

Reconstruction

1863–1877

Chapter Learning Objectives

1. What were the challenges and controversies facing efforts at reconstruction even before the end of the war?
2. What was President Johnson's plan for reconstruction? How was it similar to and different from Lincoln's plan?
3. What was the significance of the Fourteenth Amendment, and why did President Johnson advise southern states not to adopt it? Explain the terms of radical reconstruction and the advent of military rule in the South.
4. Why did some in Congress think Johnson should be impeached, and why was he able to stay in office? What were the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment, and why were some women's rights advocates dissatisfied with it?
5. How did congressional reconstruction alter political and everyday life in the South?
6. Why did the North abandon reconstruction in the South? Be sure to note the role the Supreme Court played in undermining reconstruction. What was the effect of Grant's troubled presidency on this abandonment, and why did white supremacy triumph in the South?
2. Lincoln's plan for reconstruction, issued in December 1863, was designed primarily to shorten the war and end slavery.
3. His easy terms of peace, which included full pardons for rebels willing to renounce secession and accept the abolition of slavery, angered abolitionists, who thought that the president was making a mockery of African Americans' freedom.
4. Congress drew up its own plan in 1864, the Wade-Davis bill. It demanded that at least half of the voters in a conquered rebel state take an oath of allegiance to the United States before reconstruction would begin, and it prohibited ex-Confederates from participating in the drafting of new state constitutions.
5. The Wade-Davis bill angered abolitionists because it made no provision for black suffrage.
6. Lincoln refused to sign the Wade-Davis bill into law and proceeded to nurture the formation of loyal state governments under his own plan.

B. Land and Labor

1. Lincoln's thinking about how to deal with the South's systems of land and labor was still undeveloped when he died, but of all the problems raised by emancipation, none proved more critical.
2. The question of what to do with federally occupied land and how to organize labor in it engaged former slaves, former slaveholders, Union military commanders, and federal government officials long before the war ended.

Annotated Chapter Outline

- I. Wartime Reconstruction
 - A. "To Bind Up the Nation's Wounds"
 1. President Lincoln's second inaugural address suggested that deep compassion for the enemy guided his thinking about peace.

3. Up and down the Mississippi Valley, occupying federal troops announced a new labor code requiring slaveholders to sign contracts with ex-slaves and to pay them wages.
 4. Planters complained because the new system fell short of slavery.
 5. African Americans found the new regime to be too reminiscent of slavery to be called free labor.
 6. In January 1865, General William T. Sherman set aside part of the coast south of Charleston for black settlement.
 7. In March 1865, Congress passed a bill establishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, which distributed food and clothing to destitute Southerners and eased the transition of blacks from slaves to free persons.
 8. Despite the flurry of activity, wartime reconstruction settled nothing.
- C. The African American Quest for Autonomy
1. Ex-slaves never had any doubt about what they wanted freedom to mean.
 2. Whites contended that without the discipline of slavery, blacks would revert to their “natural” condition: lazy, irresponsible, and wild.
 3. Nevertheless, freedmen did not easily give up on their quest for economic independence.
 4. The restoration of their families also became a persistent black aspiration.
 5. Ex-slaves also wanted to be able to worship independently from whites.
- II. Presidential Reconstruction
- A. Johnson’s Program of Reconciliation
1. Andrew Johnson, the only senator from a Confederate state to remain loyal to the Union, held the planter class responsible for secession.
 2. Despite his antiplanter sentiment, he was no friend of northern radicals.
 3. Johnson had been a steadfast defender of slavery.
 4. Johnson presented his plan for reconstruction as a continuation of Lincoln’s plan, and in some ways it was.
 5. He stressed reconciliation between the Union and the defeated Confederacy, rapid restoration of civil government in the South, and the pardoning of most ex-rebels.
 6. Johnson’s eagerness to normalize relations with southern states and his lack of sympathy for blacks led him to instruct military and government officials to return to pardoned ex-Confederates all confiscated and abandoned land, even if it was in the hands of freedmen.
- B. Southern Resistance and Black Codes
1. In the summer of 1865, delegates across the South gathered to draw up the new state constitutions required by Johnson’s plan of reconstruction – renouncing the right of secession, denying that the debts of the Confederacy were legal and binding, and ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment.
 2. These delegates balked even at the president’s easy terms of peace and began to think that they, not the victorious Northerners, would shape the transition from slavery to freedom.
 3. State governments across the South adopted a series of laws known as black codes, which sought to keep blacks subordinate to whites by subjecting blacks to every sort of discrimination.
 4. President Johnson refused to intervene decisively.
 5. Moreover, Johnson personally pardoned fourteen thousand wealthy or high-ranking ex-Confederates, and he accepted the new southern state governments even when they failed to satisfy his minimal demands for readmittance to the Union.
 6. White Southerners chose former Confederates, not loyal Unionists, to represent them in Congress.
- C. Expansion of Federal Authority and Black Rights
1. Southerners miscalculated in assuming that what Andrew Johnson was willing to accept, the northern public and Congress would accept as well.
 2. The black codes, which became a symbol of southern recalcitrance, soured moderate Republicans on the South.
 3. Moderates represented the mainstream of the Republican Party and wanted assurance that slavery and treason were dead.
 4. In December 1865, when southern congressional representatives arrived in Washington, it became clear that southern obstinacy had succeeded in forging unity among Republican factions.
 5. Moderate Republicans took the lead, declaring that the president’s policy was wrongheaded and drafting two bills strengthening the federal shield of protection for the newly emancipated.

