

Carpetbaggers and Scalawags

During the period known as Reconstruction, thousands of Northerners moved to the South. They wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that were available to make money. The South needed to be rebuilt. New industries and businesses were needed. Hired workers built factories that produced farm equipment and machinery. Mines were opened. People replanted cotton and tobacco farms and operated them as big businesses.



Unfortunately, most Southerners did not like the "Yankee invaders." They called Northerners "carpetbaggers" because Northerners often arrived in the South carrying their belongings in cloth luggage bags. Southerners felt the Northern business people really cared more about making money for themselves rather than improving the lives of Southerners. In fact, most carpetbaggers weren't rich business people out to make money off the people of the South. Most were former soldiers who had set out to find opportunities that were not available in the North. Most of the anger the Southerners felt was because the carpetbaggers supported the rights of freed slaves.

"Scalawags" were Southerners who worked with carpetbaggers or supported the freed slaves. Many of these people were white Southerners who joined the Republican Party after the Civil War. Scalawags were often considered traitors. Many of the so-called scalawags held positions in government during Reconstruction. They tried to get state governments to consider equality and rights for all citizens in the plans they made for their states.

Many people still use the terms carpetbagger and scalawag in today's politics. A carpetbagger is used to describe a person who gets involved in someone else's business for his or her own personal gain. The word "scalawag" is still often used to mean a trait today.

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