

# Reconstruction

## RESTORING THE SOUTHERN STATES TO THE UNION

The Civil War came to an end on April 9, 1865. Four years of war had exhausted the nation. In the North, soldiers returned home to look for jobs. In the South, soldiers returned to find much of their land destroyed. They needed to do a great deal of work to rebuild their homes and to grow crops. Almost 4 million slaves had been freed. They also faced many problems at the war's end. They needed places to live and jobs to support themselves and their families. In March 1865, just before the war ended, Congress had passed a law setting up the Freedmen's Bureau. Its job was to provide work, food, medical supplies, and clothing for poor whites and freed blacks alike. It also supported the education of blacks.

Equally important was solving the problem, "How should the victorious North treat the defeated South?" Long before the end of the war, President Lincoln had made plans for the South for the time when peace would come. He did not want to punish the states that had seceded. He wanted them returned to the Union as soon as possible. Lincoln did not live to carry out his plans. On April 14, 1865, he was killed in a theater by John Wilkes Booth, an actor who favored the Confederacy. The Union lost its beloved leader only five days after the surrender of Lee.

The new president, Andrew Johnson, was a southern Democrat. He had once owned slaves himself. Following Lincoln's plan, he made it clear that he would welcome the southern states back into the Union. In state after state, former Confederate leaders put themselves into power again. They drew up new constitutions. They accepted the new 13th Amendment. (This amendment had been passed in 1865. It ended slavery.) These white southern leaders drew up a series of laws called the Black Codes. These state laws sharply limited the rights of the freedmen.

Freedmen were the men, women, and children who had been slaves. The southern states elected representatives to Congress. Many of these representatives were former Confederate leaders.

When Congress met, many of its members were angry with President Johnson. The Republican party was in control. Some of its leaders, Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, disagreed sharply with Johnson. These members of Congress were called Radical Republicans. They felt that the president had no power to readmit states to the Union. Only Congress could do that. They wanted to punish the South for leaving the Union and bringing on such a costly war. They wanted to give full rights to the newly freed blacks. They felt that the Black Codes would set up a new form of slavery. Finally, they refused to seat former Confederate leaders in Congress.

Under the leadership of Sumner and Stevens, Congress went ahead with its own plan for the Reconstruction, or the rebuilding, of the South. It passed a bill that continued the Freedmen's Bureau. It also passed the "Civil Rights Act of 1866, giving citizenship to all persons, except Indians, born in the United States. President Johnson vetoed, or rejected, both of these bills. He thought the laws were too hard on the South. However, Congress passed both bills over the president's veto. They became laws.

Many Republican members of Congress were afraid that the Civil Rights Act of 1866 might be ruled unconstitutional. So they proposed the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. This amendment would make former slaves United States citizens. It also stated that no former Confederate leaders could vote or hold office. The Republicans supported this amendment. President Johnson did not. In the congressional elections of 1866, he "took his case" to the people. Johnson asked them to vote for men who would support his policies. The majority of the people did not. The Radical

Republicans were now in full control of both houses of Congress.

With this new support, the Radical Republicans moved quickly to carry out the amendment and their plans for Reconstruction. The southern states were to draw up new constitutions. Former Confederate leaders and soldiers could not vote or hold office. Freed black men were given the right to vote and hold office. The new state governments had to accept the 14th Amendment before they would be readmitted to the Union. Until they accepted it, the South was divided into five military districts. Each district was ruled by a United States general supported by federal troops.

By 1868 new state and local governments had been set up in the South. The new governments were made up mainly of two groups. The larger group was made up of white men, many of whom had opposed the Confederacy. Some of these whites were from the North. They were called carpetbaggers because they had carried their belongings to the South in small carpetbags. Southern whites who had not fought in the Civil War were also in the new governments. They favored Congress's Reconstruction program and were called scalawags. The smaller group in the new governments was made up of black men. Some were ministers, lawyers, and teachers. Others were ex-slaves.

Many in both the white and the black groups had very little training for their new jobs. As a result, some bad things were done as well as some good things. Some lawmakers, black and white, used their power to make money for themselves and their friends. On the other hand, they passed laws setting up free public schools for blacks and whites. They rebuilt streets, roads, and bridges. They made taxes fairer. Men no longer had to prove they owned property before being allowed to vote.

From 1868 to 1876, black men took part in government at all levels. The 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment protected the right of black American men to vote. Congress proposed this amendment in 1869 and it was approved in 1870. On the local level, blacks became mayors, sheriffs, and

town clerks. They served in state legislatures. On the national level, 14 black men were elected to the House of Representatives. Some of them were former slaves. Two other blacks, Blanche K. Bruce and Hiram R. Revels, were sent to the United States Senate from Mississippi.

The differences between President Johnson and Congress grew worse. In 1868 Congress passed a law reducing his powers. The president decided to ignore this law. When he did, the House of Representatives impeached him. This means the House accused him of doing something wrong. They charged him with disobeying a law passed by Congress. Then he was tried by the Senate. If the Senate upheld the charges, he would lose the presidency. Johnson was not found guilty of the charge by only one vote! Johnson remained in office until the end of his term in 1869.

The new president, Ulysses Grant, agreed with Congress's policies. Federal troops remained in the South, giving support to the new governments. In the meantime, white southerners became more and more opposed to Reconstruction. They blamed their problems on Congress, the federal troops, and the freedmen who now helped run the governments. They set out to win back their places in the state governments in the South. All over the South, white southerners formed secret groups or societies. The main purpose of these societies was to keep blacks from voting. The Ku Klux Klan was the most well known of the secret groups. Members of this group dressed in white robes. They rode at night to beat or kill those blacks who voted or held office in the new governments. They also attacked white supporters of blacks. By keeping blacks from voting, the whites soon gained control of the state governments.