6. Johnson vetoed the first bill, an extension of the Freedmen's Bureau, and Congress failed by a narrow margin to override the veto.
7. Johnson's veto galvanized nearly unanimous Republican support for the moderates' second measure, the Civil Rights Act.
8. Johnson also opposed this bill, but this time Congress had enough votes to override the president's veto.
9. Congress also submitted another bill to extend the life of the Freedmen's Bureau and successfully overrode the president's veto.
8. Johnson advised southern states to reject the Fourteenth Amendment and to rely on him to trounce Republicans in the fall congressional elections.
9. Johnson decided to make the Fourteenth Amendment the overriding issue of the 1866 congressional elections and to gather the amendment's white opponents into a new conservative party, the National Union Party.

III. Congressional Reconstruction

A. The Fourteenth Amendment and Escalating Violence

1. In April 1866, Republican moderates introduced the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution.
2. The most important provisions of this complex amendment made all native-born or naturalized persons American citizens and prohibited states from abridging the "privileges or immunities" of citizens, depriving them of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law," and denying them "equal protection of the laws."
3. The Fourteenth Amendment also dealt with voting rights, giving Congress the authority to reduce the congressional representation of any state that withheld suffrage from some of its adult male population.
4. The voting provision clause was construed in such a way that northern states could continue to withhold voting rights from black men and not suffer in Washington because their black populations were too small to count in figuring representation.
5. Radicals considered the Fourteenth Amendment's voting provision hypocritical.
6. The suffrage provisions in the amendment completely ignored the small band of politicized and energized women who had emerged from the war demanding access to the ballot.
7. The Fourteenth Amendment dashed women's expectations because it provided for punishment of any state that excluded voters on the basis of race but not on the basis of sex.

10. Johnson's strategy suffered a setback when whites in several southern cities went on rampages against blacks, shocking Northerners and renewing skepticism about Johnson's claim that southern whites could be trusted.

11. The 1866 election resulted in an overwhelming Republican victory; the party retained its three-to-one congressional majority over the Democrats.

B. Radical Reconstruction and Military Rule

1. The elections of 1866 should have taught southern whites the folly of trusting Andrew Johnson, but when Johnson continued to urge the rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment, every southern state except Tennessee voted it down.
2. Each act of defiance by southern whites had boosted the standing of the Radicals within the Republican Party.
3. In March 1867, moderates joined the Radicals to overturn the Johnson-approved southern state governments and initiate military rule of the South.
4. The Military Reconstruction Act (and three subsequent acts) divided the ten unreconstructed Confederate states into five military districts and placed a Union general in charge of each district.
5. The generals were to oversee political reform, which included the drawing up of new state constitutions guaranteeing black suffrage.
6. When the voters of each state had approved the constitution and the state legislature had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, the state could submit its work to Congress.
7. Radicals proclaimed the provision for black suffrage a triumph.
8. Despite its bold suffrage provision, the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867 disappointed those who advocated the confiscation and redistribution of southern plantations to ex-slaves.

9. Johnson vetoed the Military Reconstruction Act; however, Congress overrode his veto on the very same day, thus dramatizing the shift in power from the executive branch to the legislative branch of government.
- C. Impeaching a President
1. Despite his legislative defeats, Andrew Johnson had no intention of yielding control of reconstruction.
 2. When Congress learned that overriding Johnson's vetoes did not ensure that it got its way, it attempted to tie the president's hands.
 3. Among other things, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act of 1867, which required approval of the Senate for the removal of any government official who had been appointed with Senate consent. The act was intended to protect Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, the last remaining friend of radical reconstruction in Johnson's cabinet.
 4. Some Republicans believed that nothing less than getting rid of Johnson could save reconstruction, and they initiated a crusade to impeach the president and remove him from office.
 5. As long as Johnson refrained from breaking any law, impeachment languished.
 6. In August 1867, Johnson violated the Tenure of Office Act by dismissing Stanton without the Senate's approval, and news of his defiance convinced every Republican in the House to vote for a resolution impeaching the president.
 7. Impeachment forces in the Senate fell one vote short of the two-thirds needed to convict.
 8. Johnson survived, but for the remaining ten months of his term, congressional reconstruction proceeded unhindered by presidential interference.
- D. The Fifteenth Amendment and Women's Demands
1. In February 1869, Republicans passed the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, prohibiting states from depriving any citizen of the right to vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.
 2. Rather than absolutely guaranteeing the right to vote, the amendment merely prohibited exclusion on grounds of race.
 3. Woman suffrage advocates were sorely disappointed with the Fifteenth Amend-
- ment's failure to extend voting rights to women.
4. The Fifteenth Amendment severed the early feminist movement from its abolitionist roots.
- IV. The Struggle in the South
- A. Freedmen, Yankees, and Yeomen
1. African Americans made up the majority of southern Republicans.
 2. Northern whites who decided to make the South their home after the war were a second element of the Republican Party in the South.
 3. Southern whites made up the third element of the Republican Party in the South.
 4. The mix of races, regions, and classes in this improbable coalition meant friction as each group maneuvered to define the party.
 5. Activity on behalf of Republicans took courage, and violence against blacks – the “white terror” – took brutal institutional form in 1866 with the formation of the Ku Klux Klan.
- B. Republican Rule
1. Beginning in the fall of 1867, the ex-Confederate states held elections for delegates to constitutional conventions.
 2. The reconstruction constitutions introduced two broad categories of changes in the South: those that reduced aristocratic privilege and increased democratic equality and those that expanded the state's responsibility for the general welfare.
 3. These forward-looking state constitutions provided blueprints for a new South but stopped short of the specific reforms, such as land redistribution, advocated by some southern Republicans.
 4. Democrats were blind to the limits of the Republican program and saw instead a revolution.
 5. In almost every state, voters ratified the new constitutions and swept Republicans into power.
 6. Republican activity focused on three major areas – education, civil rights, and economic development.
 7. The southern Republican record was mixed; its biracial coalition took up an ambitious agenda to change the South but was infected by corruption.
- C. White Landlords, Black Sharecroppers
1. In the countryside, clashes occurred daily between ex-slaves who wished to take

