

The Civil War changed life for most Americans. When the war ended, some hoped to return to the way things were before the war. Others hoped that the war's results would include an end to slavery. They wanted a chance to begin a better life. For African Americans and women—with some individuals belonging to both groups—achieving these dreams would take many more decades of struggle.

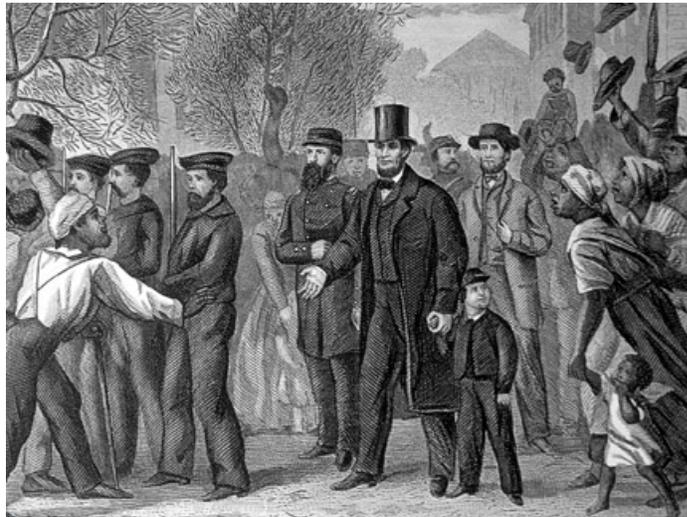
Slavery Continues by Other Names

Though slavery was officially over after the Civil War, the legacy of slavery did still continue. Many hundreds of thousands of formerly enslaved people in the South still were not able to have an equal place in society after the war.

During the war, hundreds of thousands of people had been killed—most of them men. This meant that fewer people were available for all of the jobs in the nation. The South was very dependent on farming. It still needed field workers to tend the crops, just as enslaved people had done before. Also, its industry needed coal and factory workers. But its economy was still based on unpaid labor. After the war, some employers were too poor to hire workers at fair wages.

Others felt that they could not compete if they had to pay for labor. Many didn't want to make the change from forced slavery to paid labor. Instead, it became common to use the forced labor of convicts.

The convicts were usually African Americans who were unfairly targeted by new laws. These laws, called black codes, were similar to the former slave codes, and they made it very difficult for African American people to legally live and work without conflict in the Southern states. For example, a man could be arrested for vagrancy, or homelessness, if he was unable to show that he had a home and a job. Proving a home and a job could be difficult, even if the man had both of those things. Then he would be fined for an amount of money that he could most likely not be able to pay. Southern state and county governments developed a corrupt



When President Abraham Lincoln toured Richmond on April 4, 1865, one day after federal troops had captured the city, a jubilant crowd of former slaves greeted him.

system in which local employers would pay off a convict's fines in exchange for the person's labor. So, the man would be sent to a plantation or factory to work off the debt of the fine. In effect, the man would become enslaved. He would be leased or bought by the employer from the local government. This was peonage, or debt slavery. Congress outlawed peonage in 1867, but it continued in parts of the country through the 1940s.

Green Cottonham was one such person who got caught in the peonage trap. A child of former enslaved people, he had been born free in the 1880s. In 1908, he was arrested for vagrancy at a train station. When the arresting officers brought him before a judge, they couldn't remember what he was charged with. He was convicted of a different crime. Then he was sold as a debt slave to a coal mine. He died several months later, among many others suffering from disease, malnutrition, and dangerous working conditions.



Susan B. Anthony (1820–1906, standing) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902) joined forces to fight for women's rights.

Women's Roles

The shortage of workers during and after the war affected women, too, in both the North and the South. With so many men on the battlefield during the war, women began to take on roles that had traditionally belonged to men. They served behind the lines in the war. Back at home, they ran the farms and businesses the soldiers left behind. Many lost husbands and other male relatives in the fighting and also lost the labor and income those men contributed to their families. In the South, some women faced the problem of managing farms or businesses without the enslaved people that they had depended on. During the Civil War, women did a lot of the work formerly done mainly by free men and enslaved people.

After the war, many people expected society to go back to the old ways. They expected that women would go back to being at home, caring for the children, and running the household. They considered it “unfeminine” for women to engage in politics or to work outside the home. But as the war had forced or allowed women to do much of the same work as the men, many women had become self-reliant. They wanted recognition as co-equals as the nation began to piece itself back together after the war.

One right women wanted was suffrage, meaning the right to vote. A suffragist was a person who worked toward making voting legal, and at this time that usually meant “legal for women.” Most suffragists were women, but some suffragists were men who agreed that women having the right to vote would benefit the nation.

From before the Civil War and until years afterwards, only white men could vote. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, ratified in 1869, meant that a man had the legal right to vote, regardless of his color. While many barriers prevented men from exercising that right, women did not even win the right to vote until the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920.

Healing the Wounds of a Nation

After the war, the nation's healing process did not come easily. Divisions among people characterized the Civil War era. Tensions between the North and the South, between whites and African Americans, between men and women, between those who had the vote and those who didn't—all of these tensions existed before the war. Afterwards, it took decades to truly address the tensions between the North and the South.

After reading the passage, answer the following questions:

- 1.** According to the passage, what was one accusation that could get an African American arrested in the South?
 - A.** vagrancy
 - B.** having a job
 - C.** owning land
 - D.** being African American

- 2.** What is one way that women were impacted by the massive deaths that occurred during the Civil War?
 - A.** many women could not find jobs
 - B.** women faced increasing discrimination
 - C.** many women took on jobs that men had held before the war
 - D.** women were instantly granted the right to vote after the war

- 3.** How did the Fifteenth Amendment change life in the United States?
 - A.** It gave all men the right to vote.
 - B.** It gave all women the right to vote.
 - C.** It declared an official end to slavery.
 - D.** It gave all African Americans the right to vote.

- 4.** Though many changes were made to advance the rights of African Americans after the war, life was still not easy. How did the black codes limit the freedoms of African Americans in the South? Use details from the reading passage to support your answer.