

Congratulations! You are newly freed slaves!

Most of you have lived in the United States for many generations. Some of you have come from plantations far from where you now live, and you wish to get together with long-lost relatives (even husbands and wives; children and parents). Most of you still bear the scars of slavery, both on your backs and in the deprivation that you have suffered. Most of you cannot read or write since the law stopped you from learning, and you have a strong desire for education. You are charitable, and though you well understand the ways in which you and your family suffered, you have surprisingly generous feelings toward your former masters. Nonetheless, you are aware that they are responsible for much of your suffering, and while you do not necessarily wish them to be punished, you would like some justice now that slavery is ended that might begin to help your family cope with the difficult days ahead. You fear white people and especially dislike many of the poor whites who, in former times, had worked for the masters as overseers, slave catchers, and the like. You resent the ridiculous attitude they have that they are superior to you simply because of the color of their skin. Those rednecks are ignorant, violent, and mean. You realize the whites are in the majority in most Southern states (South Carolina being the one exception), and whites are best avoided rather than confronted. Still, you feel that your hour is at hand!

Congratulations! You are Southern planters!

Most of you are well-educated and have lived in the South for several generations (quite a few of you having attended college in the North.) You view your position of leadership at the top of Southern society as a right that a person of superior breeding such as yourself deserves. You see the poor, white dirt farmers who have less land and fewer slaves than you as your inferiors, and you wish to hold on to your political power and natural position of leadership against their efforts to “make things more equal.” Those ruffians wouldn’t know how to properly care for their slaves if they owned them: they would probably beat them in an unnecessary and mean-spirited way! Of course *you* know the proper way to treat the Negro race, and they respond to your firm and Christian hand by showing you respect and obedience. Your slaves are *loyal* to you for the most part. It really hurt to see so many of them running off during the War whenever Yankee soldiers came close enough to the plantation to make it possible. Such ingrates should be whipped (and after all you’ve done for them). Lord knows how they’ll fend for themselves now that you won’t be there to protect them; they’re just like children. Of course, you would be willing to put past disloyalty aside if they would remain and work the land. You *do* need someone to grow the cotton on your large plantation, and there are so few white men willing to do such back-breaking labor. You have very little cash now; whatever you own is tied up in land and the slaves that you lost as a result of emancipation. What must be avoided at all costs is those white trash influencing your former slaves; the two groups must be kept apart. Worst of all, of course, are those grubby Yankees! They have no respect for our cherished history, or ways of life. They don’t understand the Negroes, and they don’t understand our “special relationship” with them. All those pasty-faced Yankee clerks understand is making a buck. They are Godless and only pursue the almighty dollar! We must save our Southern women from all of them, and they must be taught to mind their own business.

Congratulations! You are yeoman farmers!

There are only two things you hate more than those rich twit planters: the Negroes and the Yankees. Negroes, you feel, are an inferior race, and you are somewhat resentful that you never had enough money to own one before the War when slavery was still legal. The thought of slaves running free anywhere they want to go fills you with anger. Especially annoying are those slaves that are flaunting their freedom, putting on airs that they are as good as any whites now. Many of you were on slave-catching teams before the War, and you feel that *you* know how to deal with the Negroes. The Yankees don't belong here, and they also think that they're better than Southerners just because they have a grade-school education and can read and write. They should go back home, both the soldiers and their civilian friends. Besides, the planters, who have run things in this country for as long as you can remember, say it's okay to beat up one or two soldiers if you catch them out alone and drunk at night. The planters are too big for their britches though. They run everything around here, and a poor, honest, white man doesn't have much of a say in things. You would like to pull them off their fine white horses into the muck with you, but they are always too powerful. Poor whites may not have much education, but they're better than those Negroes that the planters depend on to do everything from picking the cotton to wiping the baby's nose.

Congratulations! You are a white Northerner!

You are glad that the war is over, and you are weary of the whole damned mess! Those plantation owners really caused you and your neighbors a bunch of trouble with their treason and disloyalty to the flag and the nation. Now they will have to follow the laws of this land and free their miserable Negro slaves. Imagine the nerve of those people trying to bring their cotton and their slaves into the territories of the United States and even up to the North! The idea of having slave labor is un-American. Free labor is vastly superior; it is what made this country great, and it has proved itself to be superior by the fact that the North won the War. Those planters and their illiterate yeomen kinsmen have been a thorn in your side since before the War, always voting down any attempt to improve the country by funding railroads, canals, and the like with federal tax dollars; their opposition to protective tariffs; and their continual groaning over slavery. They even had the nerve to insist that we help them recover their wretched runaway slaves! Some of you have opposed slavery for years, though most of you don't care one way or another what happens to the free Negroes of the South, as long as they don't come up here to the North and compete for jobs with free, white laborers, and as long as Southerners show respect for the Union and obey federal laws. Many of you have money to invest, but you're not sure whether or not to put it in Southern businesses seeing how chaotic everything is down there. If Southerners would just do things the way they are done up North, it might not be bad to make a little profit on a Southern investment. The Republicans among you are angry that all this trouble was brought upon you and many of you would like to punish the planters or at least make them pay for the death and destruction of the War, not to mention what they have done to those poor Negroes.

Congratulations! You are an educated Northern black!

You, much like Northern whites, are relieved the War is finally over. Those arrogant Southern plantation owners caused a whole mess of trouble by refusing to recognize and accept the inherent immorality of the slave system. While resentful of white Southern planters for perpetuating the system of slavery, you particularly despise their agents – white yeoman farmers. You know they look down on you because of the color of your skin, which is rather ironic coming from illiterate, ignorant, poor whites. They are little better than you in terms of their education. The only thing that sets them apart is the color of their skin and the fact that white planters entrust them with positions of authority. Many of these racist ignoramus spent years tormenting your fellow blacks as slave-catchers and overseers, and you and your Southern brethren have felt their scorn for decades. Some of you were once slaves yourselves, while others are descendants of escaped slaves. You have experienced first-hand both the physical and psychological effects of slavery and you feel for your newly freed Southern brethren. You are torn between the arguments of W.E.B. DuBois, who advocates fully political power and civil rights for blacks, and the arguments of Booker T. Washington. While you understand and partially support Washington's call for greater industrial and manual education, you find his urging to give equality time, to be giving white Southerners too much credit. DuBois understands the need for immediate equality – who is to say when and if whites will ever come around and grant us full equality? What impetus will they ever have to grant us the vote? None I say! Therefore, it is essential that we stand tall and demand full equality before the law.