Publisher's Note

The *Defining Documents in American History* series, produced by Salem Press, consists of a collection of essays on important historical documents by a diverse range of writers on a broad range of subjects in American history. *Defining Documents in American History: Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)* surveys key documents produced during the Reconstruction era, organized under the following broad themes:

- Debating Reconstruction
- Communities in Need
- Acts of State
- Black Codes & White Lives
- Extreme Reactions
- Reconstruction Moves Ahead
- An Ambiguous Legacy

Historical documents provide a compelling view of this unique period of American history. Designed for high school and college students, the aim of the series is to advance historical document studies as an important activity in learning about history.

Essay Format

Reconstruction Era contains 40 primary source documents – many in their entirety. Each document is supported by a critical essay, written by historians and teachers, that includes a Summary Overview, Defining Moment, Author Biography, Document Analysis, and Essential Themes. Readers will appreciate the diversity of the collected texts, including journals, letters, speeches, political sermons, laws, government reports, and court cases, among other genres. An important feature of each essays is a close reading of the primary source that develops evidence of broader themes, such as author's rhetorical purpose, social or class position, point of view, and other relevant issues. In addition, the chapter themes highlight major issues in the period, many of which extend across eras and continue to shape American life. Each chapter begins with a brief introduction that explains the questions and problems underlying the subjects in the historical documents. A brief glossary, included at the end of each document, highlights keywords important in the study of the primary source. Each essay also includes a Bibliography and Additional Reading section for further research.

Special Features/Appendixes

- **Chronological List** of all documents by year.
- **Web Resources** is an annotated list of web sites that offer valuable supplemental resources.
- **Bibliography** lists helpful articles and books for further study.

Contributors

Salem Press would like to extend its appreciation to all involved in the development and production of this work. The essays have been written and signed by scholars of history, humanities, and other disciplines related to the essay's topics. Without these expert contributions, a project of this nature would not be possible. A full list of contributor's names and affiliations appears in the front matter of this volume.

Editor's Introduction

Reconstruction refers, of course, to the period in U.S. history immediately following the Civil War, extending from 1865 to 1877. Some historians suggest that the Reconstruction era began earlier, in 1863, with President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (Foner 1988). In any case, by the end of the war the South was in a state of ruin and changes of historic proportions were required of it. Battles with Union forces, and the advance of the Union Army across the region, had produced massive physical damage throughout the land. Slavery had been abolished, and with it the old social and economic order sustaining the South. Although the North was by no means unaffected by the war, the most urgent problems lay with the Confederate states. Those states now had to be brought back into the Union; functioning state governments had to be established, under wholly new conditions. Moreover, millions of former slaves—freedmen—had to be accommodated within Southern society.

Given the grand scope of this undertaking, it is not surprising that Reconstruction has been viewed differently by different observers over the course of time. When the first scholarly histories of the subject came out in the early 20th century, the prevailing view was that the radical Republicans of the winning side (i.e., the most liberal faction of the party of Lincoln) had imposed a punitive military regimen on the South. Republican-led state governments set up during Reconstruction were said to exhibit unconcealed hostility toward Southern Democrats and Southern ways and traditions. They set out a Northern-style rule across the South that promoted corrupt practices and did not properly address underlying social and economic problems. Reconstruction, in this view, was regarded as a tragic blunder, a big mistake. The South, in turn, was portrayed as fighting again for a noble cause, the preservation of its heritage. Instead of healing wounds left by the war, these writers argued, Reconstruction only caused further rifts between the North and the South (Baker 2007; Smith and Lowery 2013).

Another school of thought, emerging in the mid- to late-20th century and largely accepted today, states that it was, above all, the racism of the South that prevented Reconstruction from succeeding. The radicals and their idealism, it is argued, should be acknowledged as having struggled to advance the rights of the freedmen and as contributing to the restoration of the Southern economy. Most historians writing today hold that the radical state governments produced some worthy legislative achievements, including provisions for the education of blacks as well as poor whites. It is believed that Republican governments were no more corrupt than the governments preceding or succeeding them (whether Democratic or not). Lingering racism is identified as the principle reason why Reconstruction faltered—and why, once federal troops were pulled out at the end of Reconstruction, the rights of blacks were immediately extinguished (*ibid.*; Foner 1988).

