

THE NEW SOUTH



Richmond, Virginia: 1913

Unit Overview

In the post-Civil War era, the South faced the task of rebuilding its economy and its infrastructure. Through industrialization and the diversification of agriculture, the region made great strides, and the New South emerged. However, social and political attitudes reverted to their pre-war status, and African Americans were denied the rights granted to them in a series of constitutional amendments. The Supreme Court, with its decision in *Plessy v Ferguson*, institutionalized a separate-but-equal doctrine that would dictate the treatment of African Americans for the next sixty years. Let's see how it all happened.

A Changing Economy

Since most of the fighting during the Civil War occurred in the South, this region of the United States faced a number of severe challenges in the decades following the conflict. A decline in property values, damaged railroad lines and devastated fields created a state of economic adversity. Entire sections of major cities and towns had been burned to the ground throughout the former Confederate states, and the meaning of freedom for former slaves as promised by the Emancipation Proclamation was yet to be determined.

However, there were those who saw opportunity in the ruins and promoted the potential of the **New South**. **Henry W. Grady**, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, traveled across the country to give a series of speeches designed to encourage investors and to restore regional pride. Grady and other southern intellectuals firmly believed that the reliance on a single primary cash crop had to change, and they also emphasized the need to follow the North's example of industrialization.

The old South rested everything on slavery and agriculture, unconscious that these could neither give nor maintain healthy growth. The new South presents a perfect democracy, the oligarchs leading in the popular movement—a social system compact and closely knitted, less splendid on the surface, but stronger at the core—a hundred farms for every plantation, fifty homes for every palace—and a diversified industry that meets the complex need of this complex age.

The new South is enamored of her new work. Her soul is stirred with the breath of a new life. The light of a grander day is falling fair on her face. She is thrilling with the consciousness of growing power and prosperity. As she stands upright, full-statured and equal among the people of the earth, breathing the keen air and looking out upon the expanded horizon, she understands that her emancipation came because through the inscrutable wisdom of God her honest purpose was crossed, and her brave armies were beaten.

Henry W. Grady

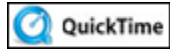
The diversification of agriculture and industrialization did help to rebuild the economy of the former Confederate states in the last decades of the nineteenth century. Along with cotton, tobacco, rice and sugar also found their marketing power. New railroad construction inspired cotton manufacturers to build textile mills throughout the South, and Birmingham's steel plants earned Alabama's premier industrial city the nickname "the Pittsburgh of the South". Lumber from southern pine forests made its way north and west for both commercial and residential construction. The manufacture of paper products also became a profitable southern business.



Picking Cotton: 1913

Exactly how former slaves fit into the economy of the New South proved to be another matter. Because they wanted to support their own families, African Americans needed land to farm. During Reconstruction, freedmen began to plant crops on land that had been taken over by the Union Army, but these properties were restored to their former owners by **President Andrew Johnson**. President Johnson was criticized for what Republicans considered a biased decision on the grounds that he had once been a slave holder and a Democrat. This policy reduced many former slaves and poor white farmers to the status of **sharecroppers**. Because southern planters had little or no cash reserves when the Civil War ended, they divided their fields into small plots. Sharecroppers agreed to raise cash crops, such as cotton and tobacco, on these parcels; they also contracted to give one-half of their crop to the landlord in exchange for land, a cabin and

supplies. Although sharecropping did give African Americans a greater degree of freedom than slavery, the practice almost always resulted in poverty and economic dependency.



Memories of Sharecropping

Go to Questions 1 through 6.

The Politics of the New South

During the Reconstruction Era, white Republicans, freed slaves and transplanted northerners joined political forces throughout the South and elected Republican dominated legislatures in almost every state that had been part of the Confederacy. Although these law-making bodies have been condemned for their corruption and incompetence, they did make some positive contributions. For example, these Reconstruction legislatures approved funding for public education and created laws to modernize transportation throughout the South. On the federal level, Congress approved the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Known as the **Reconstruction Amendments**, these provisions attempted to guarantee the rights of citizenship and the privilege of voting to African Americans.



