

RECONSTRUCTION

During and after the Civil War, most Americans believed that free people in a free society had both an opportunity and a responsibility for themselves. Therefore little or no economic help was given to either whites or blacks in the South.

Physical rebuilding of the South – mostly done by the Southern states and individuals
Political Issues involving the South – handled by the federal government

Lincoln's Policies

During the war Lincoln hoped that the Southern states could be reestablished by a test of political loyalty.

Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction (1863)

A simple plan developed during the war.

Reconstruct the state governments in the South with Unionists in charge, not secessionists. This provided for:

1. Full presidential pardons to most southerners who
 - (a) took an oath of allegiance to the Union and the Constitution
 - (b) accepted the emancipation of slaves
2. A state's government could be reestablished as soon as 10% of the voters in that state took the above oath.

Lincoln's proclamation meant that each Southern state would have to rewrite their state constitutions, resulting in the elimination of slavery.

Wade-Davis Bill (1864)

A far more demanding bill with more stringent terms for Reconstruction: The 10% plan could have fallen under the domination of disloyal secessionists.

This bill required:

- 50% of a state's voters to take a loyalty oath
- Allowed only non-Confederates to vote for a new state constitution

Lincoln refused to sign the bill with his veto.

Freedman's Bureau (March, 1865) **[the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands]**

An early welfare agency, providing food, shelter and medical aid to those who suffered during the war (blacks, mostly freed slaves and homeless whites)

At first the Bureau had the power to resettle freed blacks on confiscated lands but later on President Johnson pardoned Confederate owners of the confiscated lands and the courts restored most of the lands back to their previous owners.

The best success was with education. Led by General Oliver O. Howard nearly 3,000 schools were established in the South, mostly for freed blacks and included several black colleges. (Federal funding was stopped in 1870, by then they had taught over 200,000 African Americans how to read)

Johnson and Reconstruction

After Lincoln was shot, he was replaced by **Andrew Johnson**, a man from Tennessee who fought for the interest of poor whites against the rich planters. Johnson was the only senator from the South who remained loyal to the Union. He was a Southern Democrat but the Republicans picked him to be Lincoln's running mate in 1864 to encourage unity within the Union.

Johnson was the wrong man for the job. He was a white supremacist who clashed with Republicans in Congress who firmly believed that the war was for preservation of the Union **and** the liberation of blacks from slavery.

Johnson's Reconstruction Policy

His plan was very similar to Lincoln's 10% plan plus **disfranchisement** – the loss of the right to vote and hold office for:

1. all former leaders and officeholders of the Confederacy
2. Confederates with more than \$20,000 in taxable property

There was an “escape clause” – Johnson could grant pardons to “disloyal” southerners and he used this power quite often. This saw many former Confederate leaders back in office by the fall of 1865.

Just eight months after Johnson took office; all 11 of the ex-Confederate states had become functioning parts of the Union. These states had drawn up constitutions that repudiated secession, negated the debts of the Confederate government and ratified the 13th Amendment (the abolition of slavery). However none of these states gave voting rights to blacks. A further dismay to Republicans was that former leaders of the Confederacy were elected to seats in Congress. [Alexander Stephens, the former Confederate Vice-President was the new U.S. Senator from Georgia].

Black Codes

Johnson allowed the southern legislatures to adopt Black Codes that restricted the rights and movements of new freed African Americans. In the South:-

- (a) Blacks could not rent land or borrow money to buy land
- (b) Freedmen had to sign work contracts, placing them as “apprentices” or in “bondage”
- (c) Blacks could not testify against whites in court
- (d) Contact-Labor Systems where blacks worked the cotton fields under white-supervision saw deferred wages, no different to slavery

Northern Republicans began to challenge the election results in the South and refused to seat Alexander Stephens and other elected representatives and senators from ex-Confederate states.

Johnson only made matters worse in early 1866 when he vetoed two important bills:-

1. a bill increasing the services and protection offered by the Freedman’s Bureau
2. a civil rights bill that nullified Black Codes and guaranteed full citizenship and equal rights to blacks.

The Election of 1866

Unable to work with his Congress, Johnson’s road campaign was nicknamed “**swing around the circle**” attacking his opponents whenever possible. His stance was to appeal to the racial prejudices of whites by arguing that equal rights for blacks would result in an “Africanized” society.

