

Chapter 15: Reconstruction, 1865-1877

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, assuring that the war would have to be fought to the bitter end.
4. As some African Americans began to agitate for political rights, 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. The Wade-Davis Bill served notice that congressional Republicans were not going to turn Reconstruction policy over to the president.
6. Rather than openly challenge Congress, Lincoln executed a **pocket veto** of the Wade-Davis Bill by not signing it before Congress adjourned.
7. 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.
8. Andrew Johnson, a War Democrat, championed farmers and laborers.
9. The Republicans had nominated Johnson for vice president in 1864 in order to promote wartime political unity and to court southern Unionists.
10. 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.
11. Johnson also appointed provisional governors for the southern states and, as conditions for their restoration, required only that they revoke their ordinances of secession, repudiate their Confederate debts, and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.
12. Within months, all the former Confederate states had met Johnson's requirements for rejoining the Union and had functioning, elected governments.
13. 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.
14. 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 the 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 South had embarked on a concerted effort to circumvent the Thirteenth Amendment and 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 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 enacted the Civil Rights Act of 1866.
8. As an angry Congress renewed the Freedmen's Bureau over a second Johnson veto, Republican resolve was reinforced by news of mounting violence in the South.
9. Republicans moved to enshrine black civil rights in the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

10. Johnson urged the states not to ratify the amendment and began to maneuver politically against the Republicans; the Fourteenth Amendment became a campaign issue for the Democratic Party.
11. Johnson embarked on a disastrous railroad tour campaign and made matters worse by engaging in shouting matches and exchanging insults with the hostile crowds.
12. Republicans won a three-to-one majority in the 1866 congressional elections, which registered overwhelming support for securing the civil rights of ex-slaves.
13. The Republican Party had a new sense of unity coalescing around the unbending program of the radical minority led by Charles Sumner in the Senate and Thaddeus Stevens of the House. Both men represented the party's abolitionist strain.
14. For the Radicals, Reconstruction was never primarily about restoring the Union but rather remaking southern society.

C. Radical Reconstruction

1. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 divided the South into five military districts, each under the command of a Union general.
2. The price for reentering the Union was granting **suffrage** or the vote to the freedmen and disenfranchising the South's prewar political class.
3. Congress overrode Johnson's veto of the Reconstruction Act.
4. After Congress adjourned in August 1867, Johnson "suspended" Edwin M. Stanton and replaced him with General Ulysses S. Grant; he then replaced four of the commanding generals governing the South.
5. When the Senate reconvened, it overruled Stanton's suspension, and Grant, by now Johnson's enemy, resigned so that Stanton could resume office.
6. On February 21, 1868, Johnson dismissed Stanton; the House Republicans introduced articles of **impeachment** against Johnson.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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**, property requirements or literacy tests.
10. 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.
11. Passage of the Fifteenth Amendment was an astonishing feat. Lawmakers in the Western Hemisphere had left emancipated slaves in a condition of semi-citizenship, with no voting rights.
12. 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. 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.
3. The majority of women's rights activists, led by Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe of the American Women's Suffrage Association, accepted the priority of black suffrage over women's suffrage.
4. Stanton's new organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association, accepted only women, focused exclusively on women's rights, and took up the battle for a federal woman suffrage amendment. Susan B. Anthony assisted Stanton in forming the organization.
5. In 1873, NWSA members decided to test the limits of the new constitutional amendments. Suffragists tried to register to vote across the United States; some were arrested.
6. 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.
7. Despite these defeats, radical Reconstruction created the conditions for a high-profile, nationwide movement for women's voting rights.

8. 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 while also cleaning up corruption in Wyoming politics.

