

# Reconstruction

1865–1877

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## CHAPTER OUTLINE

The following annotated chapter outline will help you review the major topics covered in this chapter.

### I. The Struggle for National Reconstruction

#### A. Presidential Approaches: From Lincoln to Johnson

1. The Constitution did not address the question of secession or any procedure for Reconstruction, so it did not say which branch of government was to handle the readmission of rebellious states.
2. Lincoln offered general amnesty to all but high-ranking Confederates willing to pledge loyalty to the Union; when 10 percent of a state's voters took this oath—and abolished slavery—the state would be restored to the Union.
3. Most Confederate states rebuffed the offer, ensuring that the war would have to be fought to the bitter end.
4. Congressional Republicans proposed the Wade-Davis Bill, a stricter substitute for Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan, which laid down, as conditions for the restoration of the rebellious states to the Union, an oath of allegiance by a majority of each state's adult white men, new state governments formed only by those who had never carried arms against the Union, and

permanent disfranchisement of Confederate leaders.

5. Rather than openly challenge Congress, Lincoln executed a pocket veto of the Wade-Davis Bill by not signing it before Congress adjourned.
6. Lincoln also initiated informal talks with congressional leaders aimed at finding common ground; Lincoln's successor Andrew Johnson, however, held the view that Reconstruction was the president's prerogative.
7. Andrew Johnson, a Unionist Democrat, championed farmers and laborers.
8. The Republicans had nominated Johnson for vice president in 1864 to promote wartime political unity.
9. After Lincoln's death, Johnson offered amnesty to all southerners, except high-ranking Confederate officials and wealthy property owners, who took an oath of allegiance to the Constitution. His reconstruction plan required only that southern states revoke their ordinances of secession, repudiate their Confederate debts, and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.
10. Within months, all the former Confederate states had met Johnson's requirements for rejoining the Union and had functioning, elected governments.

11. Southerners held fast to the antebellum order and enacted Black Codes designed to drive the ex-slaves back to plantations; they had moved to restore slavery in all but the name.
  12. Southerners perceived Johnson's liberal amnesty policy as tacit approval of the Black Codes; emboldened, the ex-Confederates filled southern congressional delegations with old comrades, even including former vice president of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens.
- B. Congress Versus the President
1. Republicans in both houses refused to admit the southern delegations when Congress convened in early December 1865, blocking Johnson's Reconstruction program.
  2. In response, some Black Codes were replaced with nonracial ordinances whose effect was the same, and across the South a wave of violence erupted against the freedmen.
  3. Republicans concluded that the federal government had to intervene.
  4. Congress voted to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, gave it direct funding for the first time, and authorized its agents to investigate cases of discrimination against blacks.
  5. President Johnson was particularly angered by a congressional civil rights bill, the Civil Rights Act of 1866, that declared formerly enslaved people to be citizens and granted them equal protection and rights of contract, with full access to the courts.
  6. In early 1866, Andrew Johnson vetoed both bills, declaring that the U.S. government was for white men only.
  7. Galvanized by Johnson's attack on the civil rights bill, Republicans overrode the president's veto, enacted the Civil Rights Act in April 1866, and renewed the Freedmen's Bureau. Republican resolve was reinforced by news of mounting violence in the South.
  8. Republicans moved to enshrine black civil rights in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.
  9. Johnson opposed ratification, but Republicans won a 3-to-1 majority in the 1866 congressional elections, which registered overwhelming support for securing the civil rights of ex-slaves.
  10. The Republican Party had a new sense of unity, coalescing around the unbending program of the Radical Republican minority led by Charles Sumner in the Senate and Thaddeus Stevens of the House. Both men represented the party's abolitionist strain.
  11. For the Radicals, Reconstruction was never primarily about restoring the Union but rather remaking southern society.
- C. Radical Reconstruction
1. The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson
    - a. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 divided the South into five military districts, each under the command of a Union general.
    - b. The price for reentering the Union was granting suffrage or the vote to the freedmen and disenfranchising the South's leading ex-Confederates.
    - c. Congress overrode Johnson's veto of the Reconstruction Act.
    - d. Johnson "suspended" Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton and replaced him with General Ulysses S. Grant.
    - e. The Senate overruled Stanton's suspension, and Grant—now Johnson's open enemy—resigned so that Stanton could resume office.
    - f. On February 21, 1868, Johnson dismissed Stanton; the House Republicans introduced articles of impeachment against Johnson.
    - g. A vote on impeachment was one vote short of the required two-thirds majority needed, but Johnson was left powerless to alter the course of Reconstruction.
  2. The Election of 1868 and the Fifteenth Amendment