Poster celebrating the Fifteenth Amendment

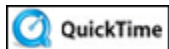
With the removal of federal troops in 1877, however, Reconstruction drew to a close, and many reforms were soon repealed or ignored. The U.S. Congress focused its attention on big business, the economic depression of the 1870s and a series of political scandals that rocked Washington D.C. The fervor of the abolitionist groups that had supported the cause of African Americans also waned. The demise of the **Freedman's Savings and Trust Company** illustrates the lack of interest. When this bank closed in 1874 due to mismanagement, bad investments and the poor economic conditions of the times, most depositors, a group primarily consisting of freed slaves, lost their savings when Congress refused to intervene.

A number of southerners were determined to restore the Democratic Party to power and to return ex-Confederates to influential positions. They were also determined to regain a culture of white superiority. In 1865 and 1866, several states, beginning with Mississippi, instituted racially motivated laws known as **Black Codes**. These acts severely limited the civil rights of African Americans by prohibiting them from serving on juries, testifying against white citizens in courts, conducting business and owning property. They also often included clauses referring to vagrancy, similar to the one quoted below.

The Civil Rights of Freedmen of Mississippi: 1865

That all freedmen, free negroes and mulattoes in this State, over the age of eighteen years, found on the second Monday in January, 1866, or thereafter, without lawful employment or business, or found unlawfully assembling themselves together, either in the day or night time, and all white persons so assembling themselves with freedmen, free negroes or mulattoes, or usually associating with freedmen, free negroes or mulattoes, on terms of equality, or living in adultery or fornication with a freed woman, free negro or mulatto, shall be deemed vagrants, and on conviction thereof shall be fined in a sum not exceeding, in the case of a freedman, free negro, or mulatto, fifty dollars, and a white man two hundred dollars, and imprisoned, at the discretion of the court, the free negro not exceeding ten days, and the white man not exceeding six months.

Although Congress attempted to emphasize the spirit of the Thirteenth Amendment by passing the **Civil Rights Act of 1866**, the law had little effect, and most states found ways to avoid compliance. Voting requirements, such as literacy tests, poll taxes, proof of residency and taxation receipts, instituted throughout the South effectively disenfranchised black voters. White voters, on the other hand, were generally exempt from these requirements if they owned property. When these tactics did not work, violence was also a viable option. The Ku Klux Klan, the White League and other nativist groups threatened Republican politicians, burned African-American homes and sometimes murdered their opponents.



Racial Equality

Go to Questions 7 through 13

Separate but Equal

The limitations placed on black voting rights made it easier for state legislators to pass other discriminatory laws. **Jim Crow laws**, named for a character in a minstrel show, supported the separation of races in public places. Separate schools, hospitals and cemeteries became legal requirements. The segregation of housing, cars on passenger trains, hotels and drinking fountains soon followed. The legality of these pieces of legislation did not go unchallenged, and

the Supreme Court agreed to hear the landmark case of *Plessy v Ferguson* in 1896. Louisiana's Jim Crow laws required that blacks and whites ride in separate cars when traveling on passenger trains. Homer Plessy, whose ancestry was one-eighth black, boarded with an appropriate ticket and took a seat in the train car reserved for whites. When he refused to move, Plessy was arrested and convicted. Plessy sued the company on the grounds that it violated the equal rights and due process guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment.

Amendment 14: Section 1

Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

When the Supreme Court ruled in this case, its 8-1 decision established the separate-but-equal doctrine that would remain in effect for sixty years. The decision declared that segregation under state law was constitutional as long as public facilities provided for blacks and whites were equal. The court further stated that any discrimination in the instance of Homer Plessy existed only in the mind of the African-American community. The one dissenting Justice, **John Marshall Harlan**, warned that the Constitution did not fulfill its obligation to remain color-blind when it handed down this ruling and that the country would have a difficult time atoning for this injustice. The Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v Ferguson* set a precedent that supported segregation and institutionalized racism. With the establishment of a separate-but-equal policy, the case upheld the adoption of Black Codes and Jim Crow laws.



