

RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA

Racial Violence
After the Civil War

1865-1876

1860

1865

1870

1875

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How to use this Guide

EJI's *Reconstruction in America* report provides context and analysis for a dark period in American history, one that has been erased from public memory and that may be difficult to process. This visual reading guide is designed to help readers engage with the report. It aims to prompt meaningful reflection and discussion about the missed opportunity of Reconstruction and how the violent rejection of Black equality set the stage for generations of terror and inequality in the South and throughout the country.

The guide is divided into seven sections, each including discussion questions, summaries of key information, and a timeline of events. While reading, reflect on the discussion questions for that chapter of the report. After reading, use the information and timeline in this guide to review what you have learned. Then, you should be able to meaningfully discuss the guided reading questions, in conversation with others or through self-reflection.

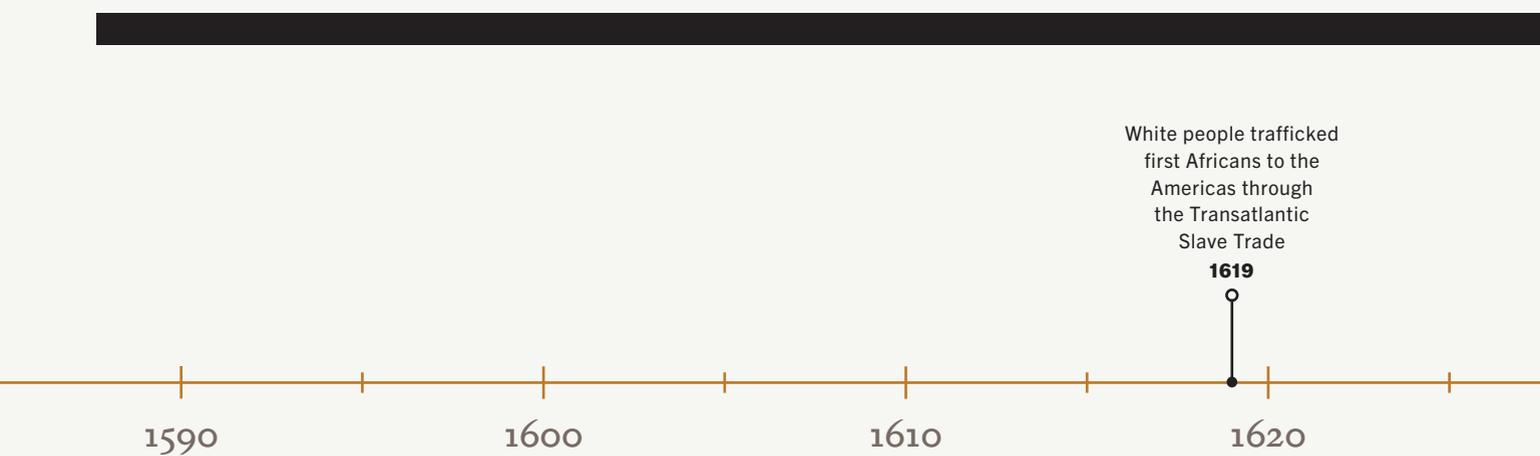
It is our hope that through conversations about racial terrorism, the complicity of public officials and law enforcement, and the false myth of racial hierarchy, readers will:

- Better understand the history of violent resistance to Black equality in this country,
- Reject the false myths of Black inferiority and dangerousness that were used to justify that resistance, and
- Identify the ways that public and private actors expressed their belief in white supremacy and sought to embed that ideology in local, state, and federal laws.

In addition to this guide, on EJI's website you can find a data visualization map showing the spread of racial violence during Reconstruction and a video animation of the *Reconstruction in America* report.

Learn More

The *Reconstruction in America* report is one in a series of EJI reports about the history and legacies of racial injustice in the United States. If the discussions that emerge from this guide leave you with more questions about this history and its legacies, please consider visiting eji.org/reports to read the other reports in the series.



INTRODUCTION

During the 12-year period of Reconstruction, at least 2,000 Black women, men, and children were victims of racial terror lynchings.

Our collective ignorance of what happened immediately after the Civil War has contributed to misinformed stereotypes and misguided false narratives about who is honorable and who is not and has allowed bigotry and a legacy of racial injustice to persist.

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the **Introduction**. Come back to them after reading.

- **What similarities do you notice between the desires of newly emancipated people during Reconstruction and the desires of Black Americans today? What similarities or differences do you notice in the response to those desires in your local community, your state, and the nation?**

Definitions

80%

The percentage of eligible Black voters who were registered to vote by 1868.

Emancipation vs. equality

During Reconstruction, white people used violent resistance to ensure that emancipation—the end of many Black people’s status as enslaved—did not result in equality—equal access to the rights of citizens.

