

## The Devastated South

Mary Chesnut was the wife of a wealthy and respected South Carolina planter and politician. Now, at war's end, the family was penniless. The world they had known was gone. Chesnut described the devastation:

“Mrs. Bartow drove me to our house at Mulberry. On one side of the house, every window was broken, every bell torn down, every piece of furniture destroyed, every door smashed in. . . . [The Yankee soldiers] carried off sacks of our books and our papers, our letters were strewn along the Charleston road. Potter's raid ruined us. He burned our mills and gins, and a hundred bales of cotton. Indeed nothing is left now but the bare land.”

—Mary Boykin Chesnut, *A Diary From Dixie*

- ▲ A southerner sits amid the postwar ruins of Richmond, Virginia.

# The Reconstruction Era

## Objectives

- Explore how Congress and the President clashed over Reconstruction.
- Describe the impact of Reconstruction on the South.
- Explain how Reconstruction came to an end.

## Terms and People

Reconstruction	impeachment
Freedmen's Bureau	Fourteenth Amendment
Andrew Johnson	Fifteenth Amendment
Thirteenth Amendment	Ku Klux Klan
Radical Republican	de jure segregation

## NoteTaking

**Reading Skill: Categorize** As you read, identify the political, social, and economic aspects of Reconstruction.

Political	Social	Economic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radical Republicans clash with President</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharecropping develops</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

**Why It Matters** The Civil War ended in April 1865 with the Union victorious. Now, North and South faced the challenge of reunion. Political decisions made in the next decades helped shape the modern South. And constitutional amendments passed during this period redefined American notions of citizenship and civil rights. **Section Focus Question:** What were the immediate and long-term effects of Reconstruction?

## The Nation Moves Toward Reunion

Even while the war was in progress, Union politicians had been debating ways to achieve **Reconstruction**, bringing the South back into the Union. For President Lincoln, the major goal was to reunify the nation—in the words of his Second Inaugural Address, to “bind up the nation's wounds.” But some congressional leaders favored a harsh Reconstruction plan designed to punish the South.

**The Freedmen's Bureau Aids Southerners** Shortly before the war ended, Lincoln and Congress did agree on the creation of the **Freedmen's Bureau**, a federal agency designed to aid freed slaves and relieve the South's immediate needs. The black and white agents of the Bureau delivered food and healthcare and began to develop a public school system for both black and white southerners. It also helped to reunite families separated by slavery and to negotiate fair labor contracts between formerly enslaved African Americans and white landowners.

**President and Congress Clash** Meanwhile, debate over Reconstruction continued. Before he could gain support for his moderate plan, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 14, 1865. As the nation mourned, Vice President **Andrew Johnson** became President.

Johnson favored a plan that restored political power to southerners if they merely swore allegiance to the United States. Under Johnson's plan, the South also had to accept the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which ended slavery in 1865. In return, the new President promised to uphold states' rights, with the laws of individual states taking precedence over federal regulations.

Many congressmen disagreed. Arguing that southerners had caused the war, these **Radical Republicans** favored punishment and harsh reorganization for the South. Radicals also advocated full citizens' rights for African Americans and wanted states' authority to be subordinate to federal power. When southern legislatures passed laws to restrict the activities of African Americans, Radicals became even more determined to impose a harsh Reconstruction policy on the South.

Johnson and the Radicals in Congress clashed repeatedly. In 1868, Congress voted to impeach Johnson. **Impeachment** is the act of bringing charges against an official in order to determine whether he or she should be removed from office. The Senate narrowly voted not to remove Johnson from office, but by that time he had lost control of Reconstruction. A few months later, Civil War hero Ulysses S. Grant was elected President.

 **Checkpoint** What were the Reconstruction goals of the Radical Republicans?

## The Reconstruction South

With Congress firmly under their control, Radical Republicans designed a sweeping Reconstruction plan. They divided the South into five military districts under the command of Union generals. As a condition of readmission to the Union, all southern states were required to grant the vote to African American men. Perhaps most important, Radicals passed the **Fourteenth Amendment**, which guaranteed full citizenship status and rights to every person born in the United States, including African Americans. The Amendment was ratified in 1868.

**African Americans Gain Political Rights** Under Radical Reconstruction, many white southerners were not eligible to vote or chose to stay away from the polls. African American men, on the other hand, eagerly signed up to exercise their new right of suffrage. Thus, by 1868, many southern states had black elected officials and were dominated by a strong Republican Party. South Carolina—the first state to secede—became the only state where, for a short time, an African American majority dominated the legislature.

At this time, no laws guaranteed the vote to African Americans in the North. To remedy this imbalance, Congress passed the **Fifteenth Amendment**, which guaranteed that no male citizen could be denied the right to vote on the basis of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” It was ratified in 1870.

**Freedmen Rebuild Their Lives** In the South, formerly enslaved African Americans worked to carve out new lives. Some struck out for the North or West. But many more stayed in the South. They assembled their scattered families and built strong churches that also served as community centers, employment agencies, schoolhouses, and—in later years—centers of protest.

For the first time, many African American men and women could legalize and celebrate their marriages, set up housekeeping with their families and make

### Vocabulary Builder

status—(STAT uhs) *n.* standing or position, especially with regard to the law



## The Ku Klux Klan

Ku Klux Klan members wore hoods, like those shown above, to hide their identities and terrorize their victims.

### Vocabulary Builder

**withdraw**—(with DRAW) *v.* to remove; to pull back from

choices about where they would reside. Freed women could care for their families and leave field labor. Freed people also realized the importance of learning to read and to count their money. So the Freedmen's Bureau schools quickly filled. By 1869, as many as 300,000 African American adults and children were acquiring basic literacy.

