

1. How are the factors of class and wealth inequality central features of this film and the history of the Civil War? Offers specific examples.
2. Why do Newton Knight and other former Confederates decide to dessert the military?
3. What common traits do Confederate deserters and runaway slaves share? What are their differences?
4. Newton rebelled against the Confederacy, which itself was a rebellion against the U.S. What does the rebellion of Jones County tell us about the basic function of a government?
5. How could Newton Knight be considered a “Robin Hood of the Confederacy?” In your view, are his violent tactics justified?
6. How did former slaves attempt to organize and become involved in politics after the war?
7. How did ex-Confederates regain control of politics, society, and ex-slaves after the war?
8. How did the movie change and/or expand your views of the Civil War and Reconstruction?
9. How have societal views on biracial relationships evolved since the Civil War era? How does the movie’s 1940s subplot/flash forward demonstrate the slow growth of racial progress?
10. How does *Free State of Jones* connect with racial violence and inequality in our own times? Can you think of specific events in the past several years that relate?

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Accompanying primary sources:

***Lieutenant General Leonidas Polk to Jefferson Davis, March 21, 1864, O.R., Ser. 1, Vol. 32, pt. 3, pp. 662-63.***

In regard to the condition of affairs in the counties alluded to, I have to report that Col. Henry Maury, under my orders, through the commander of the District of the Gulf, made a campaign against the deserters and traitors in Jones, Perry, &c. Counties about a week ago.

He found them, as reported, in open rebellion, defiant at the outset, proclaiming themselves “Southern Yankees,” and resolved to resist by force of arms all efforts to capture them. My orders were very stringent, and very summary measures were taken with such as were captured, and with marked benefit to many of the rest.

Some escaped to the bottoms on Pearl River, swearing they would return with Yankee re-enforcements; others were brought to reason and loyalty, and have come in and surrendered themselves.

I have today dispatched another expedition from this place to the counties of Smith and others lying on the Pearl River, to break up an organization which has been formed there, and which has held three public meetings.

I shall not stop until these outbreaks are suppressed and their authors punished, but it would be far better for the Government to dispose of its military resources in such a way as to prevent them.

***Laws of the State of Mississippi, Passed at a Regular Session of the Mississippi Legislature, held in Jackson, October, November, and December 1865, Jackson, 1866, from pages 82-93, 165-67.***

An Act to Regulate the Relation of Master and Apprentice, as Relates to Freedmen, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes

Section 1. Be it enacted by the legislature of the state of Mississippi, that it shall be the duty of all sheriffs, justices of the peace, and other civil officers of the several counties in this state to report to the Probate courts of their respective counties semiannually, at the January and July terms of said courts, all freedmen, free Negroes, and mulattoes under the age of eighteen within their respective counties, beats, or districts who are orphans, or whose parent or parents have not the means, or who refuse to provide for and support said minors; and thereupon it shall be the duty of said Probate Court to order the clerk of said court to apprentice said minors to some competent and suitable person, on such terms as the court may direct, having a particular care to the interest of said minors: Provided, that the former owner of said minors shall have the preference when, in the opinion of the court, he or she shall be a Suitable person for that purpose.

Section 2. Be it further enacted, that the said court shall be fully satisfied that the person or persons to whom said minor shall be apprenticed shall be a suitable person to have the charge and care of said minor and fully to protect the interest of said minor. The said court shall require the said master or mistress to execute bond and security, payable to the state of Mississippi, conditioned that he or she shall furnish said minor with sufficient food and clothing; to treat said minor humanely; furnish medical attention in case of sickness; teach or cause to be taught him or her to read and write, if under fifteen years old; and will conform to any law that may be hereafter passed for the regulation of the duties and relation of master and apprentice: Provided, that said apprentice shall be bound by indenture, in case of males until they are twenty-one years old, and in case of females until they are eighteen years old.

Section 3. Be it further enacted, that in the management and control of said apprentices, said master or mistress shall have power to inflict such moderate corporeal chastisement as a

father or guardian is allowed to inflict on his or her child or ward at common law: Provided, that in no case shall cruel or inhuman punishment be inflicted.

Section 4. Be it further enacted, that if any apprentice shall leave the employment of his or her master or mistress without his or her consent, said master or mistress may pursue and recapture said apprentice and bring him or her before any justice of the peace of the county, whose duty it shall be to remand said apprentice to the service of his or her master or mistress; and in the event of a refusal on the part of said apprentice so to return, then said justice shall commit said apprentice to the jail of said county, on failure to give bond, until the next term of the county court; and it shall be the duty of said court, at the first term thereafter, to investigate said case; and if the court shall be of opinion that said apprentice left the employment of his or her master or mistress without good cause, to order him or her to be punished, as provided for the punishment of hired freedmen, as may be from time to time provided for by law, for desertion, until he or she shall agree to return to his or her master or mistress: Provided, that the court may grant continuances, as in other cases; and provided, further, that if the court shall believe that said apprentice had good cause to quit his said master or mistress, the court shall discharge said apprentice from said indenture and also enter a judgment against the master or mistress for not more than $100, for the use and benefit of said apprentice, to be collected on execution, as in other cases.

Section 5. Be it further enacted, that if any person entice away any apprentice from his or her master or mistress, or shall knowingly employ an apprentice, or furnish him or her food or clothing, without the written consent of his or her master or mistress, or shall sell or give said apprentice ardent spirits, without such consent, said person so offending shall be deemed guilty of a high misdemeanor, and shall, on conviction thereof before the county court, be punished as provided for the punishment of persons enticing from their employer hired freedmen, free Negroes, or mulattoes.

Section 6. Be it further enacted, that it shall be the duty of all civil officers of their respective counties to report any minors within their respective counties to said Probate Court who are subject to be apprenticed under the provisions of this act, from time to time, as the facts may come to their knowledge; and it shall be the duty of said court, from time to time, as said minors shall be reported to them or otherwise come to their knowledge, to apprentice said minors as hereinbefore provided.

Section 7. Be it further enacted, that in case the master or mistress of any apprentice shall desire, he or she shall have the privilege to summon his or her said apprentice to the Probate Court, and thereupon, with the approval of the court, he or she shall be released from all liability as master of said apprentice, and his said bond shall be canceled, and it shall be the duty of the court forthwith to reapprentice said minor; and in the event any master of an apprentice shall die before the close of the term of service of said apprentice, it shall be the duty of the court to give the preference in reapprenticing said minor to the widow, or other member of said master’s family: Provided, that said widow or other member of said family shall be a suitable person for that purpose.

Section 8. Be it further enacted, that in case any master or mistress of any apprentice, bound to him or her under this act shall be about to remove or shall have removed to any other state of the United States by the laws of which such apprentice may be an inhabitant thereof, the Probate Court of the proper county may authorize the removal of such apprentice to such state, upon the said master or mistress entering into bond, with security, in a penalty to be fixed by the judge, conditioned that said master or mistress will, upon such removal, comply with the laws of such state in such cases: Provided, that said master shall be cited to attend the court at which such order is proposed to be made and shall have a right to resist the same by next friend, or otherwise.

Section 9. Be it further enacted, that it shall be lawful for any freedman, free Negro, or Mulatto having a minor child or children to apprentice the said minor child or children as provided for by this act.

Section 10. Be it further enacted, that in all cases where the age of the freedman, free Negro, or mulatto cannot be ascertained by record testimony, the judge of the county court shall fix the age.