Reconstruction Plans under Lincoln

After proclaiming the emancipation of slaves in January 1863, President Lincoln began planning for the postwar period. Later that year, for example, he developed a basic Reconstruction plan for the defeated Confederate state of Louisiana. Similar plans were introduced the following year in Tennessee and Arkansas. In beginning this process, Lincoln hoped to start the work of healing the damage done to the Union and to the South, and also to build up the Republican party in the former Confederate states. Thus, in a December 1863 decree, Lincoln offered amnesty and assistance toward reconstruction for all Confederate areas occupied by Union forces. Referred to as the Ten-Percent Plan, the decree provided a pardon to any Confederate who pledged allegiance to the Constitution and loyalty to the Union. It stated that a Confederate state could return to the Union when 10 percent of its voters (as of 1860) took the required oath and established a government that accepted emancipation.

Lincoln's Ten-Percent Plan caused the radicals in Congress to worry publically that it would grant the Southern aristocracy—the old planter society—a victory, of sorts, in that the bar for re-entry to the Union had been raised too low and ways would be found to get around or soften the requirements and lower expectations. In response, the radicals passed the Wade-Davis Bill (in July 1864), requiring 50 percent of a state's voters to take a solemn oath stating that they had not voluntarily acceded to the Confederate cause. Lincoln used the gambit of a pocket veto—a delay in signing a bill that causes it to expire—to prevent the Wade-Davis Bill from becoming law. Instead, he pursued his own plan, without great success. Several states (Louisiana, Arkansas, Tennessee, and Virginia) undertook

the required course of action, but when the time came Congress refused to accept the Senators and Representatives elected from those states. Matters were at an impasse when news came of Lincoln's assassination.

Reconstruction Plans under Johnson

Andrew Johnson, successor to Abraham Lincoln, initially satisfied the radicals with talk of breaking up the planter class and punishing the Confederate states. In an amnesty proclamation of May 1865, Johnson instituted harsher retributions than did his predecessor. He sought to make the property of owners of large plantations subject to confiscation, and to disenfranchise both those owners and all former military and civil officers of the Confederacy. The main objective was to unseat the planter class, destabilize its control of politics, and return state government to small farmers, traders, and artisans.

Johnson took advantage of a congressional recess (April to December, 1865) to roll his plan out in the South. He appointed a series of provisional governors, under whom the Southern states held conventions to set up new governments and new government policies. They elected new legislatures, voided or repealed their prewar ordinances of secession, abolished slavery, and did away with Confederate debts (except South Carolina). They ratified the Thirteenth Amendment guaranteeing freedom for African Americans (except Mississippi, which only ratified it in 1995). By the end of 1865, every former rebel state except Texas had reconstituted their governments.

On the societal front, however, things were a little different. Whites reasserted their dominance over blacks, principally by enacting Black Codes, or statutes meant to severely restrict the rights of the blacks and the freedoms they could enjoy. Such laws, for example, limited the ability of blacks to own land and to work as free laborers. They denied African Americans most of the civil and political liberties enjoyed by whites. Worse yet, many of these laws came about because offices in the new governments had been won by ostensibly disenfranchised Confederate leaders, i.e., those who were supposed to have been barred from office. Rather than ordering new elections, however, President Johnson granted blanket pardons.

In the North, an outraged public came to feel that Johnson was squandering his chance to impose a victor's justice. When Congress reconvened in early December 1865, it declined to admit the newly elected Senators and Representatives from the South. Not able to abide this, Johnson openly attacked Republican leaders and turned to vetoing their subsequent Reconstruction measures. Johnson's efforts had the effect of pushing moderate Republicans toward the side of the radicals. Thus, legislators passed, over the president's veto, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, intended to protect African Americans against harmful legislation such as black codes; and the Freedmen's Bureau Bill, granting that organization (the Freedman's Bureau) more time to do its work. When questions arose regarding the constitutionality of the Civil Rights Act, the radicals worked to incorporate many of its provisions into the Fourteenth Amendment (ratified 1868), making them permanent.