- a. Grant was the Republicans' 1868 presidential nominee, and he won out over the Democrats' Horatio Seymour; Republicans retained two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress.
  - b. The Fifteenth Amendment forbade either the federal government or the states to deny citizens the right to vote on the basis of race, color, or "previous condition of servitude," although it left room for poll taxes and literacy tests. Both were concessions to northern and western states that sought such provisions to keep immigrants and the "unworthy" from the polls.
  - c. States still under federal control were required to ratify the amendment before being readmitted to the Union; the Fifteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution in 1870.
  - d. Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment was an astonishing feat. Lawmakers elsewhere in the Western Hemisphere had left emancipated slaves in a condition of semi-citizenship, with no voting rights.
  - e. After the amendment was ratified, hundreds of thousands of African American men flocked to the polls across the South, in an atmosphere of collective pride and celebration.
- D. Woman Suffrage Denied
1. Women's rights advocates were outraged that the Fifteenth Amendment did not address women's suffrage.
  2. Radicals used the vote for black men to punish ex-Confederates and establish Republican control in the South. They feared that woman suffrage would hinder these goals.
  3. At the 1869 annual meeting of the Equal Rights Association, Frederick Douglass, an abolitionist and women's rights advocate, pleaded with white women to understand the importance of granting the vote for black men before white women. The convention ended in bitter debate.
  4. The majority of women's rights activists, led by Lucy Stone of the American Woman Suffrage Association, accepted the priority of black suffrage over women's suffrage.
5. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony established a new organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), which focused exclusively on women's rights and took up the battle for a federal woman suffrage amendment.
6. In 1873, NWSA members decided to test the limits of the new constitutional amendments. Suffragists tried to register to vote across the United States; most were turned away.
7. In *Minor v. Happersett* (1875), the Supreme Court dashed suffragist hopes for protection of women's voting rights under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court ruled that suffrage rights were not inherent in citizenship; women were citizens, but state legislatures could deny women the ballot if they wished.
8. Despite these defeats, Radical Reconstruction created the conditions for a high-profile, nationwide movement for women's voting rights.
9. In 1869, Wyoming granted women the right to vote. Proponents argued that voting women in Wyoming continued to carry out their responsibilities as mothers and wives, contrary to dire predictions.
- II. The Meaning of Freedom**
- A. The Quest for Land
1. Freed Slaves and Northerners: Conflicting Goals
    - a. For the former slaves, freedom meant family, education, political rights, and economic opportunity without interference by others. One of freedmen's most pressing goals was landownership. Thousands of former slaves expected to receive small pieces of the former plantations of their owners.
    - b. After Johnson's order restoring confiscated lands to the ex-Confederates, African Americans reacted angrily and fought pitched battles with plantation owners in some

- locations. But white landowners frequently prevailed.
- c. Republicans wanted to restore cotton as the country's leading export, so they attempted to transform former slaves into wageworkers on cotton plantations, but not independent farmers.
  - d. Only a small number of Radical Republicans, like Thaddeus Stevens, believed in giving former slaves pieces of their former owner's estates. Congressmen, believing in the sanctity of legal title, suggested giving away land that had been taken from Indian tribes instead and returning plantations to their former owners to restart the southern cotton industry.
  - e. Only a small number of rural blacks became landowners.
2. Wage Labor and Sharecropping
- a. Landowners wanted to retain the old gang-labor system, with wages replacing the food, clothing, and shelter that slaves had once received. Landowners paid low wages for black agricultural work, leading to major poverty for the former slaves.
  - b. Blacks fought back by organizing strikes, by seeking work in lumber and turpentine and railroad camps, and bargaining for fairer wages.
  - c. A major conflict raged between employers and freed people over the labor of women. When planters demanded that freedwomen go back into the fields, blacks resisted resolutely.
  - d. For African American women, emancipation may have increased subordination within the black family. Some black women, however, headed their own households. For many freedpeople, the opportunity for a stable family was one of the major successes of post-Civil War life.
  - e. Many African American families accepted the northern ideal of domesticity. Women attempted to remain in the home and devote themselves to motherhood, while men were urged to work diligently and support their families.
  - f. Southern planters had to yield to demands to pay field workers. Cotton planters, however, lacked cash and offered to pay in the form of a share of the crop.
  - g. Sharecropping was a distinctive labor system for cotton agriculture in which the freedmen worked as tenant farmers, exchanging their labor for the use of land, house, and implements.
  - h. Sharecropping was an unequal relationship, since the sharecropper had no way of making it through the first growing season without borrowing for food and supplies.
  - i. Storekeepers furnished the sharecropper with provisions and took as collateral a lien on the crop; as cotton prices declined during the 1870s, many sharecroppers fell into permanent debt. If the merchant was also the landowner, the debt became a pretext for peonage, or forced labor.
  - j. For ex-slaves, sharecropping was preferable to laboring for their former owners, but it was devastating to southern agriculture; it committed the South inflexibly to cotton because it was a cash crop and limited southern incentives for agricultural improvements. A rural economy emerged that was mired in widespread poverty and based on an uneasy compromise between landowners and laborers.
- B. Republican Governments in the South
1. Between 1868 and 1871, all the southern states met the congressional stipulations and rejoined the Union.
  2. Reconstruction governments were ambitious and established reforms in education, family law, social services, commerce, and transportation.
  3. Republicans in the South needed the African American vote and helped to