Supreme Court Justice
John Marshall Harlan
Dissenting Opinion
Plessy v Ferguson
1896

The white race deems itself to be the dominant race in this country. And so it is, in prestige, in achievements, in education, in wealth, and in power. So, I doubt not, it will continue to be for all time, if it remains true to its great heritage and holds fast to the principles of constitutional liberty. But in the view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. The humblest is the peer of the most powerful. The law regards man as man and takes no account of his surroundings or of his color when his civil rights as guaranteed by the supreme law of the land are involved.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v Ferguson* set a precedent that supported segregation and institutionalized racism. These policies remained in effect for sixty years.

Go to Questions 14 through 16.

African American Leadership

At the beginning of the twentieth century, African Americans in the United States lived in a segregated society with a discriminatory culture. Literacy tests, poll taxes and open violence discouraged civic participation and active citizenship. Taking on the challenge of leadership under these conditions was a daunting task, but there were those men who persevered. **Booker T. Washington** and **W.E.B. DuBois** understood the importance of ending segregation and attaining equality. However, even though they agreed on the goals, these activists disagreed on the best approach to achieve them.



Booker T. Washington was born on a Virginia plantation in 1856 and escaped to West Virginia, which had become a state in the Union in 1863. As a young man, Washington worked in the coal fields and salt furnaces until he earned enough money to attend Hampton Institute, a high school established for the purpose of educating freedmen. After completing his courses, Booker T. Washington returned to his home and served as an elementary school teacher. A year later, he was hired to head a new school dedicated to the training of black teachers, farmers and skilled workers. Under his direction, **Tuskegee Institute** became the cornerstone of African-American education in the United States. Washington viewed the end of segregation as a long-term rather than a short-term goal. He argued that, if African Americans were truly going to gain equal political and civil rights, they had to prove their economic value to the white community. Therefore, learning useful trades, educating themselves and investing in their own businesses were primary concerns. For Washington, the most productive course of action was to gain economic power now and to pursue civil rights later. Although he was regarded as a bridge between the races, Booker T. Washington was criticized by several black leaders for tolerating segregation and for ignoring the increasing violence against African Americans.

There is no defense or security for any of us except in the highest intelligence and development of all. If anywhere there are efforts tending to curtail the fullest growth of the Negro, let these efforts be turned into stimulating, encouraging, and making him the most useful and intelligent citizen. Effort or means so invested will pay a thousand per cent interest. These efforts will be twice blessed—blessing him that gives and him that takes. There is no escape through law of man or God from the inevitable.

Booker T. Washington



One of Booker T. Washington's strongest critics was W.E.B. DuBois. Unlike Washington, DuBois grew up in the North and attended racially integrated schools in Massachusetts. As a scholarship recipient, he enrolled in Tennessee's Fiske University at the age of sixteen and completed his formal education with a doctorate from Harvard University. DuBois taught on the college level in Ohio but soon moved to Philadelphia. There, he became the director of a major study on the social conditions of African Americans living in that city. His research on the project convinced him that discrimination, not a lack of training, kept blacks in low-paying jobs. As a result, DuBois publicly opposed Washington's willingness to accept segregation temporarily and maintained that this philosophy was detrimental to African-American progress. When the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)** formed in 1909, Du Bois became the editor of *The Crisis*, the organization's magazine. By the time the United States entered World War I, W.E.B. DuBois was the most recognized African American leader in the country, but he continued to be frustrated by the lack of headway in securing civil rights for black community. Eventually, he left the United States, renounced his citizenship and became a citizen of the African nation of Ghana where he died in 1963.

The power of the ballot we
need in sheer defense,
else what shall save us
from a second slavery?
W.E.B. DuBois



Go to Questions 17 through 20.

What's Next?

As Americans moved into the twentieth century, many citizens began to question the negative effects of industrialization and urbanization. During what became known as the Progressive Movement, reformers called for the regulation of big business, consumer protection and conservation measures. With the increase in newspaper and magazine sales, journalists published articles that exposed social injustice, political corruption and unfair business practices. How successful were the Progressives? Did their work result in significant improvements for American society? Before exploring these and other questions concerning the Progressive Movement, review the names and terms found in this unit; then, complete Questions 21 through 30.

Go to Questions 21 through 30.

