

Virginia Studies VS.8

Reconstruction - (new 2023 standards)

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After the Civil War ended in 1865, **Virginia had to be rebuilt**—physically, socially, and politically. Buildings, roads, and farms were **destroyed**. People's lives were **changed** forever.

This period after the Civil War time period is called **Reconstruction**. During this period, laws of the United States were rewritten to **protect freedom and rights** for formerly enslaved people.

VS.8A – THE 13TH, 14TH, AND 15TH AMENDMENTS

a) describe what the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution accomplished

13th Amendment	Ended slavery
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14th Amendment	Guaranteed citizenship if born in U.S.
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15th Amendment	Guaranteed right to vote (to men)
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- **13th Amendment (1865) – Ended slavery** in the United States. No person could be owned as property.
- **14th Amendment (1868) –** Said that anyone **born in the U.S. was a citizen** and had equal protection under the law.
- **15th Amendment (1870) –** Said that the **right to vote** could not be denied because of race, color, or previous condition of being enslaved.

Why they mattered: These amendments were meant to give **freedom, citizenship, and voting rights to African Americans**.

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VS.8B – LIFE IN VIRGINIA DURING RECONSTRUCTION

b) examine the effects of Reconstruction on life in Virginia

Reconstruction is the period following the Civil War in which Congress passed laws designed to **rebuild the country** and bring the **southern states back into the Union**. Following the Civil War:



1865 - Richmond in ruins

Economy was in ruins:

- **Farms** were destroyed, **railroads** were damaged, and **businesses** were struggling.
- Hundreds of thousands of freed African Americans needed **housing, education, clothing, food, and jobs**.
- **Money** had no value.
- **Banks** were closed.
- Railroads, bridges, plantations, and crops were **destroyed**.
- Businesses needed to be rebuilt.
- African Americans faced **injustice**, increased violence, and **discrimination** immediately after the end of slavery.

New opportunities: Freed African Americans could now legally marry, own property, go to school, and get jobs.

Challenges: Many white Virginians **resisted** these changes. Some passed **new laws** to keep African Americans from having equal rights.

Sharecropping was a system with **unfair practices** that locked people into poverty.

- Sharecropping - freedmen and poor white farmers **rented land** from a landowner by promising to pay the owner with a **share of the crops**.
- Sharecropping was **common** in Virginia.

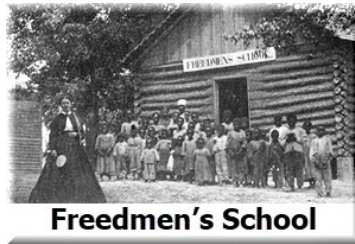
VS.8C – FREEDMEN’S SCHOOLS

c) describe the role that the Freedmen’s Schools played in the lives of African Americans in Virginia after the Civil War

The **Freedmen’s Bureau** was established to provide **food, medical care, and education** to freed African Americans after the Civil War.

Freedmen’s Schools were established and both African American **adults** and **children** attended.

- Before the war, it was often **illegal to teach enslaved people** to read or write.
- After the war, the Freedmen’s Bureau helped create **Freedmen’s Schools** for African Americans.
- Both children and adults went to school for the **first time**, eager to learn reading, writing, and math.
- African Americans pushed for **education** for their children. This directly resulted in Freedom’s First Generation of whom some became **doctors, lawyers, and teachers**
- African Americans saw education as a path to **greater opportunities**. Despite the obstacles they faced, many African Americans achieved **excellence**.
- These schools became a symbol of **hope and progress**, even though they sometimes faced threats and violence.



VS.8D – JOHN MERCER LANGSTON

d) discuss the election of African American leader John Mercer Langston to Congress in 1890

John Mercer Langston was an African American leader, lawyer, and educator. –



John Mercer Langston

- **Abolitionist** who participated in the Underground Railroad in Ohio
- **Recruited black volunteers** to serve as soldiers in the Union Army during the Civil War
- Returned to Virginia after the Civil War and became the **President of a new black college** in Petersburg later known as “Virginia State University”
- In 1890, he was elected to the **U.S. Congress**, representing Virginia.
- He was one of the **first African Americans** in the South to serve in **Congress**, showing that **political change was possible** during and after Reconstruction.

VS.8E – PLESSY V. FERGUSON (1896)

e. describing the effect of the Supreme Court’s decision in Plessy v. Ferguson

The U.S. Supreme Court decision **Plessy v. Ferguson** said “**separate but equal**” facilities for Black and white people were **legal**.

- In reality, the facilities for African Americans were almost always **worse**.
- This ruling gave legal approval for **segregation**—the forced **separation of races** in schools, trains, restaurants, and other public places.



Plessy v. Ferguson made "separate but equal" legal

VS.8F – SEGREGATION AND JIM CROW LAWS

f) analyze the effects of segregation and “Jim Crow” laws on life in Virginia

After Reconstruction, the **gains** made during that period were **taken away** through violence, intimidation and when “**Jim Crow**” Laws were passed by southern states.

- **Jim Crow laws** – State and local laws that **enforced segregation and discrimination** against African Americans and Indigenous People.



"Jim Crow" laws enforced segregation

- **Segregation** – Keeping **races apart** in daily life (schools, neighborhoods, transportation).
- **Discrimination** - **Unfair treatment** of people based characteristics like **race**, gender, religion, or disability.

These laws made it harder to:

- **Vote** (through **poll taxes** and **unfair tests**)
- Get good **jobs** or hold **public office**

- Receive **equal education** - forced to attend **separate schools**.
- Access **equal facilities** - forced to use **separate, poor-quality facilities** and services, such as drinking fountains, restrooms, and restaurants
- Travel freely

The **freedoms** African Americans had **gained during Reconstruction** were **slowly taken away**, and it would take many decades—and the Civil Rights Movement—to win them back.

Key Takeaways

- The **13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments** were meant to **protect the rights** of African Americans, but many of those rights were taken away after Reconstruction.
- Schools and leaders like John Mercer Langston gave **hope**, but Supreme Court decisions and Jim Crow laws made **life harder** for African Americans and Indigenous People for many years.
- **Reconstruction** was a time of both **progress** and **setbacks** in Virginia's history