

AP United States History
Unit 5: The Nation Divided and Reunited
Topic- Reconstruction- Part 1 of 3

Reconstruction

Content Objective: Reconstruction altered relationships between the states and the federal government and led to debates over new definitions of citizenship, particularly regarding the rights of African Americans, women, and other minorities.

How did Reconstruction alter the relationship between the states and the federal government?

When the Civil War began the primary objective for the Lincoln administration was bringing the conflict to an end and reuniting the Union as it had been before the war. It is important for us to understand that Reconstruction actually began during the Civil War with the actions that were taken by the Lincoln administration as early as 1862. As Union armies made their way into the Confederate heartland, the process of Reconstruction, as we know it, began in Louisiana. Louisiana was occupied by Union troops in 1862, and after the fall of Vicksburg, Mississippi, in July, 1863, the state came under almost complete federal control. In December, 1863, Lincoln introduced his Ten-Percent Plan. (It is important to keep in mind that this step was taken after the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect on January 1, 1863.) Under the Ten-Percent Plan, a state would be readmitted into the Union after it had met the following conditions: 10% of its citizens who had voted in 1860 would have to take an oath of allegiance to the Union, and the state would have to abolish slavery. He also began to support the idea of limited suffrage for newly freed African-American slaves.

Throughout the summer of 1864, as the war shifted to a total war with the goal being the destruction of the ability of the South to continue to wage the war and with national elections looming in the North, Republicans in Congress began to take a more active role in the process of Reconstruction. In July, 1864, the Republican-led Congress introduced the Wade-Davis Bill. The Wade-Davis Bill was the first attempt by Congress to exert some control over the process of Reconstruction during the war. It added additional requirements to the Confederate states which would seek readmission into the Union. These requirements included the following: it required each state to abolish slavery, it required each state to repudiate the ideal of secession, it required each state not to honor any outstanding wartime debts, it required a majority of voters to take an oath of allegiance to the Union, and it specified that anyone who wanted to vote in a constitutional convention to swear an oath that they had never voluntarily given their support to the Confederacy.

Facing re-election in the fall of 1864, Lincoln pocket vetoed the Wade-Davis Bill. A pocket veto simply means that a chief executive refuses to sign a bill, which leads to its death as a piece of would-be legislation. Lincoln explained that he did not want to be committed to one method of reconstruction and wanted to have more flexibility with the process.

Content Objective: The 13th Amendment abolished slavery, while the 14th and 15th amendments granted African Americans citizenship, equal protection under the laws, and voting rights.

What was the importance of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution?

In the winter of 1865, Congress passed the 13th Amendment which abolished slavery. Lincoln had won re-election in the previous fall and the Republicans had enhanced their majority in Congress, plus, the end of the war was also in sight. With the conclusion of the war imminent by the spring of 1865, in March, Congress

created a new agency to deal with one of the major issues that would confront the nation during the process of reconstruction— how to incorporate 4 million newly freed African-Americans into American society. This agency, the Freedmen's Bureau, was the first of its kind in American political history. It was essentially a welfare agency that was designed to do the following: to protect the basic civil rights of newly freed African-Americans, to provide them with an education, to provide them with medical care and assistance, and to oversee labor disputes between the ex-slaves and their employers. By April, 1865, the war had come to a conclusion on the battlefield, but despite the passage of the 13th Amendment (which had yet to be ratified, or approved by the states) and the development of the Freedmen's Bureau, the nation and the process of Reconstruction would have to move forward after a devastating tragedy. On April 15, 1865, Abraham Lincoln died after being struck down by an assassin's bullet. The nation would have to move forward into the process of Reconstruction without his wisdom, leadership and guidance. It would also set-up a showdown between the new President, Andrew Johnson, and the Republican Congress. Both would have very different visions for the process of Reconstruction.

The two visions for Reconstruction that were born out of Lincoln's assassination are often denoted as Presidential Reconstruction and Congressional (or, Radical) Reconstruction. Presidential Reconstruction came out of the administration of Andrew Johnson. Johnson was the only U.S. Senator to come from a state (Tennessee) that had been a part of the Confederacy, but who did not leave his office with his state. In 1864, he became Lincoln's running mate on a ticket which sought to win both the presidency and the war. Johnson's plan for Reconstruction which was announced in May, 1865, had the following components: former Confederates who were small property owners or farmers would be granted amnesty, ex-Confederate officials would have to petition him for presidential pardons (which he often granted), and the former Confederate states would have to repudiate secession and their wartime debts, and abolish slavery. In response to his plan, the ex-Confederate states adopted what became known as the Black Codes— severely limiting the rights of the newly freed African-Americans. Under the Black Codes in the state of Texas, for example, newly freed African-Americans were not allowed to vote, hold office, or serve on juries, interracial marriage was forbidden, and railroads were required to have separate cars for black and white patrons.