control of their working lives and ex-masters who wanted to reinstitute old ways.

2. Ex-slaves resisted every effort by former masters to reestablish forced labor.
3. Although forced to return to the planters' fields, freedmen resisted efforts to restore slavelike conditions.
4. Sharecropping was a compromise that offered both ex-masters and ex-slaves something but satisfied neither.
5. Sharecropping also introduced a new figure, the country merchant, into the agricultural equation.

V. Reconstruction Collapses

A. Grant's Troubled Presidency

1. In 1868, the Republican Party's presidential nomination went to Ulysses S. Grant, who narrowly defeated the Democrats' candidate, Horatio Seymour.
2. Grant hoped to forge a policy that would secure both sectional reconciliation and justice for blacks.
3. Anti-Grant Republicans grew disgusted with the allegations of corruption that plagued the president's administration, and in 1872 they launched the Liberty Party.
4. The nation still felt enormous affection for the man who had saved the Union, and in 1872 Grant won reelection with 56 percent of the popular vote.
5. Grant's administration was not without accomplishments, but the president's great passion in foreign policy – the annexation of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean – ended in failure.

B. Northern Resolve Withers

1. Grant understood that most Northerners had grown weary of reconstruction.
2. Northerners increasingly wanted to shift their attention from reconstruction to other issues, especially after the nation slipped into a devastating economic depression in 1873.
3. In reality, the retreat from reconstruction had begun in 1868, with Grant's election.
4. The president genuinely wanted to see blacks' civil and political rights protected, but he felt uneasy about an open-ended commitment that seemed to ignore constitutional limitations on federal power.
5. Underlying the North's abandonment of reconstruction was unyielding racial prejudice.
6. The U.S. Supreme Court also undermined reconstruction by weakening the

federal government's ability to protect black Southerners under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

7. The mood of the North found political expression in the election of 1874, when for the first time in eighteen years the Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives.

C. White Supremacy Triumphs

1. Republican state governments in the South attracted more bitterness and hatred than any other political regimes in American history.
2. By the early 1870s, Democrats understood that race was their most potent weapon, and they adopted a strategy to overthrow Republican state governments by polarizing the parties around color and by intimidating black voters.
3. Democrats employed several devices to dislodge whites from the Republican Party by fanning the flames of racial prejudice and by exploiting the severe economic plight of small white farmers by blaming it on Republican financial policies.
4. If racial pride, social isolation, and Republican financial policies proved insufficient to drive yeomen from the Republican Party, Democrats turned to terrorism.
5. The second prong of Democratic strategy – intimidation of black voters – proved equally devastating.
6. By 1876, only three Republican state governments – in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina – survived.

D. An Election and a Compromise

1. The centennial year of 1876 witnessed one of the most tumultuous elections in American history.
2. The Democrats had nominated New York's reform governor, Samuel J. Tilden, who immediately targeted the corruption of the Grant administration and the despotism of Republican reconstruction.
3. The Republican Party nominated Rutherford B. Hayes, the governor of Ohio.
4. Tilden fell one vote short of securing a victory in the electoral college, but the electoral votes of Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina remained in doubt because both Republicans and Democrats in those states claimed victory and submitted electoral votes supporting their respective candidates.

5. Congress had to decide who actually won the elections in these states. The Constitution provided no guidance.
6. The impasse was broken when negotiations behind the scenes between Hayes's lieutenants and some moderate southern Democrats resulted in an informal understanding known as the Compromise of 1877.
7. The last three Republican state governments in the South fell quickly once Hayes abandoned them and withdrew the army.
8. Reconstruction came to an end.