**The Ku Klux Klan Uses Terror Tactics** Even though the South remained under military occupation, organized secret societies, such as the **Ku Klux Klan**, used terror and violence against African Americans and their white supporters. A federal grand jury concluded that the chief goal of the Klan attacks was to keep African Americans from voting:

#### Primary Source

“The Klan . . . inflicted summary vengeance on the colored citizens of these counties by breaking into their houses at the dead of night, dragging them from their beds, torturing them in the most inhuman manner, and in many instances murdering them; and this, mainly, on account of their political affiliations.”

—42nd Congress, House Report No. 22, 1871

Congress passed federal laws making it a crime to use violence to prevent people from voting. Although Klan activities lessened somewhat, the threat of violence persisted, keeping many southern African Americans from the polls.



**Checkpoint** What political gains did African Americans make in the early phases of Reconstruction?

## Reconstruction Comes to an End

After a decade of Reconstruction, northerners began to lose interest in remaking the South and to focus on other social, political, and economic issues. In the fall of 1873, a series of bank failures sparked a severe economic downturn. At the same time, a series of political scandals in the Grant administration damaged the Radical Republicans. Under these circumstances, Reconstruction began to fade. Gradually and quietly, beginning in 1871, troops were withdrawn from the South. In 1872, Congress dissolved the Freedmen's Bureau.

**Southern Democrats Regain Power** Meanwhile, southern white Democrats patiently devised a strategy for regaining political control of the South. They argued that Republican programs for public schools and road building resulted in higher taxes. Most white southerners shunned anyone who supported Radical Republicans. Southern Democrats grasped every opportunity to discredit African American politicians as corrupt and incompetent. At the same time, the ever-present threat of violence kept African Americans from voting, thus depriving the Republicans of a large segment of their political base.

One by one, southern states reinstated wealthy white southern men as governors and sent former Confederate leaders to the U.S. Congress. In the 1874 elections, the Republicans lost control of the House of Representatives. By 1876, only South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana—three states with large African American populations—still had Reconstruction governments and remained under military occupation.

**Election of 1876 Ends Reconstruction** The presidential election of 1876 signaled the end of Reconstruction. Democratic candidate Samuel Tilden won more popular votes than Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes, but the


electoral vote was in dispute. The disputed votes were those of Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana, the three southern states still controlled by Republican Reconstruction governments.

In an informal compromise, a congressional committee declared Hayes the winner. In return, he promised to pull all remaining federal troops from the South. In effect, the election of Hayes ended Reconstruction.

**Historians Evaluate Reconstruction** Was Reconstruction a success or a failure? Southerners and northerners, black and white, then and now would give different answers. All will agree, however, that some things were changed forever by those dozen years during which the victorious North tried to remake the vanquished South.

Certainly, Radical Reconstruction failed in most of its aims. By the end of the century, the political rights of African Americans in the South had eroded. Southern states slowly took away the voting rights of African Americans. **De jure segregation**, or legal separation of the races, became the law in all southern states.

Still, Reconstruction did mark the beginning of the physical and economic rebuilding of the South. Despite continuing conflicts and resentments, the nation was permanently reunited. And the constitutional amendments passed during Reconstruction, especially the Fourteenth Amendment, would eventually form the basis for a revived civil rights movement that sought political equality for all citizens.

 **Checkpoint** How did the influence of Radical Reconstruction in the South erode?

## Cause and Effect

### Causes

- Civil War destroys South's economy and infrastructure.
- Freed slaves and war victims need help.
- Black codes discriminate against African Americans.
- Radical Republicans want to restructure the South.
- Southern states need to rejoin Union.



### Reconstruction

### Effects

- South is divided into military districts.
- African Americans gain citizenship and voting rights.
- Union is restored.
- Sharecropping becomes the new farming system.
- White backlash leads to Ku Klux Klan and segregation.



### Connections to Today

- Constitutional amendments protect civil rights.
- Debate over states' rights and the federal government continues.

### Analyze Cause and Effect

Although it failed in some of its major goals, Reconstruction had a lasting impact, especially on the South. Which of the effects of Reconstruction were temporary?

## SECTION

# 4 Assessment

### Progress Monitoring Online

For: Self-test with vocabulary practice

Web Code: nea-0210

### Comprehension

**1. Terms and People** For each item below, write a sentence explaining how it was connected with the reshaping of the South after the Civil War.

- Reconstruction
- Freedmen's Bureau
- Andrew Johnson
- Thirteenth Amendment
- Radical Republican
- impeachment
- Fourteenth Amendment
- Fifteenth Amendment
- Ku Klux Klan
- du jure segregation

**2. NoteTaking** **Reading Skill:**

**Categorize** Use your table to answer the Section Focus Question: What were the immediate and long-term effects of Reconstruction?

### Writing About History

**3. Quick Write: Chart Conflicting Arguments**

Make a table with two columns. In one column, list two arguments in favor of a harsh Reconstruction policy toward the South. In the other column, list two arguments in favor of a lenient Reconstruction policy.

### Critical Thinking

**4. Recognize Ideologies** How did the clash between President Johnson and Congress reflect a difference in attitudes about the role of the federal government?

**5. Evaluate Information** How did the Fifteenth Amendment guarantee the voting rights of some Americans but not others?

**6. Contrast Viewpoints** How do you think a northern Radical Republican and a southern Democrat would evaluate the long-term impact of Reconstruction?