Republicans attacked Johnson by calling him a drunkard and a traitor. Their tactic, known as “**waving a bloody shirt**” reminding the Northern voters about the hatred of the Civil War. The Republicans stated that southerners were Democrats; therefore the entire Democratic Party was for rebellion and treason!

The Republicans gained an overwhelming victory, the moderate and radical Republicans having more than a 2/3 majority in both the House and Senate.

Congressional Reconstruction

Before the Election of 1866 the Republican Party was split:

Moderates –pro economic gains for the white middle class

Radicals – civil rights for blacks

Fearing the Democratic Party may be reunified the Republicans shifted toward radical. The main reason was that the federal census now counted blacks equal to whites (no longer the 3/5 Compromise). The South would have a greater representation in Congress as the population of eligible voters had changed.

Leading Radical Republican in the Senate – **Charles Sumner** of Massachusetts
Leading Radical Republican in the House – **Thaddeus Stevens** of Pennsylvania

Stevens wanted to extend military rule in the South allowing blacks to be free to exercise their civil rights including education and land owing.

Other radical movements were women's suffrage, rights for labor unions and civil rights for northern blacks. Gains were made but the program was never fully implemented.

Enacting the Radical Program

Presidential Reconstruction was now in phase two and in early 1866 Congress passed two pieces of legislation previously vetoed by Johnson.

1. Civil Rights Act of 1866

All African Americans were now U.S. Citizens (overturning the Dred Scott Case). This provided protection from the Black Codes. However, if the Democrats took control in the future this could be easily overturned so they made a permanent law from this act.

2. Fourteenth Amendment [Proposed in late 1866, finally ratified in 1868]

- (a) All persons born or naturalized in the United States were citizens
- (b) The states had to respect the rights of U.S. Citizens and provide them with “equal protection of the laws” and “due process of the law”
- (c) Disqualified former Confederate political leaders from holding either state or federal offices
- (d) Repudiated the debts of the defeated governments of the Confederacy
- (e) Penalized a state if they kept an eligible person from voting; they had a reduction in the state’s proportional representation in Congress and the Electoral College.

Reconstruction Acts of 1867

- Took the drastic step of placing the South under military control
- The former Confederate states were divided into five districts, each controlled by the Union army
- Increased the requirements for gaining readmission to the Union
 - (a) the Fourteenth Amendment had to be ratified
 - (b) each state Constitution had to guarantee the right to vote for all adult males

Beginning in 1867, each Republican-controlled government was under the military protection of the U.S. Army until such time as Congress was satisfied that it had met its Reconstruction requirements. Then the troops were withdrawn. The period of Reconstruction rule in a southern state lasted from as little as one year (Tennessee) to as long as nine years (Florida), depending on how long it took conservative Democrats to regain control.

Impeachment of Andrew Johnson

In 1867, Congress passed the **Tenure of Office Act** – prohibiting the president from removing a federal official or military commander without the approval of the Senate.

[This was a political move, trying to protect the Radical Republicans in Johnson's cabinet, e.g. Edward Stanton – Secretary of War – who was in charge of the military governments in the South]

Johnson believed the act was unconstitutional and dismissed Stanton from office, The House responded by impeaching Johnson. He was charged with 11 “**high crimes and misdemeanors.**” Johnson became the first president to be impeached.

In 1868, after a three-month trial in the Senate, Johnson’s political enemies fell one vote short for the necessary 2/3 vote to remove him from office. Seven Republicans (moderates) joined the Democrats because they believed it was a bad precedent to remove a president for political reasons.

Election of 1868

Democrats chose Horatio Seymour rather than Andrew Johnson
Republicans chose General Ulysses S. Grant

Grant was more popular in the North but only won 300,000 more popular votes. The votes of 500,000 blacks gave the Republicans the victory. The Republicans saw that the voting rights of freedmen needed federal protection. Without these votes they would not have won and future elections could be drastically affected.

Fifteenth Amendment (1869)

Prohibits any state from denying or abridging a citizen's right to vote on account of
"race, color, or previous condition of servitude"

Civil Rights Acts of 1875

- Guarantees equal accommodations in public places (hotels, railroad, theaters)
- Prohibits courts from excluding African Americans from juries

This Act was poorly enforced; moderate and conservative Republicans had become frustrated of trying to reform an unwilling South and were also afraid of losing white votes in the North.

Composition of the Reconstruction Governments

In every radical, or Republican, state government in the South, except one, whites were in the majority in both houses of the legislature. The exception – South Carolina – freedmen controlled the lower house in 1873.

