

Reconstruction and Race (1863-1876)

Although Congress had endorsed the enrollment of black troops as early as July 1862, it was Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863 that set in motion the creation of the United States Colored Troops (USCT) and ultimately the enlistment of more than 180,000 blacks in the Union army during the final eighteen months of the conflict.



Emancipation in Beaufort, SC (1863)

In his oil painting, "A Visit From the Old Mistress" (1876), Winslow Homer attempts to portray the social changes that occurred after the Civil War while acknowledging that much still had not changed and that new tensions now threatened post-war southern society. These former slaves, probably now sharecroppers, were not yet secure or safe in 1876 as federal supervision of the South was ending.



Winslow Homer painting (1876)

1863

1865

1865-70

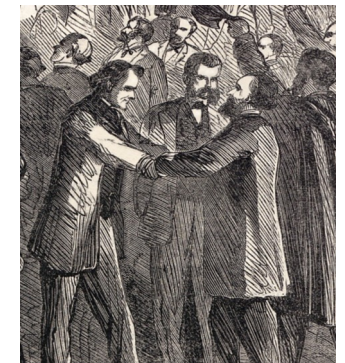
1876

The end of the Civil War and the destruction of slavery helped set the stage for the integration of nearly four million ex-slaves into free American society. At the heart of this transition was a desire to legalize marriages, reconstitute families, educate children, earn wages or cultivate land, and finally, to achieve some form of political equality. For a period after the war, there was great hope among blacks embodied by this Waud sketch.



Alfred Waud sketch of a black wedding (1865)

Between 1865 and 1870, Americans radically altered the U.S. Constitution with three amendments (Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth) that promised to abolish slavery, establish universal equality and promote voting rights for black men. The reality, however, proved far different and within only a few years, the Supreme Court was vastly diminishing the scope of these changes.



Passage of Thirteenth Amendment (1865)

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