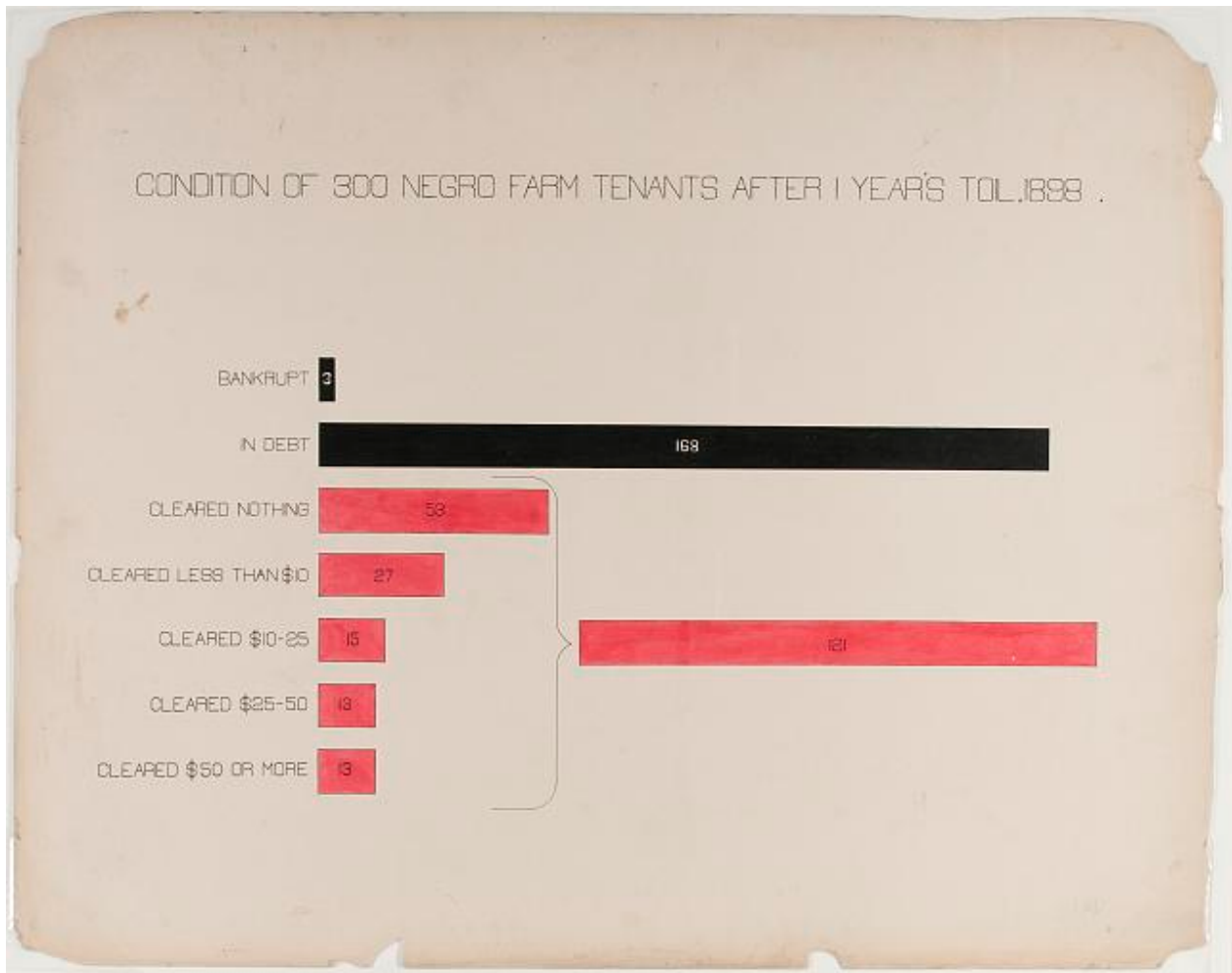


## From Slavery to Sharecropping...Just Another Form of Servitude?

Gerilyn Leland

**8-5.3 Summarize the successes and failures of Reconstruction in South Carolina, including the creation of political, educational, and social opportunities for African Americans; the rise of discriminatory groups; and the withdrawal of federal protection.**



[The Georgia Negro] Condition of 300 Negro farm tenants after 1 year's toil, 1898  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ppmsca.33892/?co=anedub> digital file from original item)  
ppmsca 33892 <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.33892> Library of Congress Prints and  
Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>  
Chart prepared by Du Bois for the Negro Exhibit of the American Section at the Paris  
Exposition Universelle in 1900 to show the economic and social progress of African Americans  
since emancipation.



"Oklahoma Cotton Field." <http://docsteach.org/documents/516434/print> Overseer and Negro cotton pickers ca. 1897 – 1898 *Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Interior National Archives Identifier: 516434*

## Description:

Before the Civil War ended, President Abraham Lincoln was offering the South the Ten Percent Plan in hopes that the southern leaders would accept his offer to rejoin the Union and end the war. The South's determination to fight to preserve states' and their way of life led to Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse in April, 1865. Now the hard work began ... Lincoln, Johnson, and Congress had to agree on a plan to reunite the south with the rest of the Union.

The Reconstruction Amendments ... the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments ... were supposed to provide opportunities for the newly freed slaves to become functioning members of society. The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment abolished slavery. The 14<sup>th</sup> amendment guaranteed all citizens of the United States all rights guaranteed to them by the Constitution (*for newly freed blacks it overturned the Dred Scott decision*) under due process of law. The 15<sup>th</sup> amendment guaranteed all males the right to vote. With the population imbalance in the south (there were 2 negroes for every white person), the former members of the Confederacy were having a very difficult time recognizing that African Americans were equal to them, were receiving more help from the federal government than they were, and could potentially have an equal or even higher place in southern society.

The Radical Republicans in Congress were aware that the white southerner was not receptive to these amendments; therefore, the former seceded states were divided into military districts and Union troops were placed in the south to make sure that these new laws were not broken. The former plantation owner was desperate to get his farm up and running. He knew that with the Union troops "in town" they could not break the law so they had to become creative in their working relationship with their former slaves. The former slaves had nowhere to go so the sharecropping arrangements were created. The newly freed Africans could not read or write and the former plantation owners took advantage of their illiteracy. The sharecroppers were given a share of the crop to sell for their own profit but until the crop could be harvested; they borrowed money from the landowner signing contracts that essentially made them indebted to the landowner for many, many years. The former plantation owner had his farm up and running again and essentially had free labor because of these contracts that indebted the sharecropper to the white farmer and most importantly; there was nothing the Radical Republican Congress could do to stop them because they were not breaking any laws!

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Looking at the chart, how many Negro farmers were in debt in 1898? Why were they in debt?
2. Why do you think newly freed slaves entered into the sharecropping agreements?
3. Looking at the image "Oklahoma Cotton Field", if the date 1897 was not published, what does the scene look like? Why do you think that there is a white overseer on a horse?
4. Was sharecropping just another form of servitude? Defend your answer with evidence from the documents.