Things had changed in the North, too. Sumner and Stevens had died. Few northerners continued to show their concern for the rights of black Americans. They often believed the reports about the dishonesty of black people in the state legislatures. They were becoming more interested in building railroads and

making their mills and factories grow even larger. By 1877 the federal troops who occupied the South had left. The southern states were now under the control of white Democratic leaders. Reconstruction was over.

## FROM SLAVERY TO SEGREGATION

The Industrial Revolution came to the South after 1865. In many small towns, business leaders raised enough money to start small factories. Before long, there were many cotton and flour mills and furniture and tobacco factories. Factory workers were chiefly poor whites from the hills. They worked 12 hours a day, six days a week for low wages. The workers depended on the factory owners for their jobs, their houses, and their food supplies.

Mining also expanded. Great coal fields were opened in the Appalachian highlands from Maryland to Alabama. Great deposits of iron were found all the way from Virginia through northern Alabama to Arkansas. Birmingham, Alabama, became a busy iron and steel center by 1890. Despite the destruction left by the war, the old railroads were quickly rebuilt while new ones were being built. By 1890 the South had a railroad system twice as large as that of 1860.

Despite the new mills and factories, farming remained the chief source of wealth in the South. The war, of course, had brought changes. The freeing of the slaves meant that the southern planters had to work out a new labor system. They had land to be farmed but no money to pay wages. The freed blacks and poor whites had no money to buy or rent the land. But they were willing to work. To get farming going again, the planters divided their land into small farms. Then they rented these pieces of land to farmers. The planters provided cabins, seed, and tools for the farmers, but no wages. When the cotton or tobacco crop was in, the farmers turned over part (usually one-third) of what they raised to the landowner as rent for the land. The farmers gave the landowner another part (often one-third) as rent for tools, seed, and fertilizer. In other

words, the farmers *shared* part of their crops with the planters. For this reason, these farmers were called sharecroppers.

Poverty was not the only problem southern blacks had to live with. Many southern whites had not forgiven Congress for the Reconstruction laws. As soon as these whites regained control of the state governments, they drew up a new set of laws to keep whites and blacks apart, or segregated. These laws were called Jim Crow laws. The name Jim Crow may have come from a well-known song of the 1830s. One of the first Jim Crow laws said that blacks and whites had to ride in separate railroad cars. Blacks took these laws to the Supreme Court. In 1896 the Court ruled that "separate but equal" railroad cars for black people were lawful. The decision opened the way for more Jim Crow laws. These laws separated blacks from whites in restaurants, hotels, schools, and hospitals. Under segregation laws, black people did not seem to benefit much from the ending of slavery.

Beginning in Mississippi in 1890, the states in the South adopted new constitutions. These new constitutions took the vote away from many blacks. Some states limited the right to vote to persons who could read and write an article of the United States Constitution. Other states taxed each person who wanted to vote. This poll tax, as it was called, was small. However, it kept many poor blacks from voting. Finally, some southern states passed laws that allowed a man to vote if his father or grandfather had voted in 1867. This law allowed many poor whites to vote even if they could not read or write or afford to pay the tax. Of course, many blacks did not qualify because their fathers and grandfathers had not been allowed to vote in 1867. Because of these laws, the number of black persons who were able to vote dropped sharply. This meant that black Americans had little or no voice in local government.

In addition, many blacks were not safe from personal harm. Blacks were sometimes lynched. This meant that they were judged guilty without a trial, and then killed by a mob. From 1880 to 1910, over 3,000 black people

were lynched in the South, mostly by hanging. Often a single crime by a black person, or the rumor of a crime, sent white mobs streaming into black neighborhoods, ready to burn homes or kill innocent people. In many cases, this treatment continued without strong protest from people in the North.

In spite of their hardships, many blacks in the South wanted an education. Many of the first schools in black communities were started with money and teachers from the North. Among these schools was Hampton Institute in Virginia. One of its first students was Booker T. Washington. He was born a slave. To stay in school, he worked as a janitor. When Washington graduated, he became a teacher. Later he founded Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Other blacks eager to learn went to his school. Washington believed that students should learn useful skills, such as carpentry, bricklaying, or mechanics, in addition to book learning. Such skills would help them earn a good living and permit them to buy their own homes and farms. In this way, their white neighbors would come to respect them and grant them their rights. He also believed that blacks ought to live apart from white people.

8. Although Washington had many followers, not all black people believed as he did. One of these was William E. B. Du Bois. He had studied in Europe and at Harvard. Unlike Washington, he had not been born into slavery. Du Bois believed that blacks should receive the same education given to white people. He thought blacks should not be taught just skills needed for jobs in the trades. He thought blacks should study the arts and sciences. Then they could become doctors, lawyers, and teachers. Du Bois also felt that blacks should demand equal rights with whites. In 1909 he helped to organize the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). The NAACP tried to get lawmakers to end Jim Crow laws. It brought civil rights cases to court. This organization still works today for equal rights for blacks.

After the Civil War many white and black people began moving from the farms to nearby cities. By 1900 thousands of southern blacks were also moving to cities in the North. They

were looking for jobs in the many new factories being built. Among these cities were New York, Pittsburgh, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. Blacks new to the cities had to get used to a life much different from farm life. Most had little or no money. They had to live in the poorer areas. Jobs were hard to find. Blacks faced discrimination in housing and jobs. In fact, many practices were as discriminatory as those in the South. For all their disadvantages, however, the northern cities seemed to offer blacks a better life than they had in the rural South,



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