

## Reconstruction, 1865-1877

### Key Terms

1. **Black codes** – Laws passed by Southern states after the Civil War denying ex-slaves the civil rights enjoyed by whites and punishing “crimes” such as failing to have a labor contract or travelling outside a plantation without a written pass.
2. **Sharecropping** – A labor system in the South after the Civil War. Tenants worked the land in return for a share of the crops produced instead of paying cash rent. The system perpetuated a seemingly endless cycle of debt and poverty.
3. **Carpetbaggers and scalawags** – *Carpetbagger* is the derisive name given by ex-Confederates to Northerners who moved to the South during Reconstruction. *Scalawag* is the derisive name given to Southern whites who supported Radical Reconstruction.
4. **Redeemers** – White Southern political leaders who claimed to “redeem” or save the South from Republican domination. Redeemers supported diversified economic growth and white supremacy.
5. **Jim Crow** – A system of racial segregation in the South that lasted from the end of Reconstruction until the 1960s.

### Presidential Reconstruction

- I. Lincoln’s **Ten Percent Plan** –
  - a. Abraham Lincoln led the United States through a long and bloody Civil War. When the conflict finally ended, Lincoln faced the daunting challenge of overcoming Southern resentment, restoring the Union, and determining the meaning of black freedom.
  - b. Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan proposed a generous settlement.
    - i. He offered a full pardon (except for high-ranking Confederate leaders) to Southerners who pledged loyalty to the Union and to the Constitution.
    - ii. Southern states in which 10 percent of the 1860 electorate took such an oath and accepted emancipation would be restored to the Union.
  - c. Lincoln concluded his **Second Inaugural Address** by promising "malice toward none, with charity for all." We will never know if Lincoln could have fulfilled his inspiring pledge.
    - i. On April 14, 1865, John Wilkes Booth assassinated Lincoln while the president was watching a play at Ford's Theatre in Washington.
- II. The **13<sup>th</sup> Amendment** –
  - a. Ratified on December 6, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment formally abolished slavery and involuntary servitude.
  - b. Lincoln believed that the **freedmen** should receive suffrage because their military contribution during the Civil War "demonstrated in blood their right to the ballot."

- i. Lincoln felt confident that the states would fulfill this important responsibility.

### III. **Johnson's Plan** –

- a. Lincoln's tragic death placed the burden of reconstructing the South on the untested shoulders of his former Vice President, Andrew Johnson.
- b. Johnson favored a swift return to political and racial normalcy.
  - i. Like Lincoln, he favored amnesty to most Confederates who took an **oath of loyalty** to the Union.
    - 1. Whites in each Southern state could then elect delegates to a state convention. A state could reenter the Union when its convention repealed all secession laws, repudiated Confederate debts, and ratified the Thirteenth Amendment.
- c. Johnson did not support racial equality. His idea of racial normalcy was grounded in a firm belief in **white supremacy**. Declaring, "White men alone must manage the South," Johnson stood aside as former rebels regained political power across the South.

## Radical Reconstruction

### I. The **Black Codes** –

- a. Slavery left an entrenched legacy of prejudice and discrimination that would be difficult to eliminate. Unwilling to accept blacks as equals, Southern legislatures enacted laws known as Black Codes to limit the freedmen's basic civil and economic rights.
- b. Black Codes continued the legal distinction between whites and blacks.
  - i. For example, laws barred blacks from carrying weapons, marrying whites, assembling in groups, serving on juries, and pursuing any occupation other than agricultural work.

### II. The **Civil Rights Act of 1866** –

- a. President Johnson did not object to the Black Codes. His lenient view of Reconstruction placed the President on a collision course with Congress.
- b. Led by **Thaddeus Stevens** and **Charles Sumner**, **Radical Republicans** insisted on protecting the basic rights of the newly-freed blacks.
  - i. Congress promptly passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 declaring that blacks were American citizens who had the same rights as whites.
  - ii. Johnson stunned Congress by vetoing the bill, claiming it was an unwarranted extension of federal power that would "foment discord among the races."
    - 1. Johnson's veto infuriated the Republicans who successfully overrode his veto. The struggle over the Black Codes and the Civil Rights Act marked the beginning of a contest of wills between Johnson and Congress.

