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**Abstract:** Presents an overview of the reconstruction of the United States after the end of the Civil War in 1865. Highlights of Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which offered to pardon Confederates who agreed to swear loyalty to the Union; Details of President Andrew Johnson's policies; Efforts to secure civil rights for former slaves; Military occupation of Southern states; Disdain for the increasing Northern influence in Southern affairs; Creation of the Ku Klux Klan as a reaction to the North's attempts at reconstruction.

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**Reconstruction**

The American Civil War came to a close in 1865, ending four years of bitter fighting between North and South. The United States faced the task of "reconstructing" the defeated South in a world which no longer included African-American slavery. The years 1865-1877 are therefore known as Reconstruction, when the victorious North restored the former Confederate States to normal relations with the rest of the Union.

Reconstruction had a tumultuous thirteen-year life. President Abraham Lincoln had followed a moderate policy which would have brought the Southern states back quickly into the Union, provided their people promised loyalty to the Union and acknowledged that slavery was ended. After Lincoln was assassinated, his successor, President Andrew Johnson, followed a policy that many in the North thought was too lenient toward the South. Johnson lacked Lincoln's tact in dealing with his Cabinet and the Congress, and so his seemingly pro-Southern policies met with great hostility in the North.

The Radical Republicans in Congress, who wanted to punish the Southern states for seceding, imposed laws that favored the former slaves but angered white Southerners. They carried out their policies with the help of the "carpetbaggers," or Northerners who helped govern the Reconstruction South. Local Southerners who aided the Northern occupation were dubbed "Scalawags" by their peers.

Through election fraud, violence, and other means, the Southern whites regained control of the state governments and reasserted their control over the black population.

Reconstruction finally came to an end in 1877, when the Republicans and Democrats made a tacit agreement in that year's elections. The Democrats acknowledged Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes as the winner of the presidency, and the Republicans acknowledged the Democrats' victories in the states of South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. With the Democrats in control, whites managed to take away most of the civil and political rights that blacks had gained. Not until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's did African-Americans regain these rights.

### **Lincoln's Reconstruction Plan**

Abraham Lincoln set forth his first formal plan of Reconstruction on December 8, 1863. The Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction offered a full pardon and restoration of civil rights to most of the Confederate population, upon taking an oath of loyalty to the Union and acknowledging that slavery would be barred in the post-war state governments. However, The proclamation did not offer pardons to high-ranking Confederate political and military leaders, persons who had resigned commissions in the U.S. Army and Navy to join the Confederacy, or persons who had mistreated prisoners of war.

The proclamation also said that when 10 percent of a state's 1860 voting population had taken the loyalty oath, these citizens could vote in elections to establish new state governments and state constitutions, which outlawed slavery. Once these governments and constitutions were in place, the state would then in Lincoln's eyes be fully part of the Union again and ready to send representatives and senators to Congress.

Lincoln's opponents in Congress responded with the Wade-Davis Bill of July 4, 1864. This measure required that a majority of a Southern state's voters take the oath of loyalty before the state could establish a new government. The president killed the bill with a "pocket veto," which meant he failed to sign the measure within 10 days. He did, however, take the unusual step of issuing a proclamation to explain his reasons for the veto. Lincoln declared that he was satisfied with the bill's plan for Reconstruction, but was unprepared to commit himself to a single plan of restoration. He also did not want to set aside the anti-slavery governments and constitutions already established in Arkansas and Louisiana.

Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio and Representative Henry Winter Davis of Maryland, who had sponsored the Wade-Davis bill, responded to Lincoln's comments with a manifesto published on August 5, 1864. The Wade-Davis Manifesto criticized the president for overstepping his authority in making plans for Reconstruction. The paper claimed that only Congress had the power to determine what was a legally established state government.

Other Northerners complained that Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction did not give enough rights to the freed slaves. This plan did not allow blacks to take the loyalty oath, vote, or hold public office.

In his last speech, delivered on April 11, 1865, just after the news of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Lincoln again asserted that he had not bound himself to any particular plan of Reconstruction. He hinted that another plan might be forthcoming:

And yet so great peculiarities pertain to each state; and such important and sudden changes occur in the same state; and, withal, so new and unprecedented is the whole case, that no exclusive, and inflexible plan can safely be prescribed as to details and

colaterals [sic]. Such exclusive, and inflexible plan, would surely become a new entanglement. Important principles may, and must, be inflexible.

Lincoln did not have a chance to carry out his moderate policies-only three days later, on April 14, 1865, he was assassinated at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. by Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth. Lincoln's successor was Vice President Andrew Johnson.

### **Reconstruction Under Johnson**

President Johnson continued Lincoln's plan of moderation toward the South, which made his relations with the Republican Congress extremely strained. The so-called Radical Republicans, who wanted the harshest measures against the former Confederacy, had hoped that Johnson would continue his pre-war hostility to the South's slaveholding aristocracy. Eventually, however, the Radicals decided that Johnson was acting too leniently.

