

# End of Civil War & Transitions

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The end of the Civil War was days away and years gone according to the dates on the given primary sources. The direct and personal account in the *Diary Entries of a Southern Plantation Wife* easily give readers an idea that the new systems of freedom (established in 1863) had not yet been received, only rumored at this time. Meanwhile, we are given the legal lease between Dawson and Solid South as they transition into a sharecropping system. This document gives insight on the legality of finding one's place in an agricultural society, with little to no emotion, but by using our knowledge, we can make accurate assumptions about how these legal documents made the people feel.

As of 1863, technically slaves were free men. Although for many years to come, the idea of citizenship was in question, they were in fact, *free*. These diary entries seem to be proving otherwise however, but as readers, students, and historians we can infer that word has simply not traveled to the deep south just yet. That word being that slaves were freed men, many southern plantation owners would deny the idea, keep the idea on a low scale, and/or just simply keep it a secret from fellow plantation owners upon finding out. Another valid reason would be the lack of technology, the only thing to spread word fast enough would have been newspapers, but in the deep south articles such as "free the slaves" would be hidden into secrecy. The author proves this point in her oblivious tone in the first entry, she starts with the rumor moving through her family that their slaves must be freed. By the end of the entry, she corrects herself into being "mistaken" and that they did not need to be freed. However, as the end of the war was just one day away, the author's tone has changed into an angry, bitter voice. It is made clear that the owners and slaves now understand that they are freedmen and do have the right to leave. The author is proven wrong at this point, which I think is a major source of her anger, her family has lost their

laborers, an unknown feeling and system to this woman. While the author is mistaken for thinking they would forever have slaves, she is not completely wrong in her statement that says, “It is a terrible cruelty to them this unexpected, unsolicited gift of freedom.” It is known that the post-war freedoms of former slaves was not pretty nor easy. These men and women were free, but not citizens, they had no education, they cannot vote, and most importantly, they have no money, land, or possessions. Eventually, legislation would be passed to make obtaining these things slightly easier for freedmen.

By the 1870’s African Americans were citizens and there was a new system in place called sharecropping. Sharecropping entailed a former slave (usually) and a landowner willing to divide and rent out a portion of his plantation. During this time, freedmen still struggled in society, especially a working society. There was very much competition for jobs from all the former slaves, there were extremely low wages (if any at all), and dangerous conditions. While this was unappealing to many, without an education, agriculture was the only business they would survive in. There was also great benefit to the landowners as well, as a racist society, they did not have to pay sufficient wages, nor give fair contracts, however it was good enough to be legal and worth it to many african families. This time period was beginning to bring many changes in the agricultural business, due to the railroads and creation of corporations, causing many small, single family farms to go under. Sharecropping allowed those farms to make more money with more help on the farm, without paying much for it. We cannot know for sure the race of the “leasee,” but we can educatedly assume Dawson was African American. The lease itself provides no emotional aspects of this exchange, but there are strict guidelines the renter must follow, keep, and uphold in order to please his landlord. As if the disappointment of not

being able to own your own land was not an emotional stressor enough, the standard to which the sharecropper was held to was extremely difficult and specific. As we know from history, this system eventually failed due to more advancements in the railroads, a national market, and corporations.

These documents are both very raw and full of information for historians to delve into, providing information to emotions, legal terms and developments, as well as how the transitions clearly and rigidly happened over these few post war years.