[Republican legislatures included native-born white southerners, freemen, and recently arrived northerners].

"Scalawags" and "Carpetbaggers"

"Scalawags" – southern Republicans

"Carpetbaggers" – northern newcomers

Southern whites who supported the Republican governments were usually former Whigs who were involved in economic development. Northerners went south for various reasons; some were investors setting up new businesses, others were missionaries and teachers. Also, due to this being an age of greed, some also went to plunder.

“Carpetbaggers” and “Scalawags”

Carpetbaggers: the term of contempt applied by the people of the Southern states mainly to government agents, politicians, businessmen, and adventurers from the Northern states who traveled to the South during the Reconstruction period following the American Civil War (1861-1865). The term was coined to suggest that northerners could stuff everything they owned into a carpetbag, a satchel made of carpet. Some carpetbaggers were representatives of the Freedmen's Bureau and other Reconstruction agencies; some were humanitarians intent on aiding the blacks; and others were opportunists seeking to exploit the political and financial problems of the South. Because the Congress of the United States had temporarily banned former Confederate political leaders and soldiers from voting or holding political office, many carpetbaggers were able to become politicians with the support of newly emancipated slaves. Although a few carpetbaggers established corrupt and wasteful governments, many were able to broaden black voting activity, improve education, and aid in the restoration of Southern cities and roads. Carpetbaggers generally cooperated with native southern Unionists known as scalawags, and both groups were bitterly resented by most white Southerners. Secret terrorist societies such as the Ku Klux Klan were formed to terrorize the blacks and drive the carpetbaggers out. Today the term carpetbagger refers to roving opportunists or politicians.

Scalawags: an American historical term denoting Southerners who supported the federal program of Reconstruction, the period of rebuilding after the American Civil War (1861-1865). After the Civil War ended, the federal government ordered Southern states that had seceded from the Union to set up new state governments. These governments were dominated by Republicans, both black and white. Southerners who did not support these Republican governments called the white Southerners involved scalawags and the white Northerners involved carpetbaggers. The term scalawag was originally used to describe worthless livestock.

Many scalawags had genuinely opposed secession and the formation of the Confederate States of America; they sincerely hoped to reform the South through the newly established Republican governments. Others, however, were corrupt individuals who joined the Republicans solely for political and financial gains. Although many Southerners believed that scalawags came from the lowest levels of society, many were actually from the upper classes



Carpetbagger cartoon – A woman struggles to carry freedom while Grant appears as the Napoleonic figure.

African American Legislatures

Most blacks who held elective office in reconstructed state governments were educated property holders. They took moderate positions on most issues. There were two black senators; Blanche K. Bruce and Hiram Revels (took the Mississippi seat once held by Jefferson Davis) and there were more than a dozen black representatives to the House of Representatives.

Evaluating the Republican Record on Reconstruction

| Accomplishments | Failures |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liberalized state constitutions in the south• Universal male suffrage• Property rights for women• Debt relief• Modernized penal codes• Promoted building of infrastructure• Established needed state institutions such as hospitals and asylums and homes for the handicapped• Established state-supported school systems in the South• Tax systems overhauled to pay for the above as well as bonds issued. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Republican party depicted as utterly wasteful and corrupt• Politicians took bribes and kickbacks from contractors• Graft also common in the Northern states• Grant's administration in Washington commonly accused of corruption• Decline in ethics in government |

How did African Americans Adjust to Freedom?

Freedom meant many things to Southern blacks; reuniting families, learning to read and write, migrating to cities where freedom was “freer” and independence from white control.

They changed religions from the white-dominated ones and formed the **Negro Baptists** and **African Methodist Episcopalian** churches; black ministers became leading figures in their communities.

Black colleges (Howard, Atlanta, Fisk and Morehouse) were established to train black ministers and teachers.

Sharecropping

Sharecropping became the agricultural industry norm in the South. The landlord provided the seed and other needed farm supplies in return for a share (usually half) of their harvest. The system gave both poor black and whites the opportunity to work on a piece of land for themselves. However the sharecroppers were either dependent on the landowner or in debt to local merchants. By 1880 no more than 5% of southern blacks had become independent landowners. Sharecropping was really a new version of servitude!

The Effects of Reconstruction in the Northern States

As the South struggled after the war, the North focused on railroads, steel, labor problems and money.