1865-1876

This is the period of Reconstruction, the period of legal, political, and social

recreation that followed the Civil War.

During Reconstruction, the federal government provided oversight to enforce Black people’s new rights of freedom and citizenship and to establish new state governments.

United States Supreme Court

During Reconstruction, the Supreme Court used its power to stop Congress from protecting Black people’s rights. By blocking Congress’ efforts, the Court allowed the same white Southerners who had fought the Civil War to keep Black people enslaved to maintain control of state and local governments.

Black disenfranchisement

This is the practice of preventing Black people from exercising their constitutional right to vote. Throughout Reconstruction, intimidation, violence, and lawlessness were used to keep Black people from voting, to murder Black elected officials, and to overthrow duly elected public officials who supported Black equality.

Racial hierarchy

This is a belief system that white people are inherently superior to Black people and all people of color. It is myth that was created to justify the kidnap, human trafficking, and enslavement of Africans.

1630

1640

1650

1660

1670

1680

1690

1700

1710

JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

Emancipation and Citizenship

“

Not a single Southern legislature believed free Negro labor was possible without a system of restrictions that took all its freedoms away; there was scarcely a white man in the South who did not honestly regard Emancipation as a crime, and its practical nullification as a duty.

—Sociologist W.E.B. DuBois

Many of the day’s most pressing questions asked: what would happen to the entrenched institution of slavery? And what fate would befall the millions of Black people who had been enslaved at the war’s start?

1720

1730

1740

1750

1760

1770

1780

1790

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the section **Journey to Freedom**. Come back to them after reading.

- **What did enslaved Black people hope a Union victory would mean for their lives?**
- **After the Confederate surrender, a newspaper editorial wrote that, “Slavery is dead. The Negro is not; there is our misfortune.” In what ways does this section help you understand why ending enslavement did not end the devastating effects of racial hierarchy for Black people?**

Definitions

Transatlantic Slave Trade

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was the human trafficking of Africans from the continent of Africa to North America, South America, or Central America. Over 10 million African men, women, and children were kidnapped and sold into captivity through this trade, and an additional 2 million African men, women, and children died during the brutal voyage. This trade ended in 1808, but the enslavement of Black people in the United States did not end. It grew.

Chattel slavery

A unique system of enslavement that permanently took away legal rights and autonomy from the enslaved and allowed

them to be exploited economically through violent means. In the United States, a child born to an enslaved Black person was automatically declared to be enslaved. This custom created a racial hierarchy that was hereditary and permanent.

Domestic Slave Trade

The Domestic Slave Trade emerged after the Transatlantic Slave Trade was legally banned in 1808 to meet the ongoing demand for enslaved Black people. Millions of Black people, including free Black people who were illegally sold into captivity, were trafficked through the Domestic Slave Trade.

Secession

Beginning with South Carolina, 11 Southern states left the United States because they wanted to maintain slavery. When South

Carolina seceded, its state legislators wrote that a primary catalyst for their action was “[a]n increasing hostility on the part of the non-slaveholding States to the institution of slavery.” The secession of these 11 states began the Civil War.

Emancipation Proclamation

Issued by President Abraham Lincoln in September 1862, the Emancipation Proclamation declared the freedom of Black people enslaved in the Confederacy. It did not free enslaved people in the border states of Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri and exempted Tennessee and parts of Virginia and Louisiana. People across the country—in the South and the North—protested the Order.

13th Amendment

The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, except as punishment for a crime. It passed both houses of Congress by January 1865, but could not become part of the Constitution until 75% of the states voted for it, including the states in the South who were fighting a war to maintain slavery. It was ratified in December 1865 after federal laws required former Confederate states to adopt the 13th Amendment in order to officially rejoin the country.

Civil Rights Act of 1866

This federal law declared that Black Americans were citizens of the United States entitled to equal rights. President Andrew Johnson vetoed it because he did not believe Black people should have equal rights when “intelligent, worthy and patriotic” foreigners did not. In April 1866, Congress overrode a veto for the first time in the nation’s history, and this bill became law.

14th Amendment

The 14th Amendment declared that Black people are citizens of the United States and established the civil rights of all citizens. President Andrew Johnson opposed this amendment becoming part of the Constitution, empowering other elected officials to publicly oppose it, too. 10 of the 11 former Confederate states rejected it. Congress had to impose military rule on the South and require former Confederate states to ratify the 14th Amendment to get enough state votes to add the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

15th Amendment

The 15th Amendment prohibits racial discrimination in voting, granting voting rights to men of all races. It became part of the Constitution in February 1870.

25%

The percentage of delegates to state constitutional conventions in the former Confederate states who were Black men. Eligible to participate in politics for the first time in the country’s history, Black men were the majority of delegates in South Carolina, more than half in Louisiana, and more than a third in Florida.