### III. The **14<sup>th</sup> Amendment** –

- a. The Republican majority in Congress feared that Johnson would not enforce the Civil Rights Act. They also worried that the courts would declare the law unconstitutional.
  - i. These concerns prompted Congress to pass the Fourteenth Amendment in June 1866.
    - 1. Many constitutional scholars believe the Fourteenth Amendment is the most important addition to the Constitution since the Bill of Rights was ratified in 1791.

- ii. The Fourteenth Amendment defines national **citizenship** for the first time as extending to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States."
- iii. The amendment gave the federal government responsibility for guaranteeing equal rights under the law to all Americans.
- iv. The amendment prohibited the states from depriving "any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction equal protection of the laws."

#### IV. The **Reconstruction Act of 1867** –

- a. The Fourteenth Amendment intensified the struggle for power between President Johnson and Congress.
  - i. Saying that blacks were unfit to receive "the coveted prize" of citizenship, Johnson campaigned for Congressional candidates who supported his policies.
    - 1. His strategy backfired. Voters repudiated the President by giving his Republican opponents a solid two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress.
- b. The victorious Republicans promptly passed the Reconstruction Act of 1867 eliminating the state governments created by Johnson's plan.
  - i. It divided the South into five **military districts**, each under the command of a Union general. In order to be readmitted into the Union, a state had to approve the Fourteenth Amendment.
- c. Johnson vetoes the Reconstruction Act thus deepening his growing rift with Congress. Firmly in control of Capitol Hill, the Republicans overrode his veto.

#### V. The Impeachment Crisis –

- a. Congress escalated the struggle for power by passing the **Tenure of Office Act**. It required Senate consent for the removal of any official whose appointment had required Senate confirmation.
  - i. Convinced the law was unconstitutional, Johnson fired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, a leading Radical Republican ally.
- b. Johnson's provocative action prompted the Radical Republicans to pass a resolution declaring that the President should be **impeached**.
  - i. On February 24, 1868, the Republican-dominated House of Representatives impeached Johnson for "high crimes and misdemeanors in office," which included violating the Tenure of Office Act.
  - ii. After a tense trial, the Senate failed to convict Johnson by one vote.
- c. Although Johnson escaped conviction, the trial crippled his presidency.
  - i. Ten months later, voters sent the Union war hero Ulysses S. Grant to the White House. The Republicans completed their overwhelming victory by retaining two-thirds majorities in both houses of Congress.

#### VI. The **15<sup>th</sup> Amendment** –

- a. The Fifteenth Amendment marked the last of the three Reconstruction Amendments.
  - i. Ratified on February 3, 1870, it forbade either the federal government or the states from denying citizens the right to vote on the basis of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

- b. Taken together, the three Reconstruction Amendments constitute what modern historians call a “Second Founding”.
  - i. The Republicans who wrote these amendments believed that the new constitutional provisions would fully protect the newly-freed slaves by granting them the liberties and legal equality promised in the Declaration of Independence.

## VII. Radical Republican Governments –

- a. The period when Republicans ruled the South is called **Radical Reconstruction**.
  - i. The word "radical" underscores the Republicans' attempt to transform the South by extending civil and political equality to African Americans.
- b. The Fifteenth Amendment enabled African Americans to exercise political influence for the first time.
  - i. This produced a significant change in voting patterns and office holding in the South.
    1. Freedmen provided about 80 percent of Republican votes in the South.
    2. Over 600 blacks served as state legislators in the new state governments.
    3. In addition, voters elected 14 blacks to the House of Representatives and 2 to the Senate.
    4. Black voters supported the Republican Party by loyally casting votes that helped elect Grant in 1868 and reelect him in 1872.
- c. The Republicans launched an ambitious program of reforms.
  - i. They started a public school system that included about 600,000 black students.
  - ii. They also built new hospitals and orphanages and began to reform the criminal justice system.
  - iii. Republican officials raised taxes to finance the construction of roads, bridges, and railroad lines.
  - iv. The growth of educational opportunities also led to the founding of a number of black colleges including Howard University in Washington, D.C., Morehouse College and Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