Relatively early on in the process (April 1866) the Joint Committee on Reconstruction issued a report stating that the ex-Confederate states were in no condition to conduct their own legislative affairs or to represent their citizens in the national government. These states had not held, nor could they be expected to hold, valid elections. The committee also proposed that Reconstruction was a matter for Congress to attend to, not the executive branch. Elections held in 1866 served to solidify the radicals' hold in Congress. Thus, when the Fourteenth Amendment failed to be ratified by the rebel states (except Tennessee), the time had come in the radicals' eyes for sterner measures to be introduced.

Reconstruction in Practice

The reconstruction of the South got under way on a large scale following the enactment, in March 1867, of the Reconstruction Act. According to it, and to three supplemental acts, the South (except Tennessee) was to be divided into five military districts, each led by an army commander whose authority reined over most matters of state. President Johnson, balking at this and other congressional measures, sought to remove the radical Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, even though such a maneuver violated the Tenure of Office Act. The latter was itself authorized by Congress over a presidential veto. Thus, when Johnson aimed his guns at Stanton, the House of Representatives moved to impeach him (February 1868). In the end, the vote in the Senate for conviction of the president fell one short, but by then Johnson's ability to rule was virtually nil.

One of the first priorities under the Reconstruction Acts was the writing of new state constitutions in the South. This was done, and in mid-1868 six states (Ar-

kansas, North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida) were readmitted to the Union, having duly ratified the Fourteenth Amendment as required by federal law. The four remaining, "unreconstructed" states (Virginia, Mississippi, Texas, and Georgia) were readmitted in 1870, after ratifying both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments, the latter of which guaranteed the right to vote for adult African American males.

In Southern state capitals, radical Republican governments worked to address the grave problems left by the Civil War and the destruction of slavery. These state legislatures were led by a mix of 1) Northerners who settled in the South, i.e., so-called carpet-baggers; 2) Southern whites in the Republican party, known as scalawags; and 3) freedmen (former slaves) along with free blacks. Together these men labored to reorganize the Southern economy and reconstitute Southern society. Trade was restored, the production of food and fiber (cotton) was brought back online, infrastructure was rebuilt, the financial system (including a redistributive tax) was revised, and educational programs were established for blacks and impoverished whites. For the first time, blacks were allowed to participate in the civil and economic life of the South, now that their political rights were guaranteed.

The majority of Southern whites continued in the postwar period, however, to reject the idea of treating former slaves as full and equal members of society. This is the period when the Ku Klux Klan, a vigilante or hate group, arose. Its threats and acts of violence kept African Americans and many white Republicans from enjoying their civil liberties, including the right to vote. Revelations of corruption in the radical Republican governments further fueled animosities, and eventually caused the fall of those governments. Now gone from the scene, too, were many of the old-guard radicals in Congress, such as Thaddeus Stevens, who died while in office. In relatively short order, the administration of Ulysses S. Grant was implicated in a corruption scandal of its own and could no longer devote its attention to a flagging Reconstruction effort in the South.

The End of Reconstruction

Eighteen seventy-six was an election year. At that time, only three states—Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana—remained under Republican control. The Republican presidential candidate that year, Rutherford B. Hayes (Ohio), proclaimed that the South would fare better under his administration. His Democratic opponent, Samuel J. Tilden (New York), was winning support in the South, as were other Democrats on the ballot. Inside the three holdout states concerted efforts were afoot to overturn the Republicans. Come the election, one of the most controversial in history, the results were indeterminate. Tilden won in the popular vote, but in the electoral vote both candidates claimed victory based on state tallies. To resolve the matter a compromise was struck, the Compromise of 1877, which awarded the disputed electoral votes—and the presidency—to Hayes in return for withdrawing federal troops from the South.

