



## Section 4

## PRIMARY SOURCE *from* An Inquiry on the Condition of the South

*Congress established the Joint Select Committee to investigate reports of violence and intimidation in the South. On August 4, 1871, the committee took this testimony from Henry B. Whitfield, the mayor of Columbus, Mississippi. What does Whitfield's testimony reveal about conditions in Mississippi during Reconstruction?*

**QUESTION.** This committee is charged with inquiring into the condition of affairs in Mississippi and other States, especially in reference to the safety of property and life, and the due execution of the law. State anything you know on that subject.

**ANSWER.** I consider that in the counties in Eastern Mississippi particularly, and on the Alabama line, and in North Mississippi, on the Tennessee line, there is considerable insecurity to liberty of person, and in some instances to life, unless a party espouses certain opinions.

**QUESTION.** What opinions do you mean?

**ANSWER.** I mean that if a white man, an old citizen of the county, is known to be a member of the republican party, the people are very intolerant toward him; and if a northern man who has come there is a republican they are a little worse toward him; and toward the black people, unless they are willing to vote as the people there desire them to vote, they are very intolerant. . . .

**QUESTION.** Take first your own county of Lowndes, and state the condition of things there.

**ANSWER.** . . . Back as far as the year 1868 was the first time that we had any indications there of any organizations which appeared to be for improper purposes—for the purpose of controlling opinion or making people do as they wanted them to do. Such organizations then existed, being organized during the campaign of 1868—at the time of the election for the convention in the State. During 1869 and a part of 1870, we did not hear of anything of the kind to any extent in Lowndes County. But last February the thing seemed to have broken loose again with every indication of violence, and to a very outrageous extent in the northeastern part of the county.

**QUESTION.** The part of the county bordering on the Alabama line?

**ANSWER.** Yes, sir. . . . I will state that the first outbreak which occurred was in the latter part of

February of the present year. The victim was a negro named James Hicks. . . . It was charged that . . . he had used some improper language in regard to some white ladies of the neighborhood; and these people determined, I suppose, that he should suffer for it. He had moved down some seven miles below that, into another neighborhood. They found out where he lived, followed him down there, and took him out one night. From the best information I could get, there were from one hundred to one hundred and twenty disguised men, who were armed heavily. They took him out into the public road and whipped him. The statements of the witnesses varied considerably as to the amount of whipping he received. The lowest estimate that I heard was three hundred lashes; some of the black people who were present thought it was as high as one thousand. I have no doubt myself, from the man's appearance two days afterward, and from the evidence in the case, that he was very severely beaten.

*from Testimony Taken by the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States. Reprinted in Louis M. Hacker, ed., The Shaping of the American Tradition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1947) 647–651.*

### Activity Options

1. Imagine yourself as a member of the Joint Select Committee. Write a list of questions that you might want to ask witnesses about conditions in the South during Reconstruction.
2. With a small group of classmates, role-play the questioning of Whitfield by the Joint Select Committee.
3. Based on your reading of Chapter 4, list two or three witnesses that you think the Joint Select Committee could have called to testify.