The Freedmen

The thousands of freedmen (former slaves) faced great hardships. Homeless, uneducated and free for first time in their lives, the freedmen had little more than the clothes on their backs. Many went from place to place looking for food, shelter, and work. Some traveled just to demonstrate that they could. Others searched for spouses, children and other family members, or friends who had been sold away from them during slavery.

The Freedmen’s Bureau

In an effort to help the struggling freedmen, the United States government established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in March 1865. Its first commissioner was Union General Oliver O. Howard, who later founded Howard University in Washington, D.C. The original purpose of the agency, which soon became known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, was to help both former slaves, and poor whites cope with their everyday problems by offering them clothing, food and other necessities.

After a while, the bureau’s focus changed, it became concerned mainly with helping the freedmen adjust to their new circumstances. An important focus was education. The bureau set up over 4,000 primary schools, 64 industrial schools, and 74 teacher-training institutions for young African Americans in addition to spending over $400,000 to help establish teacher-training centers.

Northerners and missionary societies helped by sending both money and teachers. In 1867, the American Missionary Association sponsored the chartering of Georgia’s Atlanta University. The American Baptist Home Mission society organized Morehouse College in Augusta. Morehouse, which moved to Atlanta in 1870 is still in operation today. A third Georgia Reconstruction-era school was Clark College in Atlanta, which first opened as a school for children. By 1877, it had become a college.

Freedmen’s Bureau

The thousands of freedmen faced great hardships. Homeless, uneducated and free for first time in their lives the freedmen had little more than the clothes on their backs. Many went from place to place looking for food, shelter, and work. Some traveled just to demonstrate that they could. Others searched for spouses, children other family members, or friends who had been sold away from them during slavery.

In an effort to help the struggling freedmen, the US government established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands in March 1865. Its first commissioner was Union General Oliver O. Howard who later founded Howard University in Washington, D.C. The original purpose of the agency, which soon became known as the Freedmen’s Bureau, was to help both former slaves and poor whites cope with their everyday problems by offering them clothing, food and other necessities. After a while the bureau’s focus changed; it became concerned mainly with helping the freedmen adjust to their new circumstances. An important focus was education. The bureau set up over 4000 primary schools, 64 industrial schools, and 74 teacher-training institutions for young African Americans in addition to spending over $400,000 to help establish teacher-training centers.

Northerners and Missionary societies helped by sending both money and teachers. In 1867, the American Missionary Association sponsored the chartering of Georgia’s Atlanta University. The American Baptist Home Mission society organized Morehouse College in Augusta (which moved to Atlanta in 1870). A third Georgia Reconstruction-era school was Clark College in Atlanta, which first opened as a school for children.
Lincoln’s Plan for Reconstruction (VENN DIAGRAM)

During the closing days of the war, President Lincoln developed a plan to rebuild the South and restore the southern states to the Union as quickly and easily as possible. The process was known as Reconstruction. Lincoln’s plan had two simple steps: 1) All southerners, except for high-ranking Confederate civil and military leaders, would be pardoned after taking an oath of allegiance to the United States, and 2) when 10 percent of the voters in each state had taken the oath of loyalty, the state would be permitted to form a legal government and rejoin the Union.

It soon became apparent that Congress and many northerners thought that the South should be punished. They believed that those Confederate states that seceded should be treated like a conquered country. In 1864, Congress passed the Wad-Davis Bill, which Lincoln saw as an attempt to punish the South for the actions of the secessionists. Lincoln did not sign the bill into law; he let it die quietly. This action signaled that there would be a fight over Reconstruction. Lincoln, however, was not part of that fight.

During the closing days of the Civil War, President Lincoln developed a plan, commonly called the “Ten Percent Plan,” to rebuild the South and restore the southern states to the Union as quickly and easily as possible. The process was known as Reconstruction. Lincoln’s plan had two simple steps: 1) All southerners, except for high-ranking Confederate civil and military leaders, would be pardoned after taking an oath of allegiance to the United States; and 2) when 10 percent of the voters in each state had taken the oath of loyalty, the state would be permitted to form a legal government and rejoin the Union.

Johnson Reconstruction

Johnson’s Reconstruction plan was much like Lincoln’s plan except that Johnson expanded the groups of southerners not granted a general pardon. Those who had owned property worth more than $20,000 or those who had held high civil or military positions had to apply directly to the president for a pardon.

At first, some of the radicals were willing to work with Johnson because they approved of his plan to offer a reward for the arrest of Jefferson Davis. But after Davis was captured and imprisoned, the radicals turned their attention back to the president’s plan and began to disagree with it. They were afraid that the freedmen would be disfranchised (have their voting rights taken away). They also thought that the South deserved a greater punishment than Johnson’s plan provided.