- organize organizations like the Union League, a biracial secret fraternal order that functioned as a powerful political club to uphold justice to freedmen.
4. The Freedmen's Bureau also helped freedmen on economic matters and established schools for African Americans, including black colleges such as Fisk, Tougaloo, and the Hampton Institute. By 1869, there were over three thousand teachers, over half of whom were black, instructing freedmen in the South.
  5. Southern white Republicans were called scalawags by Democratic ex-Confederates; white northerners who moved to the South were called carpetbaggers. Both groups wanted to bring northern capital into the South for economic development and personal gain.
  6. Contrary to Southern Democrats' perception of black politicians as ignorant field hands, most were indeed skilled and educated, had achieved economic success, and were accomplished reformers. Northern black ministers, teachers, and Union veterans also moved south to support Reconstruction.
  7. Although never proportionate to their size in population, black officeholders were prominent throughout the South.
  8. Republicans modernized state constitutions, eliminated property qualifications for voting, abolished the Black Codes, and expanded the rights of married women.
  9. Reconstruction social programs called for hospitals and more humane penitentiaries and asylums; Reconstruction governments built roads and revived the railroad network.
  10. Most impressive of Republican Reconstruction government achievements was in the field of education. By 1875, over half of black children were attending school in several deep southern states. White children also benefitted from higher graduation rates during this progressive period in southern public education.
  11. One flawed development was the adoption of convict leasing allowing private companies to hire prisoners as laborers. The system was riddled with corruption and prisoners worked in horrible conditions.
- C. Building Black Communities
1. After emancipation, Southern blacks could engage in open community building. In doing so, they cooperated with northern missionaries and teachers.
  2. Independent churches quickly became central institutions of black life. Black churches served as schools, social centers, and meeting halls. Black ministers were community leaders and often political spokesmen.
  3. Teachers and charity leaders embarked on a project of "racial uplift" while black entrepreneurs built businesses that catered largely to a black clientele.
  4. Some black leaders promoted integration of public facilities, but most stayed away from the thorny issue, while many black parents preferred all-black schooling to protect their children from hostile whites.
  5. At the national level in 1870, Congress addressed desegregation with a civil rights bill championed by Radical Republican Charles Sumner. By the time it passed in 1875, it was a narrower version, requiring full and equal access to jury service and to transportation and public accommodations irrespective of race. Another near-century would pass before Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- ### III. The Undoing of Reconstruction
- A. The Republicans Unravel
1. The death of Radical Charles Sumner in 1874 signaled the wane of Reconstruction.
  2. Events of the 1870s, as well as racist media reports, deepened northern white disinterest in southern black issues.
  3. Scandals in the Republican administration of President Ulysses S. Grant eroded public confidence in Grant's policies, particularly during his second term in office.

