

*A New South?  
The South After the Civil War*

After the Civil War, sharecropping and tenant farming took the place of slavery and the plantation system in the South. Sharecropping and tenant farming were systems in which white landlords (often former plantation slave owners) entered into contracts with impoverished farm laborers to work their lands. Those who worked the fields shared a portion of the crop yield with the landlord as payment for renting the land. Under the sharecropping system, the landlord typically supplied the capital to buy the seed and equipment needed to sow, cultivate, and harvest a crop, while the sharecropper supplied the labor. In other tenancy farming arrangements the laborer, not the landowner, took responsibility for purchase of seed and equipment.

Yet, because prices on cotton and other crops remained low, sharecroppers and tenant farmers often fell into a cycle of indebtedness called debt peonage: farmers found that the money they made selling their crops at the end of the growing season was not enough to pay back the loans they had taken out for seed, tools, farm equipment, and living expenses, leaving them owing more after a year of labor than they had when they started.

This system left both black and white tenant farmers living in dire poverty. In addition, since no one had any money to spend, the southern economy stagnated.

Enter Henry W. Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, a newspaper in Georgia's capital city. In a series of impassioned public speeches and articles, Grady envisioned a southern economy enriched with broadly expanded manufacturing facilities and commerce. Grady and like-minded southerners referred to this regional economic remake as the "New South."

There were some New South successes. Birmingham, Alabama prospered from iron and steel manufacturing, and mining and furniture production benefited other parts of the South. Likewise, James Duke made use of newly invented cigarette rolling machines to feed the growing market for tobacco and founded the American Tobacco Company in North Carolina in 1890.

The most notable New South initiative was the introduction of textile mills in the South. Beginning in the early 1880s, northern capitalists invested in building textile mills in the southern Appalachian foothills of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, drawn to the region by the fact that they could pay southern mill workers at half the rate of workers in northern mills. In consequence of the low wages the mills gave only a modest boost to the southern economies in which they were built.

Although new industries did emerge in this era, the benefits of the New South did not accrue to African Americans or poor whites. Although Grady dreamed of a new South of increasing economic prosperity, his vision did not extend to civil rights for African Americans. "I declare," said Grady in an 1888 address, "that . . . the white race must dominate forever in the South." In the New South, landlords and factory owners prospered, but sharecropping and low-wage factory work kept many across the region from escaping dire poverty

For African Americans in the South, life after slavery was a world transformed. Gone were the brutalities and indignities of slave life, the whippings and sexual assaults, the selling and forcible relocation of family members, the denial of education, wages, legal marriage, homeownership, and more. African Americans celebrated their newfound freedom, promised in the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, both privately and in public jubilees.

But life in the years after slavery also proved to be difficult. Although slavery was over, the brutalities of white race prejudice persisted. After slavery, government across the South instituted laws known as Black Codes. These laws granted certain legal rights to blacks, including the right to marry, own property, and sue in court, but the Codes also made it illegal for blacks to serve on juries, testify against whites, or serve in state militias. The Black Codes also required black sharecroppers and tenant farmers to sign annual labor contracts with white landowners. If they refused they could be arrested and hired out for work.

Angry whites in the South sometimes resorted to violence to intimidate blacks. In 1866 the Ku Klux Klan was formed as a secret society of white supremacists in Tennessee to terrorize blacks. Klansmen wore white hoods to conceal their identities, harassed and beat blacks, carpetbaggers, and scalawags, and sometimes conducted lynchings.

Southern states also instituted poll taxes, literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and Jim Crow laws to limit the ability of African Americans to exercise their rights protected by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. A poll tax, a fee for voting was first introduced in 1871. By 1910 eleven states (all in the South) had a poll tax. Generally it was \$1-2 but in a few states the tax was cumulative. It is estimated that the poll tax reduced overall voter turnout 16-28% and black turnout by 50%. It seems clear its purpose was to disenfranchise and not to raise revenue since no state brought prosecution against those that failed to pay.