After some pressure, President Johnson added several more requirements. First, the southern states had to approve the 13th Amendment, which made slavery illegal. Second, the southern states had to nullify (declare invalid) their ordinances of secession. Third, the southern states had to promise not to repay the individuals and institutions that had helped finance the Confederacy.
Congressional Reconstruction

Black codes were created by the south to control the freedoms of the African-Americans

Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866. This law not only extended citizenship to African Americans, it also gave the federal government the right and responsibility to intervene any time civil rights were taken away from the newly freed men and women. To ensure this. Congress pass the 14th Amendment which granted citizenship to the freedmen and forbade any state from denyig anyone the “equal protection of the law.”

That same year the radical Republicans gained control of both houses of Congress. They maintained that the southern states were not adequately reconstruccted and must ratify the 14th Amendment before they could rejoin the Union. One radical, Thaddus Stevens wanted to punish the South even more by breaking up all of the plantations and providing every farm slave with “forty acres and a mule”. But the Republicans, who valued personal property refused to seriously consider his plan.

Congress and many northerners thought that the South should be punished. They believed that those Confederate states that had seceded should be treated like a conquered country. In 1864 Congress passed the Wade-Davis Bill, which Lincoln saw as an attempt to punish the South for the actions of the secessionists. Lincoln did not sign the bill into law; he let it die quietly. This action signaled that there would be a fight over Reconstruction. Lincoln’s assassination took place before his plan for Reconstruction went into effect. Upon Lincoln’s death, Vice President Andrew Johnson, a North Carolinian, became the nation’s seventeenth president. Soon after taking office, he took on the responsibility for returning the former Confederate states to the Union. In June 1865, President Johnson appointed James Johnson as Georgia’s provisional governor because, as a congressman, Johnson had opposed secession.

Carpetbaggers – were northerners who moved south after the war.

Scalawags – a term used to describe southerners who supported the Republicans.

Reconstruction Ends

In 1870 the General Assembly of Georgia met and reseated the African American representatives who had been expelled from the General Assembly in September of 1868.
Henry McNeal Turner and Black Legislators

In 1867 African Americans voted for the first time in Georgia. In 1868 they helped elect a Republican governor. They also helped elect twenty-nine African Americans to the Georgia House of representatives and three African Americans to the Georgia senate. Some of those elected were Tunis G. Campbell, Jr., Henry McNeal Turner, and Aaron A. Bradley. However, all of these men were expelled in September 1868 on the grounds that although the constitution had given them the right to vote, it did not specifically give them the right to hold political office.

During Reconstruction, African Americans formed the largest group of southern Republicans, and thousands voted in the new elections to help keep Republicans in power. By the same token, Republican carpetbaggers, along with some agents and many volunteers of the Freedmen's Bureau, worked hard to make African Americans part of the political scene.

Realizing political empowerment (the ability to bring about change) for the first time, thousands joined the Union League, which had become the freedmen's political organization. From church meetings to picnics and family gatherings, politics became “the” topic of discussion and debate.

African Americans in Politics

In 1867, African Americans voted for the first time in Georgia. In 1868 they helped elect a Republican governor. They also helped elect twenty-nine African Americans to the Georgia house of representatives and three African Americans to the Georgia senate. Some of those elected were Tunis G. Campbell Jr., Henry McNeal Turner and Aaron A. Bradley. All of these men were expelled in September 1868 on the grounds that although the constitution had given them the right to vote, it did not specifically give them the right to hold political office.

During Reconstruction the African Americans formed the largest group of southern Republicans, and thousands voted in the new elections to help keep Republicans in power. By the same token Republican carpetbaggers along with some agents and many volunteers of the Bureau, worked hard to make African Americans part of the political scene. Hiram Revels and Blanche Bruce of Mississippi were the first African Americans to serve as U.S. senators. Other served in the U.S. House of Representatives and the state legislatures.
During this same time period the Ku Klux Klan became a force in Georgia. The Klan, as it was called was one of several secret organizations that tried to keep freedmen from exercising their new civil rights. The group began in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865 as a social club for returning soldiers. However it quickly changed into a force of terror. Its members dressed in robes and hoods so no one would recognize them. They terrorized and intimidated African Americans to keep them from voting and by doing so to return control of the state to the Democrats. There were numerous reports of beatings, whippings, and murders.

Freedmen who were not frightened away from the polls were carefully watched. Those voting Republican lay awake at night listening for the sounds of horses indicating the Klan was nearby. All knew that the price for suffrage (voting rights) could be death. Hostilities between whites and African Americans increased, and there were many incidents of racial conflict.

During Reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan became a force in Georgia. The Klan, as it was called was one of several secret organizations that tried to keep freedmen from exercising their new civil rights. The group began in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1865 as a social club for returning soldiers. However, it quickly changed into a force of terror. Its members dressed in robes and hoods so no one would recognize them. They terrorized and intimidated African Americans to keep them from voting and, by doing so, to return control of the state to the Democrats. There were numerous reports of beatings, whippings, and murders.