II. The Meaning of Freedom

A. The Quest for Land

1. One of freedmen's most pressing goals was land ownership. Thousands of African American former slaves expected to receive small pieces of the former plantations of their owners.
2. After Johnson's order restoring confiscated lands to the ex-Confederates, African Americans reacted angrily and fought pitched battles with plantations owners in some locations. But white landowners frequently prevailed.
3. Republicans wanted to restore cotton as the country's leading export, so they attempted to transform former slaves into wage-workers on cotton plantations, but not as independent farmers.
4. Only a small number of Radical Republicans like Thaddeus Stevens believed in giving former slaves pieces of their former owner's estates. Congressmen believed in taking land from Indian tribes and returning plantations to their former owners to restart the southern cotton industry.
5. 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.
6. Blacks fought back by going on strike, by seeking work in lumber and turpentine and railroad camps, and bargaining for fairer wages.
7. 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.
8. For African American women, emancipation may have increased subordination within the black family. Some black women, however, headed their own households. For many freedwomen and freedmen, the opportunity for a stable family was one of the major successes of post-Civil War life.
9. 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.
10. **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.
11. 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.
12. Storekeepers "furnished" the sharecropper and took as collateral a **lien** on the crop; as cotton prices declined during the 1870s, many sharecroppers fell into permanent debt.
13. If the merchant was also the landowner, the debt became a pretext for **peonage**, or forced labor.
14. 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 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. 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.
3. The Freedmen's Bureau also helped freedmen on economic matters and established schools for African Americans, including black colleges such as Fisk and Hampton Institute. By 1869, there were over 3,000 teachers, over half of whom were black, instructing freedmen in the South.
4. 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.
5. Although never proportionate to their size in population, black officeholders were prominent throughout the South.
6. Republicans modernized state constitutions, eliminated property qualifications for voting, got rid of the Black

Codes, and expanded the rights of married women.

7. Reconstruction social programs called for hospitals, more humane penitentiaries, and asylums; Reconstruction governments built roads and revived the railroad network.
8. 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 benefited from higher graduation rates during this progressive period in southern public education.

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 Republican Unraveling

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, such as Credit Mobilier and the Whiskey Ring, in the Republican administration of President Ulysses S. Grant eroded public confidence in Grant’s policies, particularly during his second term in office.
4. A sudden economic depression in 1877 created massive unemployment, which decreased public support of the Freedmen’s Bureau and the Republican Party, as well as public spending and private investment in the South.
5. Northern resolve was also worn down by southern white resistance against Reconstruction.
6. The collapse of the Freedmen’s Savings and Trust Company signaled that the party of Reconstruction was losing its moral leadership.
7. Classic **liberals**, those who believed in free trade, smaller government, and limited voting rights, broke away from the Republican Party and formed the Liberal Republican Party. They ran Horace Greeley in the presidential election in 1872, longtime publisher of the *New York Tribune*. Grant won overwhelmingly.
8. Liberals denounced universal suffrage and decried that blacks were unfit to govern. Grant won overwhelmingly, capturing 56 percent of the popular vote and every electoral vote.

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, appealing to racial solidarity and southern patriotism and violently attacking black suffrage as a threat to white supremacy.
3. The Ku Klux Klan first appeared in Tennessee in 1866 under Nathan Bedford Forrest; by 1870, the Klan was operating almost everywhere in the South as an armed force whose terrorist tactics served the Democratic Party.
4. Congress between 1869 and 1871 attempted to suppress the Klan through legislation known as the Enforcement Laws.
5. The Grant administration’s assault on the Klan illustrated how dependent African Americans and the southern Republicans were on the federal government.
6. But northern Republicans were growing weary of Reconstruction and the bloodshed it seemed to produce.
7. 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.
8. 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.

9. In Mississippi, armed local Democrats paraded and stuffed ballot boxes, taking control of the state in 1875.
10. By 1876, Republican governments remained in only Louisiana, South Carolina, and Florida; elsewhere the former Confederates were back in control.
11. As early as 1873, in the *Slaughterhouse 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.

C. The Political Crisis of 1877

1. Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes as their presidential candidate, and his Democratic opponent was Samuel J. Tilden; both favored **home rule** for the South.
2. When Congress met in early 1877, it was faced with both Republican and Democratic electoral votes from Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana.
3. 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.
4. 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. Reconstruction had ended.

D. Lasting Legacies

1. In the short run, the withdrawal of U.S. troops had little impact on the lives of most southerners. The broad trend of Radical Republican loss of 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. Reconstruction had shaken the entire legal framework that justified the United States as a white man's country.
3. Legal cases brought by other minorities showed that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments had transformed the nature of American citizenship.