Johnson, himself a Southerner and former slaveowner, showed less concern than Lincoln over the plight of the ex-slaves. His strict views on the U.S. Constitution also led him to end federal domination of the Southern states as quickly as possible. Therefore on May 29, 1865, he announced a modified form of Lincoln's Reconstruction plan. Johnson planned to appoint for each former Confederate state a governor who would convene a constitutional convention. He also required the Southern states to ratify the 13th Amendment abolishing slavery, repudiate Confederate-era debts, and to nullify the ordinances of secession.

By the time Congress reconvened in December 1865, Johnson thought the job of Reconstruction was almost complete. All the Southern states except Texas had taken the steps required by Johnson to regain full membership in the Union. But Congress and many other Northerners were angered by the Southern governments' institution of so-called "Black Codes." These codes were laws that restricted the economic condition of the freedmen. The codes imposed taxes on former slaves who tried to work outside of agriculture, restricted their ability to rent land, and imposed harsh apprenticeship laws which made virtual slaves of the children of so-called "unfit" parents.

Northerners were angered by Johnson's willingness to allow the new Southern governors to appoint officials who had previously supported secession. They also considered him far too willing to grant pardons to former Confederate leaders. Northerners were also concerned that the former slaves, who under the Constitution had each previously counted as only 3/5 of a person, who give the South a larger population than the North and thus more representation of Congress. The Republicans were concerned that the Southern delegates would be Democrats.

The Radical Republicans, led by Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, sought to take over control of Reconstruction. They wanted the U.S. government to guarantee the blacks' civil and political rights. Stevens was a leader in calling for the government to distribute land to the freedmen in order to make them economically secure.

Moderate Republicans, however, favored only minor changes to the presidential program in ensuring rights for the freedmen. But their hopes for success were dashed in 1866 when President Johnson vetoed two bills to give greater power to the former slaves.

The first bill was a measure to extend indefinitely the life of the Freedmen's Bureau and to give it greater authority. The bureau, headed by General Oliver Otis Howard, had had

been established in March 1865 as an agency of the War Department. It was intended to protect the rights of the freedmen, help the former slaves gain an education, and to help them become self-supporting. Johnson believed that the bill was unconstitutional, because it encroached on the Southern states' rights, and unnecessary, because the Bureau would continue for several months whether he signed the measure or not.

The second measure, known as the Civil Rights Bill, sought to give the freedmen the same legal rights as whites, regardless of state laws. It defined all persons born in the United States, except American Indians, to be citizens. The measure allowed the federal government to sue violators if the states did not act. Johnson vetoed this bill on the same grounds, that it took too much power away from the states. Congress responded by passing the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in June 1866 and declared ratified by the states in July 1868.

The amendment had four parts. The first part declared that all native-born and naturalized residents were citizens of the United States and of the states in which they dwelt. The second part solved the question of Congressional representation. A state's representation in Congress was to be based on total population. If a state denied the right to vote on any grounds other than participation in a rebellion or crime, that state lost representation in proportion to the number of people denied the vote. The third part disqualified from holding state or federal office any former civil or military officer who had rebelled against the United States or aided the rebellion. Although Congress could remove this disability, this removed almost all-important Southern leaders from influence. The fourth part of the amendment upheld the validity of United States debts and required the states to renounce all Confederate debts. It also denied any claims that would arise from emancipating the slaves.

### **The Radical Republicans in Control**

The elections of 1866 turned the tide in Congress in favor of the Radical Republicans. Moderate Republicans sought but failed to form a National Union Party. The Radicals campaigned on a patriotic platform which sought to make their opponents appear as traitors to the Union. The strategy worked, and the Radicals entered the new Congress with a more than two-thirds majority.

The refusal of the Southern states to ratify the 14th Amendment made the Radicals even more intent on enforcing their will on the South. The era of "Radical Reconstruction" began in earnest in March 1867, when Congress passed two Reconstruction Acts. The acts:

- denied the existence of legal governments in all the former Confederate states except Tennessee
- ruled that these states would receive new governments
- declared that these new governments would completely disenfranchise former Confederates and completely enfranchise the former slaves
- placed the entire process of Reconstruction under military control. Congress divided the ten Southern states into five military districts, each of which administered by an officer with at least the rank of brigadier general.

The Southern states reluctantly abided by these policies. By summer 1868, Congress recognized seven former Confederate states as ready for Congressional representation.

President Johnson found himself powerless to stop the Congress in its Reconstruction plans. As a Southern Democrat before the war, he had never had a power base in the Republican Party. The Radicals increasingly sought ways to remove him from office. They finally found their opportunity in August 1868 when Johnson tried to remove Secretary of War Stanton, a staunch Radical, and replace him temporarily with General Ulysses S. Grant.

The Radicals argued that this action was against the Tenure of Office Act (passed March 2, 1867), which declared that the Senate must consent to the removal of any persons who held an office with Senate confirmation. Johnson considered the act to be unconstitutional, but he remained within the terms of the act. The Act allowed the president to make an interim appointment with a report to the Senate within 20 days after the next session began. The president had made the change in August, when Congress was not in session, and Congress would not reconvene until December.

