RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA

Racial Violence After the Civil War
1865-1876
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.

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.
JOURNEY TO FREEDOM

Emancipation and Citizenship

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?

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

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.

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?
RECONSTRUCTION IN AMERICA

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 the 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 entitled to equal rights when "intelligent, worthy and patriotic" foreigners did not. In April 1866, Congress overrode the veto for the first time in the nation’s history, and this bill became law.

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.

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 or 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.

1865
Local newspapers in Alabama continued to advertise sales of enslaved people and to publish ads for "runaways" in defiance of the Emancipation Proclamation.

1865
Confederate soldiers hanged Amy Spain, a Black woman, for helping the Union Army

1865
Confederate Army surrenders the Civil War

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

1866
14th Amendment is added to the Constitution

1866
15th Amendment is added to the Constitution

1866
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
Confederate soldiers hang Amy Spain

1865
Civil Rights Act of 1866

1864
Confederate soldiers hang Amy Spain

1865
Civil War begins

1863
The Emancipation Proclamation issued

1863
13th Amendment

1863
Confederate Army surrenders

1865
14th Amendment

1865
15th Amendment

1865
16th Amendment

1865
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

1861
President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation by executive order

1862
262 Black Union soldiers murdered by Confederate soldiers in the Fort Pillow Massacre

1862
September

1863
14th Amendment

1868
15th Amendment

1868
Civil Rights Act of 1866

1870
15th Amendment
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.”

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.

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?
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 13th Amendment. 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. During his term, 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.

Duplicity, North Carolina Lynching

When six Black men tried to enforce their sharecropping agreement with the white landowner, 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 1868, 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 politicians in the U.S. Navy, served as 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.

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

- Police and neighbors in Duplin County, North Carolina murder six Black men.
- Ku Klux Klan formed in Pulaski, Tennessee.
- New Orleans Massacre (at least 200 victims).
- Klansmen in Warren, Kentucky lynch William Glasgow and another African American Union veteran.
- White mob kills 7 and injures 30 African Americans in Camilla, GA massacre.
- Klansmen in Georgia brutally attack Congressman Abram Colby.
- Klansmen in Chattanooga, Tennessee brutally whip elected official Andrew Flowers.
- Police kill 3 and injure at least 20 at a Savannah, GA polling location on Election Day.
- Klansmen in Georgia brutally attack Congressman Abram Colby.
- Klansmen in York County, SC murder 11 and assault more than 600 African Americans.
- Armed white men in Eufaula, Alabama attack Black voters on Election Day, murdering at least 6 people.
- Senator Hiram Revels takes office as the first Black U.S. Congressman.
- White men lynch Black state legislator Robert Burke.
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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.

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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.

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 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.

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.

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 maintain white supremacy.

The Danger of Freedom

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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 seized 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 tolynch him if he did not leave town within eight days.

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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.

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 seized 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 tolynch 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.
Sexual Violence Against Black Women

In addition to the shared threat of lynching for all Black people, Black women were more likely to suffer sexual violence as a form of racial dominance. Southern state legislatures passed laws that treated sexual assault of Black women differently than that of white women, and law enforcement would refuse to carry out arrest warrants for white men accused of raping Black women.

Opelousas, Louisiana

There were hundreds of racial terror lynchings in Louisiana during Reconstruction. The deadline took place in Opelousas as a form of voter suppression leading up to the 1868 election. White mobs murdered more than 200 Black people and several white people who were sympathetic to Black rights. The mob also destroyed the printing presses of the local newspaper that was pro-Reconstruction, and killed the white male editor of the paper.

Memphis Massacre

Over three days in May 1866, white mobs beat, robbed, tortured, shot, raped, and killed Black men, women, and children at random. Black homes, churches, and schools were burned down. Local police officers joined the violence as “murderers, incendiaries, and robbers…they even protected the rest of the mob in their acts of violence.” No white people were ever held accountable.

Anti-Black sentiment outside the South

People in the North worried that Emancipation would bring a wave of Black people to their states. Iowa, Illinois, and Oregon took steps to outlaw Black migration into the state. Black people in the North endured random acts of violence, including more than 100 murders by white mobs in New York City in July 1866, a presumption of guilt when a crime was discovered, and retaliation against Black men for exercising their constitutional right to vote.

Robinson Spring, Florida

Armed white men opened fire on a group of 26 Black men, women, and children who were having a picnic. A man and a 2-year-old child were killed.

People

John Taliaferro

Mr. Taliaferro was a white man who participated in mass violence against African Americans in Noxubee County, Mississippi. He later testified before Congress about the violence, saying that the goal was to terrorize Black people into fleeing the land they were working and re-entering exploitative work conditions under white planters.

Prince Edward County, Virginia

Four Black women were singing in their home when a white man demanded they stop singing. The women refused, and the man entered the house and severely beat them.

