Carpetbaggers and Scalawags

By Toni Lee Robinson

The American Civil War was over. The soldiers were coming home! But the war had brought many changes to the southern United States. It was like a big jigsaw puzzle with the pieces all mixed up. No one was sure how to sort it out.

One thing that had to be fixed was the leadership. The southern states had made their own government at the beginning of the Civil War. They called themselves the Confederate States of America. The United States had sent the Union Army to bring these states back under national rule. The U.S. did not agree that states could make their own rules.

The Union had won the war against the Confederate States. It was time to put the damaged country back together. Could the Southern states be made to fit back into the United States? Each state would need a person to take charge. Each would need lawmakers and judges. But who would these leaders be?

Different people came to do these jobs. Some people came from the northern states to find jobs and make money in the South. Union soldier Marshall Twitchell took a job in Louisiana to help freed slaves. Part of his job was collecting taxes to pay for the new government. All the white planters thought the taxes were unfair. They thought Mr. Twitchell was spending the money on himself.

Southerners didn't like these Northerners. They called them carpetbaggers, after the cloth bags that some carried. "These carpetbaggers didn't come to help," Southerners thought. "They're only after money!"

Some Southern white people worked in the new governments.

People who were loyal to the Confederacy hated these Southerners. "You are scalawags!" they said. A scalawag is a person who can't be trusted. By helping bring back national rule, these Southerners seemed to be joining the enemy.

Confederate General James Longstreet was one of Robert E. Lee's most trusted officers. Longstreet became a friend to Ulysses Grant after the war and worked for the federal government. To many Southerners, this made Longstreet an enemy even though he had fought bravely for them.

After the war, new governments meant new laws. In some places black people were allowed to vote. Because there were many of them, their vote was powerful. Some of these newly freed slaves became leaders too. They were elected to city, county, and state jobs. Some were even sent to Congress.

Setting up new leadership in the South was hard work. Those who took the jobs had trouble working together. Some of the new leaders were dishonest. They took money that wasn't theirs. Some treated people unfairly.

The new officials were governing people who resented them. Southerners felt they were being made to do things they didn't want to do. Life was hard. Many people were short of food. Few had any way of making money. Taxes were very high. It took lots of money to pay for all the things the new government was doing.

But the new leaders passed some important civil rights laws. These are rules that support the same freedoms for everyone. In South Carolina, for instance, a new state constitution allowed all men to vote even if they had been slaves. The new Georgia constitution said that all people born in the U.S. were citizens even if they were black. The new leaders also set up public schools. They knew it was important for everyone, black or white, to be educated.

The new governments didn't last very long. In Washington, D.C., new leaders who wanted to try different plans were put into office. After a while, the carpetbaggers were sent home. Scalawags and black people were voted out of office. Many changes took place in the course of putting the South back together again.
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Questions

1. Which side won the American Civil War?
   A. The Union
   B. The Confederacy
   C. England
   D. The black people

2. Who were the carpetbaggers?
   A. Southerners who hated the Union
   B. Southerners loyal to the Union
   C. Freed black people
   D. Northerners who came South for jobs

3. Who were the scalawags?
   A. Northerners who weren't honest
   B. Southerners helping with new governments
   C. Southerners who hated the Union
   D. Cruel slave owners

4. True or False: Black people were never allowed to vote or hold office in the South.
   A. True
   B. False

5. True or False: Once they got used to it, Southerners loved their new leaders.
   A. True
   B. False

6. What laws say that everyone should have the same freedoms?
   A. Voting laws
   B. Civil rights laws
   C. Free speech laws
   D. Anti-slavery laws

7. What kinds of laws did the new leaders work on?
   A. Laws setting up public schools
   B. Laws that would help business
   C. Civil rights laws
   D. All of the above

8. List two reasons that few people liked the new governments.