Content Objective: Efforts by radical and moderate Republicans to change the balance of power between Congress and the presidency and to reorder race relations in the defeated South yielded some short-term successes. Reconstruction opened up political opportunities and other leadership roles to formerly enslaved persons but it ultimately failed, due both to determined Southern resistance and the North's waning resolve.

How did the process of Reconstruction alter the relationship between the Presidency and Congress, plus, for a brief time, reorder race relations in the South?

By December, 1865, Johnson had announced that Reconstruction had come to an end and that the Union was fully restored. He announced this despite the fact that Texas had not sought readmission to the Union, South Carolina had never condemned secession, Mississippi refused to abolish slavery, and most of the states had not repudiated their wartime debts. Despite the actions of these ex-Confederate states, the 13th Amendment to the Constitution became ratified just a few days later. However, this set of actions by the ex-Confederate states set in motion the process of Congressional Reconstruction which would be led by a group of Congressman who have become known to us as the Radical Republicans.

The Radical Republicans garnered the moniker (nickname) for one very simple reason. It was their goal to take the newly freed slaves and to make them an equal part of the growing American society of the time. Led by the Massachusetts Senator, Charles Sumner and the Congressman from Pennsylvania, Thaddeus Stevens, the Radical Republicans countered Johnson's proposals for Reconstruction and in the end, impeached him in the first Presidential trial ever held. The Radical Republicans also fashioned a program for Reconstruction that would include two crucial constitutional amendments, the military occupation of the former Confederate states, and the strengthening of the mission of the Freedmen's Bureau.

It was the strengthening of the Freedmen's Bureau which for the very first time pitted President Johnson against the Radical Republicans in Congress. Johnson vetoed (rejected, or refused to sign) the legislation that would expand the power of the Freedmen's Bureau to protect the civil rights of African-Americans in the ex-Confederate states. The new bill also gave the Freedmen's Bureau the power to try those who tried to deprive freedmen of their civil rights in military courts. But, the lasting legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau was the creation of a public school system which appeared in each of the former Confederate states. Prior to the war, there was no public school system that was designed to educate the children of the South. By 1870, each of the ex-Confederate states featured a public school system that was— at first, integrated. Teachers often came from Northern states into the South to work in the new public school systems.

The public school system brought both children and adults together— many of them, of course, having the desire to learn to read for the very first time. But, the public school system was not the only legacy of the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau also provided medical care and support for the freedmen and their families. This agency also served as the intermediary between the freedmen and their former masters. In this role, the agency made the attempt to prevent a return to the abuses of the institution of slavery. Though the Freedmen's Bureau was a groundbreaking agency, it had taken a bruising battle between the President, Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans in Congress to set it into motion. The battle between the executive branch and the legislative branch would turn ugly in 1866.

In order to bolster the Freedmen's Bureau and to provide additional civil rights protections for the newly freed African-Americans in the South, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866— the first legislation of its kind in American history. This act also defined the process of American citizenship for the first time, granting African-Americans the ability to make contracts, sue in court, give evidence in court, and buy and sell property. Johnson vetoed the act, but just as Congress had done in bolstering the Freedmen's Bureau, it overrode Johnson's veto. Fearful that the Supreme Court might declare the act unconstitutional, Congress developed what later became the 14th Amendment which granted African-Americans citizenship for the very first time. Johnson attempted to veto it, again, Congress overrode his veto. In the elections in the fall of 1866, the Radical Republicans swept the Congressional midterm elections. In turn, this gave Congress the power to much more easily override any veto from President Andrew Johnson, who by this time they had viewed as becoming an impediment (road block) to the process of Reconstruction.

With their powers heightened, Congress passed the first in a series of major Reconstruction acts. The First Reconstruction Act (1867) divided the South into five military districts. Each district would be controlled by federal military officials through the use of martial law. The ex-Confederate states would also be required to ratify the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. Johnson vetoed the First Reconstruction Act, but this time Congress did not just override his veto, they also passed a new piece of legislation— the Tenure of Office Act, which forbade the president from removing an official that had been approved by Congress without first consulting them. The purpose of the act was to protect the process of Reconstruction by protecting the person who would be in charge of the military occupation of the ex-Confederate states. This person was none other than the Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton had been the Secretary of War under Lincoln and had overseen the military defeat of the Confederacy. But, he had not always seen eye-to-eye with Johnson regarding the process of Reconstruction. In August, 1867, President Johnson attempted to remove Edwin M. Stanton from his position as the Secretary of War. This act triggered the first impeachment proceedings in American history.

