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The U.S. president who hurt Negroes most was Rutherford B. Hayes, asserts the May issue of Ebony, taking a historical look at the beginnings of segregation.

"Hayes' 'bargain with the South'" -- to win the 1876 election -- "established white supremacy and sealed the fate of the Negro," says Ebony. "A curse would rise to Negro lips whenever his name was mentioned."

The civil rights woes of present-day Negroes can be traced directly to 1876, when Hayes let white supremacists into power in the South in order to win a deadlocked election over Samuel J. Tilden, Ebony contends.

Contrary to what many people think, the white supremacy tradition which is at the root of today's civil rights struggle did not get a foothold until the late 1870s. In fact, the Negro made real progress in the 13 years following the Emancipation Proclamation, Ebony recalls.

The catch, according to Ebony, was that Hayes wanted to be president. And in a deadlocked election the balance of power was held by "unreconstructed ex-Confederates" who had "transferred their hate of Lincoln and the North to those who recently had been their slaves."

Ironically, says Ebony, "For years before he became caught up in the exigencies of the presidency, Hayes was a devotee of liberty." He had championed Negro causes as a young lawyer aiding runaway slaves and later as a U.S. congressman and governor of Ohio.

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"President Hayes sowed a seed of compromise whose roots strangled Negro progress for years to come," says Ebony. "It was a seed which brought Jim Crow into existence and gave rise to a 'Southern way of life' which, even to this day, 87 years later remains a challenge to civil rights leaders and the might of the federal establishment. White supremacy, race hatred, segregation, discrimination, 'separate but equal,' the Bilbos and Barnetts, the Faubuses, the Wallaces, the necessity for sit-ins and civil rights bills -- all these things blossomed from the Hayes compromise with the Confederacy."

Hayes himself, Ebony recalls, left the White House in 1881 "a disappointed, rejected man. He retired to his home in Fremont, Ohio, and, it is said, spent the rest of his life brooding over the plight of the 'poor colored people.' He 'did penitence' by immersing himself in the work of an educational fund for Negro students."

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