**8-5.4: Racial Segregation – Full Version**

**8-5.4 Focus Question:**

How was the system of segregation and discrimination formed in South Carolina in the late 1800’s?

**8-5.4 Essential Notes:**

After the election of 1876, **Governor Wade Hampton** and the so-called Redeemers had political authority as well as political power in South Carolina. The Conservative Democratic Party had “**redeemed**” South Carolina from the Republicans, as they had other southern states, by reminding them of the recently lost Civil War, the “lost cause”. The antebellum political elite regained control of the government. As conservatives, they wanted to restore South Carolina’s government and society as nearly as possible to its condition before the war under the control of the elite and with limited taxes.

Although Governor Wade Hampton was willing to maintain the status quo established during Reconstruction on race relations and he recognized the rights of African Americans to vote and hold office, other members of the Democratic Party soon moved to disenfranchise the African American voter. Taking advantage of the still-high rates of illiteracy among the impoverished former slaves, politicians adopted the Eight Box Law and the poll tax. Although these devices often also disenfranchised poor whites, the Conservative elite were not concerned. The South Carolina legislature also adopted a plan in which Congressional districts were redrawn so that only one district had an African American majority. This gerrymandering limited the number of African Americans elected to the United States Congress.

In South Carolina, poor white farmers accepted the leadership of **Ben Tillman** because of his extraordinary oratorical and political skills. Tillman was a **Populist** because he appealed to the values and needs of the common people against the Conservative elite. Unlike his Populist counterparts elsewhere in the nation, however, Tillman never supported the appeal for the vote of the African-American farmers, who suffered as much or more from declining economic conditions as did the white farmer. This appeal led to an increase of violence and lynching against African-Americans and opposition to the Populist Party in many parts of the South. In South Carolina, Tillman ran on a platform of white superiority and later led the movement to further disenfranchise the African-American voter. Tillman’s bigotry and racist rhetoric led to the reemergence of the terrorism of the Reconstruction era. Soon violence and **lynchings** increased and African Americans who dared to protest were intimidated into silence. Race baiting increased during economic hard times as poor whites took out their frustrations on an easy target.

In 1895, Senator Benjamin Tillman urged his followers to call for a new state constitution to replace the Reconstruction constitution of 1868 (8.5.3). Tillman wished to cement his control of the Democratic Party and to be sure that the black majority did not provide political support to his Conservative opposition. The new constitution established a **literacy test** for voting by requiring that voters be able to read and interpret the United States Constitution. It also required that the **poll tax** be paid six months before the election. Poor farmers had little money so far ahead of harvest time. Poor, illiterate white voters were protected by the “**grandfather clause**” because they were able to vote if their grandfathers had been able to vote in 1860. This accelerated the trend in limitations on the right to vote that had begun under the Wade Hampton and the Bourbons. The new constitution required that there be separate schools for black and white children. South Carolinians further limited the social opportunities of African Americans by passing a series of laws, called **Jim Crow Laws**, which set social segregation into law, not just practice. In 1896, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that such laws were constitutional. The Court ruled that separate-but-equal facilities satisfied the 14th amendment’s requirement for equal protection under the law in the case of ***Plessy v Ferguson****.* As a result, nationally sanctioned Jim Crow impacted, both directly and indirectly, every aspect of the African-American experience for most of the next six decades. Although African-American South Carolinians protested their exclusion from public life, violence, intimidation and **lynchings** by white terrorists effectively silenced them.