Events

Fort Pillow Massacre

Against the rules of war, Confederate soldiers murdered 262 Black soldiers in the Union Army who had surrendered. This was one of many acts by Confederate soldiers to show their refusal to acknowledge the humanity of Black people.

Amy Spain Hanged

In defiance of the Emancipation Proclamation which had gone into effect two years earlier, Confederate soldiers hanged a young Black woman named Amy Spain on March 10, 1865 for “treason and conduct unbecoming a slave” because she aided Union troops.

Confederate Surrender Day

On April 9, 1865, the Confederate Army surrendered and the Civil War ended with a Union victory on the battlefield.

People

Dr. Samuel Gridley Howe

A white abolitionist who, like many white people who supported a legal end to slavery, did not believe in racial equality and believed that Black people were naturally inferior to white people. In his efforts to draw support for ending slavery, he argued that without slavery Black people would die out.

Stephen A. Hale

A proslavery public official in Alabama, Hale wrote to the governor in 1860 warning about the dangers of equality for Black people. He was concerned that white children would have to associate with Black people “upon terms of political and social equality.” Hale went on to represent South Carolina in the Confederate Congress.

Horatio Seymour

Elected governor of New York in the 1862 election cycle. Seymour ran for governor as the pro-slavery “white man’s candidate” who was opposed to emancipation for Black people.

President Andrew Johnson

President Johnson was known to some as “a champion of the white South.” He opposed the 13th Amendment, the 14th Amendment, and strict requirements for former Confederate states to re-enter the country.

TIMELINE | 1619–1870

- 1619** White people trafficked first Africans to the Americas through the **Transatlantic Slave Trade**
- 1808** Transatlantic Slave Trade becomes illegal but **Domestic Slave Trade** remains lawful and very profitable for white people throughout the country
- 1861** 11 southern states secede from the Union and the **Civil War begins**
- SEPTEMBER 1862** President Lincoln issues the **Emancipation Proclamation** by executive order
- 1864** 262 Black Union soldiers murdered by Confederate soldiers in the **Fort Pillow Massacre**
- 1865** Local newspapers in Alabama continued to advertise sales of enslaved people and to publish ads for “runaways” in **defiance of the Emancipation Proclamation**

- MARCH 10, 1865** Confederate soldiers hanged **Amy Spain**, a Black woman, for helping the Union Army
- APRIL 9, 1865** **Confederate Army surrenders** and the Civil War ends
- DECEMBER 1865** **13th Amendment** is added to the Constitution
- 1866** President Andrew Johnson vetoes the **Civil Rights Act of 1866** and Congress overrides his veto to make the bill become federal law
- JULY 1868** **14th Amendment** is added to the Constitution
- FEBRUARY 1870** **15th Amendment** is added to the Constitution

Red dates identify an act of racial violence

Local newspapers in Alabama continued to advertise sales of enslaved people and to publish ads for “runaways” in defiance of the Emancipation Proclamation

1865

Fort Pillow Massacre: 262 Black Union soldiers murdered by Confederate soldiers

1864

13th Amendment
DECEMBER 1865

Confederate Army surrenders
APRIL 9, 1865

Civil Rights Act of 1866
1866

14th Amendment
JULY 1868

15th Amendment
FEBRUARY 1870

The Emancipation Proclamation issued
SEPTEMBER 1862

Confederate soldiers hang Amy Spain
MARCH 10, 1865

Transatlantic Slave Trade becomes illegal and Domestic Slave Trade emerges

1808

1800

1810

1820

1830

1840

1850

1860

1870

1880

FREEDOM TO FEAR

A Terrifying and Deadly Backlash

“

The “wave of counter-revolutionary terror that swept over large parts of the South between 1868 and 1871 lacks counterpart...”

—Historian Eric Foner

In his 1867 annual message to Congress, President Andrew Johnson declared that Black Americans had “less capacity for government than any other race of people,” that they would “relapse into barbarism” if left to their own devices, and that giving them voting rights would result in “a tyranny such as this continent has never yet witnessed.”

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the section **Freedom to Fear**. Come back to them after reading.

- **During Reconstruction, 2,000 Black men served in political office, and white people murdered at least that many Black people in racial terror lynchings. Why did white communities respond to a period of heightened Black political participation with heightened violence against Black men, women, and children?**
- **After the Civil War, white Southerners could no longer extract Black labor through enslavement and sought to "obtain their labor by some other method." What methods were used to continue to exploit Black labor after Emancipation?**

Definitions

Organized aggression

A tactic of lawless mass murder, often in the dark of night, used by white people to resist Black equality. This tactic was used often by the Ku Klux Klan.

Ku Klux Klan

An arm of white supremacist organizing that functions like a terrorist cell. The Ku Klux Klan was created to terrorize Black people through violence and murder targeted at those who supported Black civil rights. It used the same tactics as other white supremacist organizations, like the Knights of the White Camelia and the Pale Faces. Members of this organization were called Klansmen. White elected officials and police officers were often members of the Klan.