## Backlash Against Reconstruction

### I. Criticism of Reconstruction in the South –

- a. Critics complained that the new Republican state governments accepted kickbacks and bribes from construction and railroad companies.
- b. White Southerners reserved their greatest scorn for those they called carpetbaggers and scalawags.
  - i. Carpetbaggers were Northerners who supposedly packed their belongings in a carpetbag suitcase and then headed south to seek power and profit.
  - ii. The much-maligned scalawags were Southerners who "betrayed" the South by supporting and then benefitting from Radical Republican policies.

### II. The End of Reconstruction –

- a. In 1869, members of the American Antislavery Society gathered to celebrate the abolition of slavery, passage of the Reconstruction Amendments, and the beginning of racial justice in the South.

- i. Frederick Douglass, however, did not share their optimism. He warned his listeners that “slavery is not honestly dead.”
  - ii. Douglass pointed out that slavery did not die because of moral convictions; it died because of overwhelming military force in a bloody civil war.
  - iii. Douglass's insight proved to be prescient. Two centuries of slavery created deeply rooted racial prejudices that Constitutional amendments could not eradicate.
    - 1. White Southerners bitterly resented Republican governments that repealed Black Codes and guaranteed voting rights to African Americans.
- b. **The Ku Klux Klan**
  - i. The Ku Klux Klan began in Tennessee in 1866 and then quickly spread across the South.
  - ii. The Klan sought to maintain white supremacy by aiding the revival of the Democratic Party and the overthrowing of Radical Reconstruction.
  - iii. Anonymous Klansmen dressed in white robes and pointed cowls burned black homes, schools, and churches and committed hundreds of murders.
    - 1. The Klan lynched as many as 400 African Americans between 1868 and 1871.
  - iv. The Klan's reign of terror worked. Political intimidation and violence helped weaken Republican governments.
    - 1. By 1876, Democrats replaced Republicans as governors and state legislators in eight of the eleven former Confederate states.
    - 2. Only South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida remained under Republican control.
- c. **Erosion of Northern support –**
  - i. Radical Republicans had long been the driving force behind the program to reconstruct Southern society. Sympathy for the freedmen began to wane as these leaders died or left office.
    - 1. A new generation of "politicos" began to focus their attention on Western expansion, Indian wars, tariffs, and the construction of transcontinental railroads.
  - ii. President Grant showed little enthusiasm for Reconstruction. His administration soon became distracted by scandals.
    - 1. In addition, a business panic in 1873 followed by a crippling economic depression further undermined public support for Reconstruction.
- d. **The Compromise of 1877 –**
  - i. The presidential **election of 1876** created a potential constitutional crisis when Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden won the popular vote over his Republican rival **Rutherford B. Hayes**.
    - 1. However, the outcome remained unclear because of disputed electoral votes from three Southern states.
  - ii. Congress created an electoral commission to determine which candidate would receive the disputed electoral votes.
    - 1. As tensions mounted, Democrat and Republican leaders reached an agreement known as the Compromise of 1877.
      - a. The Democrats agreed to support Hayes.
      - b. In return, Hayes and the Republicans agreed to withdraw all federal troops from the South, appoint at least one Southerner to the cabinet, and grant federal funds for internal improvements in the South.

- iii. The Compromise of 1877 ended Reconstruction. Republican governments in Louisiana and South Carolina quickly collapsed as Southern Democrats proclaimed a return to "home rule" and white supremacy.