The Rise of Spoilsman

In the early 1870's the Republican reformers (Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and Benjamin Wade) were overtaken by political manipulators. The new breed of Senators, such as Roscoe Conklin of New York and James Blaine of Maine became masters in the game of **patronage** – giving jobs and government favors (**spoils**) to their supporters.

Corruption in Business and Government

In 1869 two Wall Street financiers, **Jay Gould and Jay Fisk**, had help from President Grant's brother-in-law in a scheme to corner the gold market. The Treasury Department broke up the scheme, only after Gould had made a fortune.

The Crédit Mobilier Affair was when insiders gave stock to influential members of Congress, in order to avoid investigation into their practices and their profits (some times as high as 348%) that were being made while building the transcontinental railroad.

The Whiskey Ring took place when federal revenue agents conspired with the liquor industry to defraud the government of millions in taxes. Grant was not personally involved but his loyalty to dishonest men around him badly tarnished his presidency.

William (Boss) Tweed – the head of the New York Democratic Party located at **Tammany Hall** in New York City, masterminded dozens of schemes to help himself and his friends to vast amounts of graft.

The Tweed Ring virtually stole about \$ 200 million from New York taxpayers. He was finally exposed by a cartoon drawn by Thomas Nast that appeared in the New York Times. Boss Tweed was finally arrested and imprisoned in 1871.

The Election of 1872

Because of the many scandals within the Grant administration, there was a split within the Republican Party. These Liberal Republicans wanted civil service reform, an end to railroad subsidies, withdrawal of the troops in the South, reduced tariffs and free trade. Their chosen candidate was Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune* newspaper.

In a surprising move, the Democrats joined them and also nominated Greeley.

The Regular Republicans countered by again “waving the bloody shirt” and it worked. Grant was reelected in a landslide. Weeks after his defeat, Greeley died.

The Panic of 1873

This economic disaster was caused by:

- Overspeculation by financiers
- Overbuilding by industry and railroads
- Widespread business failures
- Northern laborers jobless and homeless

Debtors, both in farmland and cities, sought the easy-money solution, demanding Greenback paper money not supported by gold. In 1874 Grant vetoed a bill releasing additional Greenbacks after he consulted with his bankers and creditors who wanted a stable money supply backed by gold.

The End of Reconstruction

During Grant’s second term Reconstruction entered its third and final phase.

Radical Republicanism was on the rise; Southern Conservatives (“**deemers**”) took control of one state government after another. The redeemers had different social and political backgrounds but they all agreed on their political program:

- States’ rights
- Reduced taxes
- Reduced spending on social programs
- White supremacy

White Supremacy and the Ku Klux Klan

Founded in 1867 by an ex-Confederate general, Nathaniel Bedford Forrest, this “invisible empire” burned black-owned buildings, flogged and murdered freedmen to keep them from exercising their voting rights.

The Force Acts of 1870 and 1871 gave power to federal authorities to stop Ku Klux Klan violence but the Klan continued to reign.

The Amnesty Act of 1872 removed the last of the restrictions on the ex-Confederates, except for the top leaders. This act did have a political consequence. It allowed southern conservatives to vote for Democrats and allowed them to take control of state governments.

The Election of 1876

By now, federal troops had left all but three states, South Carolina, Florida and Louisiana. In the other Southern states, Democrats had returned to power and they were to play a key role in this election.

Republicans: Rutherford B. Hayes (Governor of Ohio, untouched by Grant’s scandals)
Democrats: Samuel J. Tilden (Governor of New York who fought Boss Tweed)

When the popular vote was counted the Democrats won a clear majority. In the three Southern states under federal control, the returns were contested. To win the election, Tilden needed only one electoral vote from South Carolina, Florida or Louisiana. A special electoral commission was created to review the voting. In a straight party vote of 8-7, the commission gave all the electoral votes to Hayes, the Republican. Outraged Democrats threatened to **filibuster** the results and send the election to the House of Representatives, which they controlled.

An informal deal was worked out between the two parties – **The Compromise of 1877**

Hayes would become the new President if:-

1. there was an immediate end to the federal support for the Republicans in the South
2. Hayes would support the building of a southern transcontinental railroad route.

Hayes fulfilled his part and withdrew the last of the federal troops in the South. There was now no more protection in the South for blacks and other Republicans.

In addition the Supreme Court struck down one Reconstruction law after another that protected blacks from discrimination. Supporters of the New South promised a future of industrial development but most southern blacks and whites remained poor farmers and fell further behind the rest of the nation.