Whitecaps

Mobs of poor, white farmers who led a white terrorist campaign that began in Indiana before spreading to Missouri and

throughout the country. Whitecaps viewed African Americans as economic competition and demanded that Black people abandon their land and give up their jobs.

Equal Rights Leagues

Organizations formed by Black people throughout the South to protest discriminatory treatment and ensure that Black people had access to their new legal and political rights. In 1867, their efforts helped to register 80% of eligible Black voters in 10 of the 11 former Confederate states.

2,000

The estimated number of Black men who served in elected office in the 12-year period of Reconstruction, including 16 in the U.S Congress and 600 in state legislatures.

5%

The percentage of enslaved people who learned to read and write by 1863 despite state laws that prohibited it and the violent retaliation of white people who discovered their ability to read and write.

Howard University and Fisk University

Two of the nation’s first Black colleges opened in the years after Emancipation.

Violence against Black schools and educators

White communities targeted Black education for violent retaliation. In 1870, white mobs in Tuskegee, Alabama burned almost every school there, and a white mob in Calhoun County, Alabama lynched four Black men and murdered a white man in response to the growth of a local Black school.

Black land ownership

For centuries, African American agricultural labor enriched white Southerners and the national economy. Black people hoped emancipation would come with land ownership. President Andrew Johnson rescinded orders from Union army officials that had granted land to Black people. Instead, the President ordered that land given to former Confederates.

Sharecropping

A new labor system that replaced slavery as the primary source of agricultural labor and Black exploitation in the South. Formerly enslaved people performed the same farming labor as during slavery in exchange for housing, often on the same plantation and working for the family that had previously legally owned them.

1%

The percentage of the more than 3 million African Americans in the South who owned land by 1870.

Convict leasing

A new source of labor created through the criminal law. Southern states made certain behavior criminal only when done by African Americans. They used those laws to imprison and re-enslave Black people using a loophole in the 13th Amendment. That Amendment allows involuntary servitude for prisoners, enabling states to force incarcerated people to work for private industries for no pay under brutal conditions. The system has been called “worse than slavery” by historians.

Events

New Orleans Massacre

Local Black men marched in support of the new state constitution that would recognize Black rights. In response, a mob of white police officers and white residents formed and murdered and wounded at least 200 Black people.

Abram Colby Attacked

Mr. Colby, a formerly enslaved African American, was a duly elected Congressman. His election was due to the votes of newly enfranchised Black men. Because he was a Black elected official, the Ku Klux Klan brutally attacked and whipped him for more than three hours.

Andrew Flowers Whipped

Mr. Flowers was a Black man who defeated a white candidate to become the justice of the peace in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Because he won, Klansmen whipped him and told him “they did not intend any nigger to hold office in the United States.”

James Williams Lynched

Mr. Williams was a formerly enslaved Black man who lived in York County,

South Carolina. Because he organized a coalition to protect Black people’s freedom, Klansmen lynched him, attacked other Black residents, and burned down Black people’s homes. Members of the mob were taken to trial, during which at least one person confessed to the murder. Still, no one was found guilty for Mr. Williams’ murder.

Black Political Organizers Lynched

William Glasgow was an African American former Union soldier who pledged to vote in favor of Black rights in the upcoming election. As a result, Klansmen in Warren, Kentucky lynched him in his home and then went to a nearby house and lynched another Black Union veteran. A few months later, white mobs lynched John Kemp, an active political organizer, in St. Helena Parish, Louisiana and Samson Weaver, the 13-year-old son of a prominent African American in Columbia, Florida. Samson’s father, Prince Weaver, had to flee town for his safety.

Robert Burke Murdered

Mr. Burke was a state legislator in Sumter County, Alabama. When he organized a meeting of local African Americans, white men shot and killed him near his home.

Camilla, Georgia Massacre

In September 1868, the sheriff of Camilla, GA refused to protect two Black politicians, Colonel Pearce and Captain Murphy, who were threatened with violence if they accepted an invitation to speak at a public event. Pearce and Murphy refused to be intimidated and attended the public event. A white mob attacked them in a massacre, killing 7 Black people and wounding at least 30 others.

Election Day in Savannah, GA

On election day in November 1868, Black men waiting in line to vote were accused of blocking the door. Police responded, firing into the crowd and killing Sam Parsons, Peter Hopkins, and a third victim whose name is unknown.

Duplin County, North Carolina Lynchings

When six Black men tried to enforce their sharecropping agreement with the white land-owner, police officers joined armed white neighbors and murdered the six Black men.