The withdrawal order was given on May 1st, 1877. The action effectively ended Reconstruction and returned the Southern states to Southerners, principally to white Southerners. Whites once again became politically dominant, as a "solid South" formed around the Democratic party. Blacks were promptly disenfranchised through new "Jim Crow" laws and other means, thus losing most of the civil and political rights they had won along with their hopes for economic prosperity. For the next eighty or ninety years, African Americans remained, as Frederick Douglass characterized it, "not yet quite free." Douglass wrote about the phenomenon in his autobiography:

> Though slavery was abolished, the wrongs of my people were not ended. Though they were slaves, they were not yet quite free. No man can be truly free whose liberty is dependent upon the thoughts, feeling, and actions of others, and who has himself no means in his own hands for guarding, protecting, defending, and maintaining that liberty. Yet the Negro after his emancipation was precisely in this state of destitution… He was free from the individual master but the slave of society. He had neither money, property, nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dusty road under his feet. He was free from the old quarter that once gave him shelter, but a slave to the rains of summer and the frost of winter. He was in a word, literally turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute to the open sky. (Douglass 1882, 458-59)

Michael Shally-Jensen, PhD

■ Letter from Roanoke Island

Date: June 13, 1866
Author: Sarah P. Freeman
Genre: letter

Summary Overview

After the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony was established on Roanoke Island, North Carolina, in 1863 and became a haven for former slaves, missionaries from throughout the Union were sent to help the refugees there. By 1865, the colony housed nearly four thousand former slaves. Many of its residents were sick or injured, and those men of working age had joined the Union Army. After the end of the Civil War, property taken to establish the colony was returned to its owners, and the three forts on the island were disbanded, leaving the residents of the colony without protection. Sarah P. Freeman, a missionary from Maine, was one of several who stayed on the island after the war to try to help the people still living there, particularly the aged, ill, and orphaned, of which there were many. Her letter—published in the *National Freedman* on July 15, 1866, and written the previous month—outlines the struggles of the missionaries, who worked to provide the refugees with food, shelter, and education, as well as the confusion and uncertainty that followed the war for those who had been freed by it. Whether former slaves stayed on the island or left to find work elsewhere, they faced constant challenges to their lives and livelihoods.

Defining Moment

The Roanoke Freedmen's Colony was established in 1863 after the Union Army occupied the island, an important strategic location, and freed the slaves living there. Former slaves from throughout the South soon joined the population of Roanoke, and the government responded by seizing land and building settlements that were intended to transition into a self-sufficient colony. The government officials in charge of the colony were instructed to provide paid work for the residents until they were able to support themselves. Many former slaves were employed as cooks, cleaners, and laborers for the Union Army. Those who were able to join the army were promised rations for their families. A church was established in the colony, along with schools and a sawmill.

Although the colony was supervised by an army chaplain, the Reverend Horace James, and initially administered as a military contraband camp, most of the daily care of its residents was provided by men and women supported by the American Missionary Association and the National Freedman's Relief Association (NFRA). One of the first relief workers to arrive at the island was Elizabeth James, a cousin of Rev. James and an experienced educator. Others followed, with more than twenty-five missionaries serving the colony in the three short years it was active. Like Sarah P. Freeman, many of those workers were from New England and wrote letters to the agencies that sponsored them, providing valuable information about the state of the colony.

At the end of the Civil War, the Union Army presence on Roanoke Island was removed, its forts disbanded, and the land on which the colony was built returned to its owners. Some relief agencies negotiated to purchase parcels of land from their former owners, but this effort was largely unsuccessful. Many former slaves returned to an uncertain future on the mainland, but some were unable or unwilling to do so, and relief work continued under dangerous conditions. The situation on the island, which had deteriorated quickly in the last year of the war, became critical. Food was in very short supply, disease was rampant, and the residents of the island were vulnerable to violence and exploitation. Many were afraid to leave the island, despite the deplorable conditions, because they had nowhere to go and did not believe that they could find work.