Freedmen who were not frightened away from the polls were carefully watched. Those voting Republican lay awake at night listening for the sounds of horses, indicating the Klan was nearby. All knew that the price for suffrage (voting rights) could be death. Hostilities between whites and African Americans increased, and there were many incidents of racial conflict.

**KU KLUX KLAN ACTIVITIES INCREASED THROUGHOUT THE STATE, AND THERE WAS EVIDENCE THAT THE GROUP HAD PREVENTED MANY AFRICAN AMERICANS FROM VOTING IN THE 1868 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. GOVERNOR RUFUS BULLOCK APPEALED TO THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FOR HELP. CONGRESS RESPONDED BY PASSING THE GEORGIA ACT IN DECEMBER 1869. THIS LAW RETURNED GEORGIA TO MILITARY CONTROL FOR THE THIRD TIME. GENERAL ALFRED TERRY BECAME GEORGIA’S NEW MILITARY COMMANDER, AND RUFUS BULLOCK BECAME THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNOR.**

**Georgia Act and the KKK**

This law returned Georgia to military control for the third time. General Alfred Terry became Georgia’s new military commander, and Rufus Bullock became the provisional governor.

Earlier in the year Congress had passed the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which gave all male citizens the right to vote.
Sharecropping and Tenant Farming

Planters and farmers needed laborers to work on their land. And there were many former slaves, as well as some landless whites, who needed jobs. Workers who had nothing but their labor to offer often resorted to sharecropping. Under this system the landowners provided land, a house, farming tools and animals, seed and fertilizer. The workers agreed to give the owner a share of the harvest. Until the workers sold their crop, the owners often let them have food, medicine, clothing and other supplies at high prices on credit. Credit is the ability to buy something now and pay for it later or over a period of time.

For many, this credit was their undoing. After selling the crop and paying the bills, the typical sharecropper had little, if any, cash left. Because few sharecroppers could read or count, the planter or the store owner could easily cheat them and many did. Year after year sharecroppers were in debt. They had little hope they could ever save enough to buy their own land and equipment.

Tenant farming was similar to sharecropping. The main difference was the tenants usually owned some agricultural equipment and farm animals, such as mules. They also bought their own seed and fertilizer. At the end of the year tenant farmers either paid the landowner a set amount of cash or an agreed-upon share of the crop. Because tenant farmers owned more than sharecroppers, they usually made a small profit.

Tenant farming and the sharecropper system allowed landowners to keep their farm land operational without having to spend money for labor.

Sharecropping

After the war planters and farmers needed laborers to work on their land. There were many former slaves, as well as some landless whites, who needed jobs. Workers who had nothing but their labor to offer often resorted to sharecropping. Under this system the landowners provided land, a house, farming tools and animals, seed, and fertilizer. The workers agreed to give the owner a share of the harvest. Until the workers sold their crop, the owners often let them have food, medicine, clothing, and other supplies at high prices on credit. Credit is the ability to buy something now and pay for it later or over a period of time.

For many this credit was their undoing. After selling the crop the paying of bills, the typical sharecropper had little, if any, cash left. Because few sharecroppers could read or count, the planter or the store owner could easily cheat them, and many did. Year after year, sharecroppers were in debt. They had little hope they could ever save enough to buy their own land and equipment.

Tenant Farming

Tenant farming was similar to sharecropping. The main difference was that tenants usually owned some agricultural equipment and farm animals, such as mules. They also brought their own seed and fertilizer. At the end of the year tenant farmers either paid the landowner a set amount of cash or an agreed-upon share of the crop. Because tenant farmers owned more than sharecroppers, they usually made a small profit. However, the lives of both groups were very hard. The tenant farming and sharecropping systems allowed landowners to keep their farms in operation without having to spend money for labor.

On the surface, it would seem that landowners who used tenants and sharecroppers made a profit while taking few risks. However, many landowners who did not have the money to buy the needed seed, fertilizer, and tools borrowed the money and used the crops to back up the loan. Interest on such loans was often more than the crops were worth. Because bankers expected farmers to grow cotton or tobacco year after year, the soil was eventually ruined. In time, many landowners in the south, like the sharecroppers and tenants who worked their land became poorer each year.
The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which continued the work of the Emancipation Proclamation, officially abolished slavery. The amendment was passed by Congress in January 1865 and submitted to the states for ratification. It was ratified in December 1865. President Andrew Johnson made ratification of the amendment a requirement for the southern states to rejoin the Union.

Although the Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery it did not abolish discrimination (unfair treatment of a person or group because of prejudice). By 1865 most of the southern states, including Georgia, had passed a number of laws known as Black Codes, which were designed to restrict the rights of the freedmen. Congressional reaction to the Black Codes was fairly swift. The fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to the freedmen and forbade any state from denying anyone the equal protection of the law. Congress passed the amendment in June 1865 and it was ratified in July 1868.

The Fifteen Amendment granted all male citizens the right to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The amendment was submitted to the states in February 1869 and ratified in February 1870.