People

York County KKK

By 1871 nearly every white male resident of York County, South Carolina was a Klansmen. That same year, there were at least 11 murders and 600 whippings and assaults of Black residents. Federal law enforcement called the violence a “carnival of crime not paralleled in the history of any civilized community.” The white people who committed the violence were not held accountable by the local criminal justice system.

Hiram Revels

Senator Hiram Revels, a formerly enslaved man, was elected to represent Mississippi in 1870, making him the first African American to serve in the U.S. Congress. He was often introduced to audiences as the “Fifteenth Amendment in flesh and blood.”

Robert Smalls

Representative Robert Smalls, a formerly enslaved man and one of the first African American pilots in the U.S. Navy, served in the U.S. House of Representative to represent Beaufort, South Carolina. As a Congressman, he fought against racial segregation.

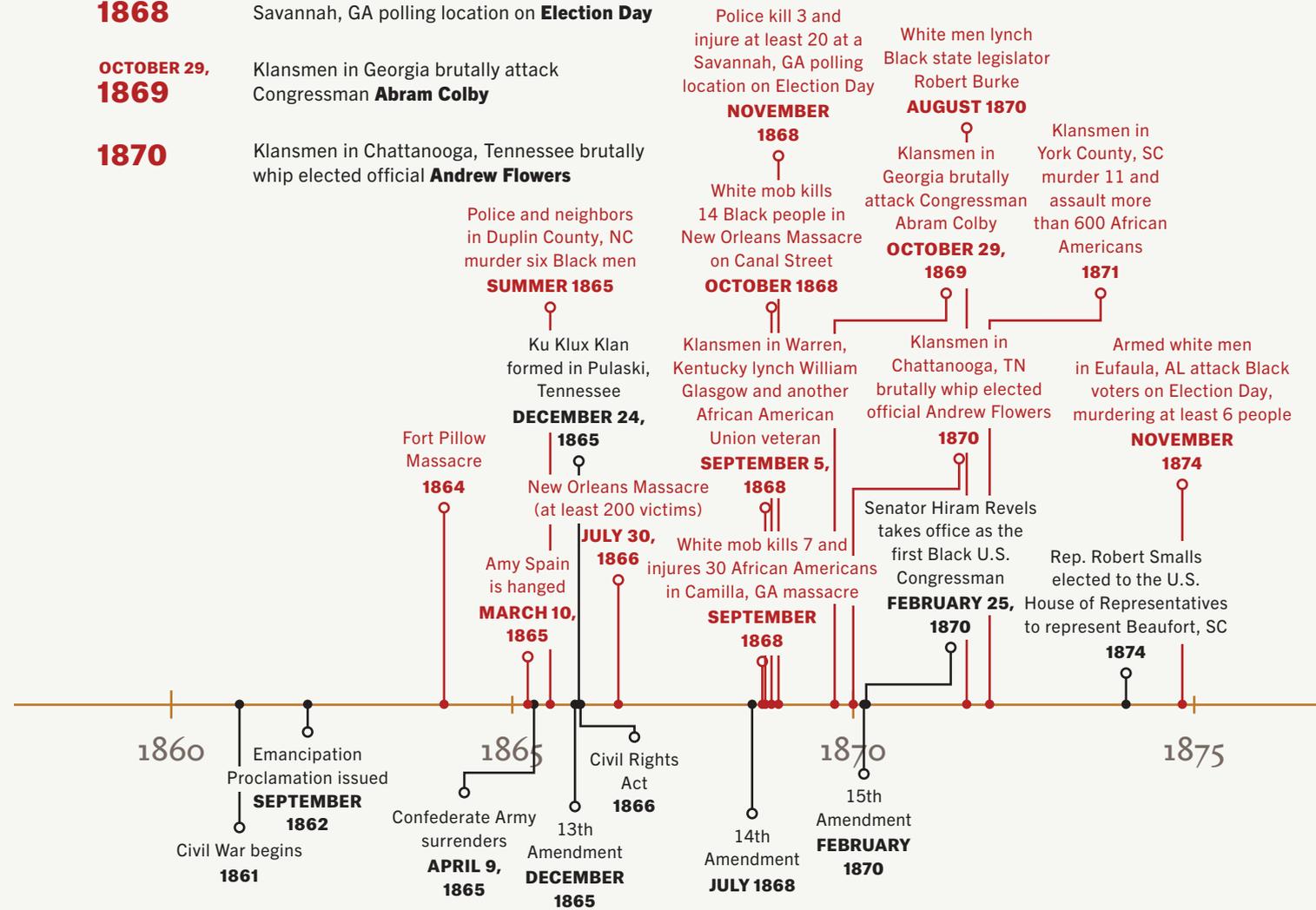
John W. Fields

A formerly enslaved African American who remembered the many ways enslaved Black people used to learn to read and write. By the Civil War, nearly every Southern state banned Black literacy and the possession of learning materials as a means of maintaining white racial dominance. Some made it punishable by death.