TIMELINE | 1860–1875

| March 1865 | White men in Unionville, South Carolina lynch Saxe Joiner |
| March 1866 | 200 white men in New York City lynch a Black teenager named John Taylor |
| May 1866 | White mob seizes Tom Conyers on his way to court and hangs him |
| May 1–3, 1866 | White mob kills at least 46 African Americans in Memphis Massacre |
| September 1866 | 8 white men sexually assault Rhoda Ann Childs |
| September 1866 | White lynching in Georgetown, Colorado hangs Edward Bainbridge |
| September 1867 | A white man assaults John Henry Hill because Mr. Hill insisted on being paid for his work |
| Joe Cody lynched in Warren County, GA for voting |
| 1866 | Six white men murdered (Duplin County, NC) |
| 1866 | 6 white men sexually assault Rhoda Ann Childs |
| 1866 | White mob seizes Tom Conyers and hangs him |
| 1866 | White mob kills at least 46 African Americans in Memphis Massacre |
| 1866 | Joe Cody lynched in Warren County, GA |
| 1866 | White men in Unionville, SC lynch Saxe Joiner |
| 1866 | White mob in Abbeville attack and injure African Americans |
| 200 white men | in New York City lynch a Black teenager named John Taylor |
| January 1868 | Six Black men murdered (Duplin County, NC) |
| March 1868 | White men in Abbeville attack and injure African Americans |
| 1868 | White men in Beef Island, TN violently terrorize local African Americans |
| January 1868 | Joe Cody lynched in Warren County, GA |
| 1868 | Police kill 3 and injure at least 20 in Memphis |
| November 1868 | New Orleans massacre on Canal Street |
| October 1868 | William Glasgow and another African American Union veteran lynched |
| September 1868 | September 15, 1868 | Jack Dupree lynched in Monroe County, Mississippi |
| October 29, 1869 | Klu Klux Klan executes Mr. Hill in Savannah, GA |
| 1869 | Armed white men attack Black people having a picnic |
| October 10, 1869 | Armed white men attack Black people |
| 1870 | White men in Monroe, LA to suppress Black voters |
| August 29, 1870 | Over 200 massacred in Louisiana |
| 1870 | Klu Klux Klan attempts to murder Octavius Catto, Isaac Chase, and Jacob Gordon for voting in the mayoral election |
| 1870 | Large crowd in Hancock County, Indiana gathers to witness public spectacle of William Kemmer |
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| Large crowd in Hancock County, IN gathers to witness public spectacle of William Kemmer |
| Jack Dupree lynched in Monroe County, Mississippi for political activity |
| 3 white men sexually assault Harriet Simril |
| White mobs in Philadelphia murder Octavius Catto, Isaac Chase, and Jacob Gordon for political activity |
| White mob in Orange County, North Carolina hangs Cyrus Guy |
| Armed white men in Robinson Spring, Florida attack Black people having a picnic |
| Guilford Coleman lynched in Alabama for political leadership |
| Senator Hiram Revels takes office in U.S. Congress |
| Rep. Robert Smalls elected to the U.S. House of Representatives |
| Armed white men attack Black voters, murdering at least 6 people (Eufaula, AL) |

THE DANGER OF FREEDOM
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

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

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

**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.

**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.

**Events**

**1871-1872 Congressional investigation**
In a 10-month long investigation, Congressmen traveled through the South collecting information about racial violence. This

**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.

**Compromise of 1877**
There was a dispute over which party’s candidate won the necessary number
of Electoral College votes in the 1876 presidential election. A bipartisan commission decided that Rutherford B. Hayes would become president in exchange for ending Reconstruction and returning Southern political power to the Southern Redeemers.

**People**

John Archibald Campbell

A former Supreme Court Justice who retired from the Court to help run the Confederate States of America. In an earlier case, he had voted that Black people could not be American citizens.

Confederate Colonel James Milton Smith

Because of the Amnesty Act, James Milton Smith was no longer prohibited from holding public office. In 1872, he became the Governor of Georgia and rolled back the progress that Black Georgians had won under Reconstruction administrations.

**CONFEDERATE GENERAL JAMES L. KEMPER**

In 1874, General James L. Kemper became the Governor of Virginia. As Governor, he declared that “the political equality of the races is settled, and the social equality of the races is a settled impossibility.”

**slaughterhouse Cases**

In 1872, the United States Supreme Court ruled on a series of cases about the 14th Amendment. These cases were brought by Redeemers who wanted to limit federal protections for Black people. Former Supreme Court Justice John Archibald Campbell represented the Redeemers. In its decision, the Court held that the 14th Amendment, which guarantees citizenship, civil rights, and due process, only applied to a short list of rights. Because that list did not include many of the rights being denied to Black people in the South, this decision struck down federal laws designed to protect the formerly enslaved. The Ku Klux Klan Act was one of these laws. This was the 13th Court decision in seven years that eliminated federal protections for Black people.

**United States v. Cruikshank**

In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed a series of Enforcement Acts to respond to the violent behavior of private persons. On March 27, 1876, the United States Supreme Court ruled on a series of cases about the 14th Amendment. Because of the Amnesty Act, former Supreme Court Justice John Archibald Campbell retired from the Court to help run the Confederate States of America. In an exchange for ending Reconstruction and returning Southern political power to the Southern Redeemers.

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**United States v. Cruikshank**

In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed a series of Enforcement Acts in response to the terror faced by Black people. White Southerners challenged these laws under federal law. After this ruling, the Department of Justice dropped 179 many of the rights being denied to Black people in the South, this decision that the 14th Amendment, which guarantees citizenship, civil rights, and due process, only applied to a short list of rights. Because that list did not include many of the rights being denied to Black people in the South, this decision struck down federal laws designed to protect the formerly enslaved. The Ku Klux Klan Act was one of these laws. This was the 13th Court decision in seven years that eliminated federal protections for Black people.
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.

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. Corne 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.

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?

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.