openly. Doing so, however, was dangerous. Blacks who spoke out risked being attacked by white mobs. Some were even lynched, or murdered (often by hanging), for speaking out against “white rule.” During the 1890s, there was an African American lynched somewhere in the United States almost every day.



Two units of African American cavalrymen, the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, fought in the Indian wars that followed the end of the Civil War. Dubbed “Buffalo Soldiers” by Native Americans, the black cavalrymen served loyally but were often mistreated by the white settlers they were supposed to protect. Twenty-three Buffalo Soldiers earned the Medal of Honor for heroism.

often faced racism, if not southern-style segregation. Others headed to the West, where they found work as cowboys and Indian fighters. Two all-black U.S. Cavalry units known as the Buffalo Soldiers fought on the front lines of the Indian wars. Ironically, some blacks found new homes with Native American nations.

Thousands of black families left the South for Kansas in the “Exodus of 1879.” The “exodusters,” as the migrants were known, faced many hardships on their journey west. Bands of armed whites patrolled roads in Kansas in an effort to drive the migrants away. Still, the exodusters pushed on, saying, “We had rather suffer and be free.”

Self-Help Most African Americans, however, remained in the South. They worked hard as families, churches, and communities to improve their lives. While most blacks farmed for a living, a growing number started their own businesses. Between 1865 and 1903, the number of black-owned businesses in the South soared from about 2,000 to 25,000.

Families, churches, and communities also banded together to build schools and colleges for black children. Because of these efforts, literacy among African Americans rose rapidly. When slavery ended in 1865, only 5 percent of African Americans could read. By 1900, more than 50 percent could read and write.

Migration Thousands of African Americans responded to segregation by leaving the South. A few chose to return to Africa. In 1878, some 200 southern blacks chartered a ship and sailed to Liberia, a nation founded by freed American slaves on the coast of West Africa.

Many more African Americans migrated to other parts of the United States. Not only were they “pushed” from the South by racism and poverty, but they were “pulled” by the lure of better opportunities and more equal treatment. Some sought a new life as wage earners by migrating to cities in the North. There they competed for jobs with recent immigrants from Europe and