

## Chapter 18: Reconstruction, 1865-1877

### Section 1: Rebuilding the Union

**Main Idea: During Reconstruction, the president and Congress fought over how to rebuild the South.**

Reconstruction, the process of bringing the Confederate states back into the Union, lasted from 1865 to 1877. President Lincoln wanted Southern states to quickly form new governments. He also wanted to pardon Confederate officials. Lincoln set up the Freedmen's Bureau, which provided schools and hospitals for African Americans. It also gave out clothes, food, and fuel.

When Lincoln was killed in 1865, Vice-President Andrew Johnson became president. Johnson followed Lincoln's goals. Southern states had to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which prohibited slavery. They also had to accept the power of the federal government. Johnson pardoned white Southerners who pledged loyalty to the United States.

Some Southern states, however, refused to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. They also passed black codes—laws that limited the freedom of former slaves. As a result of what was happening in the South, Congress refused to seat representatives from the South in 1865. Congress set up a committee to study conditions in the South.

A group of Republicans in Congress wanted the federal government to be active in changing Southern politics and society. This group was known as the Radical Republicans. With the strong support of the Radical Republicans, Congress passed a Civil Rights Act in 1865. It declared that all persons born in the United States were entitled to equal rights. The Radical Republicans also wanted the Constitution to protect equality. As a result, Congress proposed the Fourteenth Amendment. It stated that all people born in the United States were citizens and had the same rights. President Johnson refused to support the amendment. So did most Southern states. Both moderate Republicans and the Radical Republicans were outraged by the refusal to pass the Fourteenth Amendment. So they pushed through Congress the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. These Acts began the period known as Radical Reconstruction.

They placed the South under army rule. They required former Confederate states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment and to grant African-American males the right to vote. In 1867, Southern voters chose delegates to draft their new state constitutions. About three-fourths of the delegates were Republicans. Almost half of the Republicans were poor white farmers called scalawags, or

scoundrels. Another one-fourth of the Republican delegates were carpetbaggers—white Northerners who had rushed to the South after the war. African Americans made up the rest of the delegates. The new state constitutions set up public schools and gave the vote to all adult males, including African Americans. By 1870, voters in each former Confederate state had approved the constitutions. As a result, the states were allowed back into the Union and to send representatives to Congress.

In 1867, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act, which said that the president could not fire Cabinet members without the Senate's approval. Nevertheless, in February 1868, Johnson fired his secretary of war. As a result, the House of Representatives voted to impeach the president, or formally accuse him of improper behavior. The Senate, however, acquitted Johnson by one vote.

## Section 2: Reconstruction and Daily Life

**Main Idea: As the South rebuilt, millions of newly freed African Americans worked to improve their lives.**

African Americans' first reaction to freedom was to leave plantations. The Freedmen's Bureau helped many families reunite. Throughout the South, African-American children and adults flocked to freedmen's schools, which were established to educate African Americans.

By 1869, more than 150,000 African-American students were attending 3,000 schools. However, many white Southerners worked against the teachers' efforts. White racists even killed teachers and burned some schools.

Radical Republican leaders pushed to make land reform part of the Reconstruction Acts. They wanted to take land from plantation owners and give it to freed people. There were rumors that each African-American family would receive 40 acres of land and a mule. However, Congress failed to pass the plan. After the Civil War, many freedmen returned to work on the plantations, where they were needed to raise cotton. They reacted to the shortage of labor by choosing the best contract offers.

However, even the best contracts paid very low wages. Workers often could not leave the plantation without permission. Workers who broke their contracts were punished by law. Because of these problems, many African Americans turned to sharecropping. Under this system, a worker rented a plot of land to farm. The landowner provided the tools, seed, and housing. In return, the sharecropper gave

the landowner a share of the crop. This system gave families without land a place to farm, and landowners got cheap labor.

However, problems soon arose. Farmers wanted to grow food to feed their families, but landowners forced them to grow cash crops, such as cotton. This meant that farmers had to buy their food, but most had little money and often went into debt. Many white farmers also became sharecroppers.

During Reconstruction, African Americans in the South faced violent racism. In 1866, the Ku Klux Klan was formed. This secret society wanted to restore Democratic control of the South, and it used violence to keep former slaves powerless. Klansmen attacked African Americans and other Republicans. They beat people and burned homes. They killed some victims without a trial. This was known as lynching. Military authorities often ignored the Klan's terror tactics, which kept many African Americans away from the polls and increased the power of the Democrats.

### Section 3: End of Reconstruction

**Main Idea: As white Southerners regained power, Reconstruction ended, as did black advances toward equality.**

Republican candidate Ulysses S. Grant was elected president in 1868. About 500,000 African Americans voted in the South, despite attacks by the Ku Klux Klan. Most voted for Grant. Their votes were critical, for Grant won the popular vote by only a slim majority.

After the election, Radical Republicans proposed the Fifteenth Amendment, which stated that citizens could not be stopped from voting "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." The amendment became law in 1870. At President Grant's request, Congress passed a tough law against the Ku Klux Klan. Federal marshals then arrested thousands of Klansmen, and Klan violence declined. As a result, the 1872 presidential election was both fair and peaceful. Grant was reelected. However, scandals hurt the Grant administration. Many of Grant's advisers were not qualified for their jobs. Others took bribes. In 1872, some outraged Republican officials formed a new group, the Liberal Republican Party. With their party split, Republicans were less willing to impose tough Reconstruction plans on the South.

In 1873, an economic depression began when several Eastern banks failed. This was known as the Panic of 1873. The depression lasted about five years. During these hard times, most Americans were losing interest in Reconstruction.

In an 1876 case, *U.S. versus Cruikshank*, the Supreme Court ruled that only the states—and not the federal government—could punish individuals who violated the civil rights of African Americans. As a result, violence against African Americans increased.

In another 1876 case, *U.S. versus Reese*, the Court ruled that the Fifth Amendment merely listed grounds on which states could not deny the vote. States therefore could prevent African Americans from voting for other reasons. States began to use poll taxes and literacy tests to keep African Americans from voting.

The final blow to Reconstruction came with the 1876 presidential election. When the race between Democrat Samuel J. Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes ended without a clear winner, Congress appointed a special committee to decide the election. With the Compromise of 1877, the committee made Hayes president. In return, Republicans removed federal troops from the South, causing Southern Reconstruction governments to collapse.

African Americans made lasting gains during Reconstruction. Protection of civil rights became part of the U.S. Constitution. Black schools and churches were established. But many African Americans remained poor. Few took part in politics. Furthermore, African Americans continued to face widespread violence and prejudice.