TIMELINE | 1860–1875

SUMMER 1865	Police and neighbors in Duplin County, North Carolina murder six Black men
DECEMBER 24, 1865	Ku Klux Klan formed in Pulaski, Tennessee
JULY 30, 1866	New Orleans Massacre (at least 200 victims)
SEPTEMBER 5, 1868	Klansmen in Warren, Kentucky lynch William Glasgow and another African American Union veteran
SEPTEMBER 1868	White mob kills 7 and injures 30 African Americans in Camilla, GA massacre
OCTOBER 1868	White mob kills 14 Black people in New Orleans Massacre on Canal Street
NOVEMBER 1868	Police kill 3 and injure at least 20 at a Savannah, GA polling location on Election Day
OCTOBER 29, 1869	Klansmen in Georgia brutally attack Congressman Abram Colby
1870	Klansmen in Chattanooga, Tennessee brutally whip elected official Andrew Flowers

FEBRUARY 25, 1870	Senator Hiram Revels takes office as the first Black U.S. Congressman
AUGUST 1870	White men lynch Black state legislator Robert Burke
1871	Klansmen in York County, South Carolina murder 11 and assault more than 600 African Americans
1874	Rep. Robert Smalls elected to the U.S. House of Representatives to represent Beaufort, South Carolina
NOVEMBER 1874	Armed white men in Eufaula, Alabama attack Black voters on Election Day, murdering at least 6 people



DOCUMENTING RECONSTRUCTION VIOLENCE

Known and Unknown Horrors

“

Nor could any accurate body count or statistical breakdown reveal the barbarity and depravity that so frequently characterized the assaults made on freedmen in the [purported] name of restraining their savagery and depravity...”

—Historian Leon F. Litwack

There is a lack of public memory about what is known of Reconstruction-era violence and a lack of documentation that limits what can be known. This erasure is possible because of white intimidation of Black victims and witnesses; refusal of Southern newspapers to document violence against Black people; and failure today to make existing records readily available to the public.

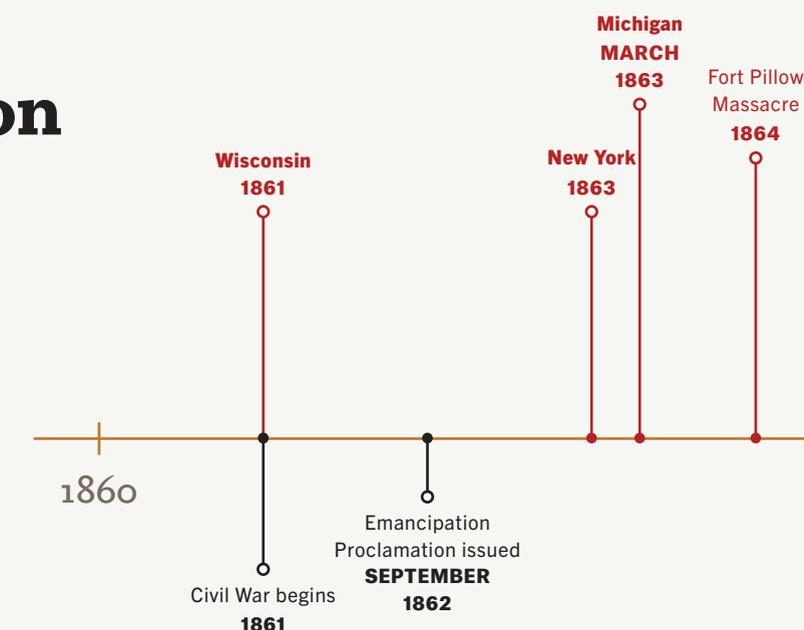
The Freedmen's Bureau

The Freedmen's Bureau was a federal effort to provide formerly enslaved people with basic necessities and to ensure their rights. Though understaffed and under constant political attack by political opponents, local Bureau offices served as central community locations to report and document violence against Black people, to register Black people to vote, to verify labor contracts between the formerly enslaved and their employers, to provide food and medical care, to establish schools, and to perform marriages. White Southerners often disregarded the authority of the Freedmen's Bureau, and this disregard made local Bureau offices targets of racist violence. And in 1872, at the height of deadly violence against Black people, Congress dismantled the Bureau. Today the Bureau's records provide some of the most detailed descriptions of Reconstruction.

TIMELINE

Racial Terror and Reconstruction State Snapshot

During Reconstruction, there were 37 states. There was documented racial terrorism against Black people in at least 26 of them. This includes all 11 of the former Confederate states, where the vast majority of African Americans lived.



THE DANGER OF FREEDOM

For all that we can never know about the countless undocumented acts of violence and unknown victims, the narratives we do know illustrate the suffering and survival of a people who had already endured so much.

