

The Effects of Reconstruction on Life in Virginia

1. The years following the Civil War were hard ones for Virginians. This period of U.S. history is known as **Reconstruction**. During Reconstruction, Congress passed laws to help rebuild the nation and bring the southern states back into the Union.

What problems did Virginia face during Reconstruction?

2. Virginia's economy was ruined by the war. The first major problem faced by the state was a lack of money to pay its debts. Virginia owed over 45 million dollars. It had borrowed this money before the war to build canals, roads, and railroads. To make matters worse, the money printed by the Confederacy was now worthless and southern banks had closed their doors.

3. Another problem involved the land. The war had left much of Virginia in ruins. Buildings had been burned, bridges torn down, and roads and railroads destroyed. The state leaders wanted to rebuild but they had no money. Plantations also suffered. Fields and crops had been destroyed and there was no money available to replant or hire workers to replace the newly freed slaves.

4. The state also faced the problem of what to do with its freed slaves. Thousands of freedmen now had no homes, no food, no clothing, and no way to make a living.

Steps were taken to resolve some of the state's problems:

5. The South needed help with its thousands of freed slaves. Although the slaves were now free, they had no homes, jobs, food, or money. In response to this problem Congress created the Freedman's Bureau. This government agency provided food, schools, and medical care for freed slaves and others in need in Virginia as well as the other southern states.

6. A new system of agriculture called sharecropping was also developed during Reconstruction to help solve the farming problems caused by the war. Farmers needed workers but they did not have the money to pay them. The solution was to rent land to poor white farmers and freed slaves. These workers lived on the property and grew crops. At harvest time they paid their rent by giving the landowner a *share* of their *crops*. The landowner often made sharecroppers give more than half of their harvest as a rent payment. Because of this, the freed slaves were not much better off than when they were owned by the landowners.