4. Republicans' hopes for economic growth ended with a sudden economic depression in 1873.
  5. The depression discredited the Republicans, resulted in plunging crop prices, and created massive unemployment.
  6. The southern economy came to a screeching halt, public credit collapsed, and public spending and private investment in the South for reform programs such as the Freedmen's Bureau decreased.
  7. The economic crisis also revealed widespread corruption among Republicans and Southern Democrats alike.
  8. The collapse of the Freedman's Savings and Trust Company and Republican controlled Congress's refusal to step in signaled that the party of Reconstruction was losing its moral leadership.
  9. The Disillusioned Liberals
    - a. Classic liberals, those who believed in free trade, smaller government, low property taxes, and limited voting rights, broke away from the Republican Party and formed the Liberal Republican Party.
    - b. They ran Horace Greeley in the presidential election in 1872, longtime publisher of the *New York Tribune*.
    - c. Grant won reelection overwhelmingly, capturing 56 percent of the popular vote and every electoral vote.
    - d. Liberals denounced universal suffrage, decried that blacks were unfit to govern, and turned northern public opinion against Reconstruction.
    - e. Scandals during Grant's second administration, such as *Crédit Mobilier* and the Whiskey Ring, further eroded public confidence in government and confirmed the Liberals' argument.
- B. Counterrevolution in the South
1. The undoing of Reconstruction was as much about southern resistance as northern acquiescence. Most white southerners believed that Reconstruction governments were illegitimate "regimes."
  2. Democrats worked hard to get the vote restored to ex-Confederates and violently attacked Republicans and black political leaders in an undemocratic and violent process they called "Redemption."
  3. The Ku Klux Klan first appeared in Tennessee in 1866 under Nathan Bedford Forrest, a fiery secessionist and white supremacist, with the purpose of ending the state's Republican government.
  4. By 1870, the Klan was operating almost everywhere in the South as an armed force whose terrorist tactics served to reinstate governments under the control of the Democratic Party and terminate Reconstruction programs.
  5. Congress between 1869 and 1871 attempted to suppress the Klan through legislation known as the Enforcement Laws.
  6. The Grant administration's assault on the Klan illustrated how dependent African Americans and the southern Republicans were on the federal government.
  7. But northern Republicans were growing weary of Reconstruction and the bloodshed it seemed to produce.
  8. Prosecuting Klansmen was an uphill battle with U.S. attorneys, who usually faced all-white juries and lacked the resources to handle the cases; after 1872, prosecutions began to drop off and many Klansmen received hasty pardons.
- C. Reconstruction Rolled Back
1. Republican governments that were denied federal help found themselves overwhelmed by the massive resistance of their ex-Confederate enemies; between 1873 and 1875, Democrats overthrew Republican governments in Texas, Alabama, and Arkansas.
  2. Voters reacted by handing Republicans stunning defeats and turning the Democrats into the majority party during the 1874 congressional election.
  3. Republicans had lost control over the South, evident in Mississippi, when armed local Democrats paraded and stuffed

ballot boxes, taking control of the state in 1875.

4. By 1876, Republican governments remained in only Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida; elsewhere the former Confederates were back in control.
5. The Supreme Court Rejection of Equal Rights
  - a. Although constitutional amendments and federal laws protecting civil right remained in force, Supreme Court decisions began to weaken them.
  - b. As early as 1873, in the *Slaughter-House Cases*, the Court began to undercut the power of the Fourteenth Amendment. In the *Civil Rights Cases* (1883), the justices also struck down the Civil Rights Act of 1875. The Court effectively had cut off the avenue of the federal courts for the pursuit of justice and equal rights.
6. The Political Crisis of 1877
  - a. Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes as their presidential candidate, and his Democratic opponent was Samuel J. Tilden; both favored home rule for the South.
  - b. The election outcome was unclear as both candidates claimed Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana. When Congress met in early 1877, it had to resolve this electoral crisis.
  - c. The Constitution declares that Congress regulates its own elections, so Congress appointed an electoral commission; the commission awarded the disputed votes to Hayes by a vote of 8 to 7.
  - d. Democrats controlled the House and set about stalling a final count of the electoral votes, but on March 1 they suddenly ended their delaying tactics and Hayes was inaugurated on March 4. Reconstruction had ended.

#### D. Lasting Legacies

1. In the short run, the political events of 1877 had little impact on the lives of most southerners. The long, slow decline of Radical Republican power and the rise of

Confederate and southern Democratic power exerted the most impact on southerners.

2. Although southern whites used violence to put down black aspirations to political power, they could not return the South to the antebellum reality of slavery.
3. Reconstruction had shaken the entire legal framework that justified the United States as a white man's country. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments existed and were the legal basis for the civil rights movement of the twentieth century.
4. Reconstruction, however, had also failed because it had not prevented the widespread poverty and denial of rights for African Americans.
5. The South may have lost the war, but it controlled the construction of the nation's memory of Reconstruction by ignoring vigilante violence and describing Radical Republicans and black activists as corrupt and ignorant.