“

[There exists] a desire to preserve slavery in its original form as much and as long as possible... The [white] people...still indulged in a lingering hope that slavery might yet be preserved....A large proportion of the many acts of violence committed is undoubtedly attributable to this motive.

—Carl Shurz in a report to the U.S. Congress

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the section **The Danger of Freedom**. Come back to them after reading.

- **What actions by white community members, public officials, and journalists created the false stereotype of innate Black criminality and a presumption of Black guilt?**
- **What was the goal of the domestic terrorism that Black men, women, and children experienced during Reconstruction?**

Definitions

Economic exploitation

After Emancipation, there was white resistance to the rights of Black people to choose where to live and when and where to work. This resistance was often violent. King Davis, a formerly enslaved man was killed for trying to leave the land where he had been enslaved. Stephen Bryant, a formerly enslaved man, was handcuffed and beaten by a white farmer for leaving the plantation without the farmer's permission.

Racial social boundaries

After the Civil War, white people used violence to maintain the social etiquette of slavery. Black people could be attacked or killed for violating any social rule as defined by any white person at any time. This included not stepping off the sidewalk for a white person or arguing with a white person.

Massacres

White resentment to Black equality often erupted into lawless bloodbaths that left many Black people dead and injured and destroyed Black property. This mass violence was treated with impunity and intentionally mislabeled as riots even though mutual combat was rare.

The Truth About Lynching and the Negro in the South

A book published in 1919 advocating for the periodic lynching of Black men,

preferably by burning. This book espoused widely held beliefs about the necessity of lynching to maintaining white supremacy.

Events

Guilford Coleman Lynched

Mr. Coleman was a Black delegate to the Alabama state convention. Because he was a political leader advocating for Black rights, he was beaten and dumped into a well.

Jack Dupree Lynched

Mr. Dupree was the well-respected Black president of a local political club in Monroe County, Mississippi. Because of his political involvement, 60 Klansmen beat him, slit his throat, and cut out his intestines before throwing his body into a creek.

Joe Cody Attacked

Mr. Cody was an African American resident of Warren County, Georgia. During the 1868 election, white residents demanded that he vote for the pro-white supremacy candidate. Because Mr. Cody refused, a white mob kidnapped and whipped him and pulled out his hair.

Racial terror in Lewisburg, Tennessee

In January 1868, a mob of 25 white men terrorized the Black community to intimidate Black voters. This terrorism

included beating a Black man named Wesley Givens and threatening to lynch him if he did not leave town within eight days.

Election Day in Philadelphia

Despite violent threats from white police officers and mobs in the days before the election, many Black men exercised their constitutional right to vote anyway. On Election Day, a white man murdered Octavius Catto, an African American activist and Union veteran, who was on his way home after voting. The killer was later acquitted by an all-white jury. At least two other Black men Isaac Chase and Jacob Gordon, were killed in acts of voter suppression.

Ed and Jinny Scott Attacked

A white man hit Jinny Scott in anger that she, her husband, and the Black couple they were with did not step off the sidewalk for two white men. Her husband, Ed Scott, came to her defense. In response, a white mob seized and tortured him. It is unclear if Jinny Scott ever saw her husband again.

Sexual Assault of Rhoda Ann Childs

Eight white planters came to Mrs. Childs home looking for her husband. Finding her alone, they kidnapped, beat, and sexually assaulted her. The mob then returned to her home and attacked her daughters.

RECONSTRUCTION'S END

“

The whole South—every state in the South—had got us into the hands of the very men that held us as slaves.

—Henry Adams, formerly enslaved man in Louisiana

“

The white men of the South need now have no further fear that the [federal powers] will ever again give themselves over to the vain imagination of the political equality of man.

—John W. Burgess, a Southern Redeemer

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the section **Reconstruction's End**. Come back to them after reading.

Many slavery abolitionists believed in ending enslavement but were not committed to racial equality.

- **What consequences did this have for formerly enslaved people?**
- **What should federal, state, and local governments have provided to Black Americans to end the racial hierarchy created by enslavement? What remedies would have repaired the harm white supremacy inflicted upon Black people?**

Definitions

Union League

A Black-led organization founded in 1863 to support African American participation in politics, education, and social efforts. The Union League met secretly due to threats by the Ku Klux Klan.

Southern Redemption

A political movement to restore white supremacy as the foundation of life in the South. Many white businessmen and wealthy planters were advocates of this movement. These Redeemers intimidated Black voters and disrupted elections; disrupted pro-civil rights political gatherings; and supported racial violence by groups like the Ku Klux Klan. During this movement, violence against Black people intensified.

Ku Klux Klan Act

This law allowed the federal government to prosecute civil rights violations as federal crimes and allowed individuals who had their rights violated to sue in federal court. It was one of few meaningful forms of legal protection for the formerly enslaved. The Supreme Court later declared this law unconstitutional.