Literacy tests were first introduced in 1890. 40-60% of Blacks were illiterate compared to 8-18% of whites. Often the test had three parts: a verbal section which required a section of the Constitution to be read aloud and in some cases verbally interpreted; and two sets of "general knowledge" questions [Scroll to the final page of this document and attempt to take the attached copy of a "literacy test." Complete this as a spiral assignment on an even numbered

page next to the notes you have been taking and title the assignment “Literacy Test.” Could you have passed this test?] A three member Board of Registrars, often in secret, then reviewed the application at a later date. It was entirely up to them whether one passed or not. This allowed for discriminatory administration.

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 (the last civil rights policy passed during Reconstruction) had guaranteed equal accommodations in public places. But various southern hotels, theaters, and railway companies began to deny African-Americans the full enjoyment in violation of the law and the Fourteenth Amendment. This was challenged in a series of cases that make their way to the Supreme Court and are referred to as the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883). The Court ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protection of equal rights applied only to state sanctioned discrimination. The Civil Rights Act 1875 was unconstitutional because the federal government can’t compel an individual or business to not discriminate. Discrimination was a private wrong that the national government was powerless to correct.

States and cities also passed Jim Crow laws – laws that allowed segregated public facilities. Many questioned whether these laws were a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment. Weren’t Jim Crow laws representative of the state-sanctioned discrimination described by the Supreme Court in the 1883 *Civil Rights Cases*? Homer Plessy, a person of mixed ethnicity was arrested for refusing to leave a railroad car designated “whites only” in Louisiana in 1892. This case was a test of the 14th amendment’s “equal protection” clause. The Supreme Court said that there could be separate facilities for blacks and whites as long as they were substantially equal thus establishing the separate but equal precedent. Summarizing the majority ruling, Justice Henry Brown wrote, "We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff's argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it." The *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896) ruling rendered *de jure* segregation (segregation by law) legal throughout the United States.

Segregated in inferior schools and separated from whites in virtually all public facilities blacks were assaulted daily galling reminders of their second-class citizenship. To ensure the stability of this “new order,” southern whites dealt harshly with any black that dared to violate the South’s racial code of conduct. A record number of blacks were lynched during the 1890s, most often for the “crime” of asserting themselves as equals. To what extent, then, did a “New South” exist? To what extent was Reconstruction a turning point in the lives of African Americans?

### **Literacy Test**

*Directions: You have five minutes to answer the questions below. Please note that one wrong answer denotes failure of the test.*

1. What body can try impeachments of the president of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
2. If a person charged with treason denies his guilt, how many persons must testify against him before he can be convicted? \_\_\_\_\_
3. If the president does not wish to sign a bill, how many days is he allowed in which to return it to Congress for reconsideration? \_\_\_\_\_
4. If a person seeks to search your home, what kind of paper must he have before you are compelled to allow him to do it? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What officer is designated by the Constitution to be president of the Senate of the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Can the state coin money with the consent of Congress? \_\_\_\_\_
7. The power of granting patents, that is, of securing to inventors the exclusive right to their discoveries, is given to the Congress for the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_
8. In what year did the Congress gain the right to prohibit the migration of persons to the states? \_\_\_\_\_
9. The president is forbidden to exercise his authority of pardon in cases of \_\_\_\_\_.
10. At what time of day on January 20 each four years does the term of the president of the United States end? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Has the following part of the US Constitution been changed? "Representatives shall be apportioned among the several states according to their respective numbers, counting the whole number of persons in each state, excluding Indians not taxed." \_\_\_\_\_
12. True or False? Law requires that "In God we trust" be placed on all money issued in the United States. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Does the population of the state affect the amount of individual or corporate income taxes which may be levied on its citizens? \_\_\_\_\_
14. Who pays member of Congress for the services, their home states or the United States? \_\_\_\_\_
15. If the United States is a party in a suit can the case be heard in a federal court? \_\_\_\_\_
16. A person opposed to swearing in an oath may say, instead: I solemnly \_\_\_\_\_.
17. A U.S. senator elected at the general election in November takes office the following year on what date? \_\_\_\_\_.