An initial attempt to impeach the president failed in December 1867. Grant resigned from the Cabinet after the Senate refused in January 1868 to support the president's action. Stanton resumed his post as secretary of war, but Johnson ordered General of the Army Grant, the nation's highest-ranking army officer, not to take Stanton's orders. Johnson removed Stanton a second time, in February 1868, and appointed Adjutant General Lorenzo Thomas in his place. In the midst of this controversy the House of Representatives finally impeached the president on March 3, by a vote of 128 to 47, with only the Democrats voting in support of Johnson.

Johnson escaped conviction in the Senate by a vote of 35-19, a single vote shy of the required two-thirds majority for conviction. Despite many senators' personal dislike for Johnson, they feared that removing the president would set a dangerous precedent, putting the president too much under the control of Congress. In addition, many senators disliked the thought of Senator Benjamin Wade, the Senate president pro tempore, into the Oval Office. The presidential succession rules at the time made this official next in line after the vice president.

Neither the Republicans nor the Democrats chose Johnson as their presidential candidate in 1868. The Republicans chose General Ulysses S. Grant as their nominee, while the Democrats selected New York Governor Horatio Seymour. Though black suffrage was on the Republican platform, the party did not push this issue outside the South because many Northern states had already rejected the idea. The Democrats denounced the Radical Republicans and called for restoring the Southern states and giving wider amnesties to Confederates. Grant won the electoral vote easily, 214 to 80. Black voters gave him a narrow victory in the popular vote.

During this period the North was increasing its control over the South by means of the "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags," both of which groups were widely hated by white Southerners. The "carpetbaggers" were mostly Northerners who came South during Reconstruction for a variety of reasons. The Southerners gave them this insulting name because of the carpetbaggers' habit of carrying their belongings in a bag made of carpet. Some represented the various federal Reconstruction agencies, such as the Freedmen's Bureau, others were humanitarians, such as educators, who wanted to help the blacks. Some carpetbaggers were simply con artists, who used force and fraud to keep the Republicans in power in the South.

The "scalawags," on the other hand, were generally local Southern whites who collaborated with the North, often to their own great advantage. Governor Henry Clay Warmoth of Louisiana admitted that he made \$100,000 during his first four years in office, when his official salary was \$8,000. Congressional investigators in 1872 estimated that Warmoth may have been worth as much as \$1 million.

Despite white opposition, blacks in the South gained a number of national and state political offices. By the end of Reconstruction in 1877, Congress had seated 17 black legislators, 15 in the House and two in the Senate. Senator Blanche Kelso Bruce of Mississippi, a former slave, was the first black to serve a full Senate term. (In 1879 he even served briefly as Senate president pro tempore.)

### **Decline and End of Reconstruction**

To fight the Northern occupation and to ensure white supremacy, Southern whites formed secret societies such as the Ku Klux Klan. The KKK was formed, in Pulaski, Tennessee, on December 24, 1865, by six former Confederate army officers. The name came from the Greek word kuklos, or "circle." Though originally a social organization, the Klan soon began attacking the Republican Reconstruction governments established by the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. The Klan and similar groups used violence and fear to keep blacks from taking part in politics.

In 1870, Congress declared ratified the 15th Amendment to the Constitution. This said that neither the federal government nor the states had the right to take away or limit the vote of any U.S. citizen "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."

During the 1870's, the Southern states managed to replace their Radical Republican (also known as "Black Republican") governments with native white leaders, usually known as "Conservatives." Southerners called this process "Redemption."

Northern sentiment began to shift during the 1870's. Northerners grew tired of dealing with the Southern issues and the freedmen's rights. In 1872, the federal government gave amnesty to all former Confederates except for those who had formerly held high political or military office in the United States before the war. By the election of 1876, all but three Southern states (Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina) had gotten rid of the Radical governments.

Reconstruction finally came to an end in 1877, as a result of that year's contested presidential election. The Democrats claimed victory for their candidate, Samuel J. Tilden, because of irregularities in the electoral votes for the Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes.

The disputes between the Radicals and the Conservatives in the states of Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina led to the submission to Congress of two sets of election returns from each state.

Congress established a 15-member electoral commission to resolve the matter. The commission determined 8-7 in favor of Hayes, which led to Democratic cries of fraud against Hayes for the next four years.

In February 1877, Reconstruction was given its death blow by the "Wormley Conference," a confidential meeting in Washington, D.C., between friends of President Hayes and Southern representatives. Hayes' friends told the Southerners that either Hayes or the outgoing President Grant would remove the last federal troops from the South. The

Southerners promised that they would not dispute the electoral count or seek to prevent Hayes from becoming president. Within two months of Hayes' inauguration, the last troops were removed from South Carolina and Louisiana.

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By Keira Stevenson

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