**Life After the Abolition of Slavery**

James Johnson, an ex-slave from Columbia, South Carolina, said in his narrative that he “[felt] and [knew] dat de years after de war was worser than befo’”.  The 13th Amendment secured the freedom of slaves, but slaves paid the price for their freedom with new difficulties.

After abolition, freed blacks fought for mere survival. Most slaves were released from their previous plantations without a penny to their names. It was difficult for them to find jobs since many whites refused to acknowledge their free status and the worth of their contributions. If they did manage to find a job, wages for free blacks were also very low because the work efforts of blacks were believed to not be worth much and could be easily replaced.

Since they didn’t make much money, most slaves could not own land or buy their own homes. According to the 1880 Census, only one-fifith of free blacks owned at least some of the land they farmed, with most of them being deep ]in debt to white land owners.  James Johnson stated that, “Befo’ de war, [blacks] did have a place to lie down at night and somewhere to eat, when they got hungry in slavery time.” This wasn’t always the case after abolition.

The poverty among ex-slaves during this time resulted in a lack of nutrition and medical care. This caused a high death rate for African Americans, especially their children. Being sick also meant unpaid medical bills or lack of access to the correct medical care. The 1900 Census shows 30 out of every 1,000 blacks dying each year as opposed to 17 out of every 1,000 whites.

Education was also difficult. In most places, free black children were not allowed to go to existing schools. Free blacks began their own schools but often lacked the necessary resources and facilities to ensure a good education.

Soon after the 13th Amendment was passed, states began creating their own laws to formally deny free blacks the same rights as whites. They did not have the same rights as white people; their interactions with former slaveholders were pretty much unchanged. The white people took violent action against them, and many times it was because they resented their freedom and fight for equal rights.

**Citations**

* James Johnson, The Cotton Man, Ex-Slave 79 Years Old, 1955, in *Slave Narratives: South Carolina Narratives Part 3*, ed. James Johnson (St. Clair Shores, Michigan: Scholarly Press, Inc., 1976), 42.