

Name _____

Date _____

Black Codes



After the slaves became free, southern states passed laws to keep blacks from real freedom. Here are some examples of these "black codes."

Mississippi Vagrant Act (1865)

All freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes over the age of eighteen years, found with no lawful employment or business, or found unlawfully assembling themselves together, either in the day or night time . . . shall be deemed vagrants, and on conviction thereof shall be fined . . . and imprisoned.

In case any freedman, free Negro or mulatto shall fail for five days after the imposition of any fine . . . to pay the same, that it shall be . . . the duty of the sheriff . . . to hire out said freedman, free Negro or mulatto, to any person who will, for the shortest period of service, pay said fine.

Louisiana Farm Labor Act (1865)

Bad work shall not be allowed. Failing to obey reasonable orders, neglect of duty, and leaving home without permission will be deemed disobedience; impudence, swearing, or indecent language to or in the presence of the employer, his family, or agent, or quarreling and fighting with one another, shall be deemed disobedience [and fined]. . . . All difficulties arising between the employers and laborers shall be settled by the former.

Florida Act on Public Places (1866)

If any Negro, mulatto, or other person of color shall intrude himself into any religious or other public assembly of white persons, or into any railroad car or other public vehicle set aside for the exclusive accommodation of white people, he shall be deemed to be guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be sentenced to stand in the pillory for one hour, or be whipped.

Mississippi Apprentice Law (1865)

It shall be the duty of all . . . civil officers . . . to report to the probate courts . . . all freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes under the age of eighteen . . . who are orphans, or whose parent or parents have not the means or who refuse to provide for and support said minors . . . the clerk of said court [will] apprentice said minors to some competent and suitable person . . . the former owner of said minors shall have the preference.

(continued)



Name _____

Date _____

UNIT 4
WORKSHEET 6

Black Codes *(continued)*



Mississippi Penal Law (1865)

Any freedman, free Negro, or mulatto committing malicious mischief . . . seditious speeches, insulting gestures, language, or acts, or assaults on any person . . . shall, upon conviction thereof . . . be fined . . . and may be imprisoned.

Directions: You are a free black person living under the provisions of the “black codes” you’ve just read above. Put a checkmark next to any of the things you do below that violate one of the codes. Also, note which part of what law you’re violating.

- _____ 1. You leave work at noon to visit your sick grandmother.

- _____ 2. You get together with a group of friends for a game of dice.

- _____ 3. You join a group of whites meeting to discuss crop prices.

- _____ 4. A coworker hits you with her hoe, and you start yelling at her.

- _____ 5. A white man driving a wagon forces you off the road, and you shake your fist at him in anger.

- _____ 6. Your church isn’t holding services this Sunday, so you attend the whites’ Baptist church services instead.

- _____ 7. You’re tired and it’s extremely hot, so you take a 10-minute break from work.

- _____ 8. You’re 16 and your parents have both died; you are running your family’s small farm.

Challenge Question: Under the “black codes,” why would a dispute between you and your employer almost certainly be decided in your employer’s favor?



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Challenge Question: Under the “black codes,” why would a dispute between you and your employer almost certainly be decided in your employer’s favor?