Amnesty Act of 1872

After the Civil War, federal law prevented former Confederate troops and supporters from voting or holding public office. The Amnesty Act removed those restrictions for most former Confederates.

12

The number of large scale massacres in the South during the period of Southern Redemption from 1872 to 1876 that EJI has documented.

11

Between 1885 and 1908, all 11 former Confederate states rewrote their state constitutions to restrict Black voting rights. It was part of an effort to legalize white supremacy. As John B. Knox of Alabama said, “if we would have white supremacy, we must establish it by law—not by force or fraud.”

Events

1871-1872 Congressional investigation

In a 10-month long investigation, Congressmen traveled through the South collecting information about racial violence. This

yielded 13 volumes of first-hand testimony of brutal violence. This violence was often targeted at Black political, social, and community leaders.

Alabama Election of 1874

Through violence, threats, terror, and fraud against Black voters, the white supremacist ticket won the election of 1874 in Alabama. This ended Reconstruction in the state, and former Confederate leaders took power in the legislative and executive branches.

Colfax Massacre

On Easter Sunday 1873, Black people protested fraudulent election results. In response, 300 white people attacked them. At least 150 African Americans were killed, including approximately 50 who surrendered, were taken prisoner, and later executed by the white militia. A judge ruled that the federal law used to prosecute members of the mob was unconstitutional because federal law could not protect Black people from the violence of private individuals.

Compromise of 1877

There was a dispute over which party's candidate won the necessary number

A TRUTH THAT NEEDS TELLING

The deadly attacks Black communities endured in the first years of freedom—and the institutions that tolerated that violence—laid a foundation for the era of racial terror lynching that followed and the segregation and inequality that endure still.

When we listen to the voices of the Black men and women who witnessed the hope, promise, and terrifying danger of the era, and when we probe the haunting descriptions of the brutality that killed so many, we cannot deny the tragedy of the post-Civil War era's missed opportunity to remake our nation's racial order.

Guided Reading Questions:

Consider the following questions as you read the section **A Truth That Needs Telling**. Come back to them after reading.

- **How would an accurate public memory of domestic terrorism against Black people during and after Reconstruction better equip us to respond to racial injustice today?**
- **How do false narratives of Black criminality that were created during Reconstruction continue on today through policing and mass incarceration?**

Definitions

Narrative war

Narrative war refers to the dominant public memory of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed. Monuments to Confederate leaders, literature about the “Lost Cause,” and social organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy try to invent historical fact by romanticizing and glorifying enslavement and those who fought to defend white supremacy. Many monuments to the Confederacy were erected in defiant response to the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century.

Confederate Monument in Tuscumbia, Alabama

This monument honoring Confederate soldiers was erected in 1911 and is inscribed with the words: “God of our fathers, help us to preserve for our children the priceless treasure of the true story of the Confederate soldier.” It is an example of efforts to silence the Black experience and to erase the denial of Black humanity that defined the South before the Civil War.

Rejection of Anti-lynching Bill

Despite repeated attempts to pass a federal anti-lynching bill during the era of racial terror, the bill never passed. In opposition to the proposal in 1938, Florida Governor Fred P. Cone explained that he did not want lynching

to become a federal crime because “we do not want a return of the shackles of Reconstruction days upon the backs of our people.”

Memphis Massacre Historical Marker

Erected in 2016 by the National Park Service

and local community leaders, this marker was the first public funded historical commemoration of the massacre. Its unveiling marked the only public space dedicated to memorializing victims of racial violence in a city with multiple Confederate monuments and a park named for the founder of the Ku Klux Klan.

Eufaula, Alabama

The 1874 massacre in Eufaula exemplifies violent voter suppression of Black voters. Emancipation and ratification of the 15th Amendment gave Black men the electoral power to end white supremacist rule in majority-Black Eufaula, Alabama. In response, the white community used terror, violence, and intimidation to suppress the Black vote during the election of 1874. On Election Day, federal troops refused to protect Black voters because their captain claimed doing so would violate his orders. Early in the afternoon, a mob of white men began firing at random into the crowd of Black voters. At least six Black people were killed, 80 injured, and an estimated 500 forced to flee without voting. The son of the City Court Judge who Black voters hoped to re-elect was also murdered that day. 1200 Black voters cast ballots that day; in the next election two years later, only 10 Black men cast ballots. The white press praised the massacre, and in 1979 a historical marker was erected celebrating the massacre as the end of Reconstruction in Barbour County.

None of the white men who participated in the 1874 massacre were held accountable, despite witnesses who testified to their participation. One witness, a Black man named Hilliard Miles, was imprisoned for perjury after identifying members of the mob. One of the men he identified, Braxton Bragg Comer, later became governor of Alabama.



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