Freeman's letter illustrates the crisis faced by former slaves on Roanoke Island and also describes the uncertainty and danger they faced if they left the island. Freeman was one of many relief workers who stayed on after the war and tried to help this vulnerable population, but she and her colleagues were unable to prevent the demise of the colony and the suffering of its residents.

Author Biography

Sarah P. Freeman was a widow from Maine, the sister of a prominent South Freeport congregational minister. At about seventy years old, she was older than most of the other relief workers when she came to the Roanoke Freedmen's Colony with her daughter as a volunteer for the National Freedman's Relief Association. Freeman was an energetic and organized woman who made significant contributions to the colony. Like many NFRA volunteers, Freeman was primarily interested in the vocational and occupational, rather than religious, training of the colony residents. She was instrumental in founding a vocational school for women to learn quilting and straw braiding, along with sewing and knitting. In addition, Freeman wrote many letters to the National Freedman, the journal of the NFRA, beginning in 1864. These letters, many of which were published, shed light on life in the Roanoke Freedmen's Colony and the needs of its residents.

HISTORICAL DOCUMENT

Roanoke Island, N.C.
June 13, 1866

Dear Sir:—I find there is a great amount of sickness and suffering, which, I think, is the result of the scarcity of food. At one time, during my absence, so nearly did they approach to starvation, in consequence of not being able to get supplies here, that our ladies, besides giving all that they could spare from family stores, were obliged to give out damaged food, which I purchased for our pigs before I left. This the people cooked and ate, to save life.

Is it any wonder that sickness follows? Whose fault is this? Surely not the fault of any one here, for there was no means of transportation to bring food to the island till a boat came down to transport goods from a steamer which was wrecked on the coast. This was seized by our kind-hearted assistant superintendent, Capt. Goslin, and dispatched to Newbern for stores, but owing to a very violent storm, it was gone two long weeks, being eight days on her passage back, and obliged to be lightened by throwing overboard a part of her stores.

During this terrible time, the passengers of the ill-fated steamer, about sixty in number, among whom were the wife and children of the rebel Gen. Price, the private Secretary of Maximilian, and other celebrities, on their way to Mexico, arrived on the island, and having money, could procure food. A boat could also be sent to take them on their way, and every attention shown them. This was as it should be. But should these poor oppressed people, to whom our Government has pledged protection and aid, be left to perish?

Some may say they should leave the island, go into the interior and find employment.

They have been trying the experiment to some extent; but many who have not quite confidence enough yet in their former owners, have left their families, and been out to work, and look for a home for their families.

I have been collecting facts from some with whom I am well acquainted, and whom I advised last winter to go out and see what they could do. I will give a few of them. Kinohen Rennick, a house carpenter (whom the N.Y.N.F.R. Association employed in building industrial school and store, a smart man of middle age, having a family to support), left the island the 11th of February, has worked to the mount of $100 been paid only $15 in money, and was obliged to leave in debt, was called upon to pay poll tax of $1.50, and when he inquired what it was for, was told that it was for his freedom.

John Mills, without family, left at the same time, and has made on an average 4,000 shingles per week, which, at the stipulated price for manufacturing, amounts to $16 per week, and at his settlement, a few days since, found $10 due him, and that he could not get, and was obliged to work his passage to the island.

Alphonso Lenox, a smart young man, who served as a private during the war, went into Murden [Martin?]

County and engaged to work for fifty cents per day and found, during the days that he work; but on the Sabbath, he must either work or find himself; chose to do the latter; but after working two weeks found that it cost him nearly as much to keep him over the Sabbath as he could earn during the week, and concluded to return to the island. Employers keep supply stores, from which they pay their employees, selling them corn meal for $1.80 per bushel, when plenty can be bought in the vicinity with cash for ninety cents.

These facts speak for themselves.

In view of them, is it any wonder that the people hesitate about taking their families into the country?

One more case. Nelson Perkins went a few miles beyond Elizabeth City, engaged work, sent for his family, and got them nicely settled; but, while pursuing peacefully his avocation, was shot down in cold blood; reason assigned, that some time during the war he was serving as a Federal soldier, on picket line, not far from the place where he was at work. After his death, his family came back again to the island.

This is the second case of murder among those who have gone from the island, and yet nothing, so far as I can learn, has been done with the murderers.

Is it any wonder they hesitate about leaving a place of safety?

I hope the number of teachers for the coming autumn will be greatly increased.

In many places the people are doing all they can to prepare buildings, and sustain their schools.

At Rowell's [Powells] Point, near Currituck Court House, the colored people have built a schoolhouse, and promise to board a teacher, and supply fuel.

At Ben [Trent] River settlement, near Newbern, they have a school-house, and $75 subscribed for support of a teacher. I hope Mr. Pond will see to that when he returns.

There are calls from Hyde County and various other points. Those who go out into the country bring back with them very urgent appeals for teachers.

Say to the people: The harvest is ripe, send laborers.

GLOSSARY

Maximilian: emperor of Mexico, 1864–67

poll tax: a tax on the act of voting, used to discourage underprivileged voters

Document Analysis

Freeman's letter to the *National Freedman*, written in June of 1866 and published the following month, illustrates the hardships faced by former slaves on Roanoke Island and the relief workers who remained behind to assist them after the end of the war. She begins her letter to the *National Freedman* with the most pressing need and goes on to explain that people remaining on Roanoke Island were sick and starving, but were too frightened to leave—and for good reason. She concludes by asking for help in the form of "teachers," who could presumably provide not only educational but also material support.

Freeman's letter begins with an example of how dire the situation had become. She had left the island temporarily and came back to find that "damaged" food purchased for pigs had been eaten by the desperate population. Without the military infrastructure in place, it was nearly impossible to arrange for transportation of goods to the island, though when a steamer carrying wealthy passengers wrecked, they were able to find food and transportation quickly. This injustice outraged Freeman, who asks, "Should these poor oppressed people, to whom our Government has pledged protection and aid, be left to perish?"

Much of the remainder of the letter is a response to those who thought that the residents of the island should simply leave and find work. "I have been collecting facts from some with whom I am well acquainted, and whom I advised last winter to go out and see what they could do," Freeman writes. She catalogues the difficulties faced by the men who had set off from the island to find work. One had been paid only a fraction of what he was owed and returned to the island in debt. Another, who made shingles, was similarly underpaid and had to work off his passage back to the island. Many

of these laborers were forced to buy food and supplies from company stores at greatly inflated prices, and one of Freeman's sources reported that it cost him more to feed himself on Sunday than he made in a week.

In addition to economic exploitation, there was the ever-present threat of violence. Freeman provides the example of a man who was murdered because he had served as a soldier in the Union Army near where he was employed. Freeman notes that this was the second such murder. "Is it any wonder they hesitate about leaving a place of safety?" she asks.

Freeman ends her letter with an urgent plea for help. Residents of the island had set up schools and were "doing all they [could] to prepare buildings, and sustain their schools." Teachers were also desperately needed on the mainland, as relief workers and the organizations that sponsored them were often the only resources available to former slaves.

Essential Themes

The primary theme of Freeman's letter is the hardship faced by both the residents of the former Roanoke Freedmen's Colony and those who had chosen to leave the island. Missionaries and relief workers, who were primarily educated women from New England, were forced to beg for supplies and support for a population in crisis. They faced a daunting choice: Fight for the survival of the sick and starving settlements on Roanoke Island, or encourage its residents to find work on the mainland, a prospect that was equally perilous. Though Freeman was clearly devoted to her cause, she was unable to provide for the basic needs of the people in her care and understood the crisis they were in, even as she sought to convince more people to join her. Her letter sheds light on an extremely dangerous and uncertain time for former slaves, even those who had found temporary refuge on Roanoke Island, and illustrates the difficulties faced by those who worked to help this vulnerable population.

—Bethany Groff, MA

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