During the spring of 1868, Johnson, in an election year, was in the fight for his political life. In the end, Johnson survived the impeachment process by a single vote. At the time, the Senators who voted to acquit Johnson did so on the grounds that they believed that his conduct did not rise to the level of a high crime or misdemeanor— but rather, that he had just stubbornly resisted the will of Congress regarding the process of Reconstruction. Meanwhile in the ex-Confederate states, African-Americans registered to vote for the first time in large

numbers. The large number of African-American voters helped the Republicans win the presidential election of 1868 and propel Ulysses S. Grant, the general who had commanded the Union armies to victory during the Civil War into the presidency.

It also led to African-American politicians being elected to serve in public office for the very first time in American history. Both Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi were elected to the US Senate in 1870 and 1875 respectively. A number of African-American politicians served as Congressmen from the various ex-Confederate states during the period. For a month, in the winter of 1872-1873, P.B.S. Pinchback served as the first African-American governor of an ex-Confederate state, when he became the acting governor of the state of Louisiana. African-American politicians also served as mayors and in a number of state and local offices during the Reconstruction period thanks to the powers of the 14th Amendment, which granted African-Americans citizenship for the first time and (later), the 15th Amendment, which gave African-American men the right to vote in 1870.

With Grant in the presidency, Reconstruction would see some of its greatest successes, but it was also the beginning of the end of the process, as well, as ex-Confederate officials would soon return to political power as the Southern states were readmitted into the Union from 1872-1876 and violence across the South would challenge the process of Reconstruction— eventually bringing it to an effective halt. But, before this set of processes could occur, one more battle and one more consequential constitutional amendment would be created. It would ignite an unexpected conflict between groups that had once supported one another in the years leading up to the war and even in the Reconstruction process that up to this point had followed it.

Content Objective: The women's rights movement was both emboldened and divided over the 14th and 15th amendments to the Constitution.

How was the women's movement impacted by the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution?

The first major battle of Grant's presidency as it related to Reconstruction occurred after the passage of the 14th Amendment. The question now became to whom did the amendment actually apply. Prior to the war, women's rights groups had pressed for the abolition of slavery and had been an important component of the push for the 13th Amendment which brought slavery to an end, but the 14th Amendment did not guarantee equal citizenship rights for women explicitly— in fact, the word male was used in its text for the very first time. The next bruising fight came over voting rights. Without the support of more than 500,000 African-American votes in the ex-Confederate states, Grant might not have been elected with such a comfortable margin in 1868. Clearly, protections for African-American voting rights were going to become an important issue. But, the question then became that if the freedmen could vote because of the guarantees of citizenship that were written into the 14th Amendment, could women not have the same right to vote, as well. With the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the ex-Confederate states, having the right to vote for the freedmen guaranteed by law became a new political priority. It split the women's rights groups which had been such an important force behind the process of Reconstruction.

Most of the leaders of the women's movement such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony favored a 15th Amendment which guaranteed universal suffrage and were dismayed by the 14th Amendment and its lack of specific protections for women. However, some influential leaders such as Frederick Douglass, who had once stood with the women's rights movement, advocated heavily for the right to vote for the freedmen. In February, 1869, the Republican-led Congress passed the 15th Amendment, which guaranteed the freedmen the right to vote— it is important to note that at the time, eight northern states had also denied African-American male suffrage.

Leaving their former allies behind, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed the National Woman's Suffrage Association, allying themselves with those who had sought universal suffrage. The women's

movement suffered a stinging defeat as the 15th Amendment was ratified in March, 1870. Some radicals in the women's movement even tried to use the 14th Amendment as a pretext for trying to vote, only to find themselves in jail— Susan B. Anthony, in 1872 was among them. The women's movement would have to wait for another 50 years before receiving the right to vote in 1920 (with the ratification of the 19th Amendment). But, the battle for suffrage was not the only major problem that occurred as Grant took office. There were violent race riots in the South, lynchings and beatings of both public officials and freedmen alike, and with it, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in the South as a major potent force. It was this component of Reconstruction that would change the nature of the process and along with a global economic catastrophe would ultimately spell the end of it.

Despite the early successes of Reconstruction, what events ultimately led to its conclusion?

It was only a year after the Civil War ended that the Ku Klux Klan emerged in the ex-Confederate states. Coupled with a series of race riots which broke out in the summer of 1866 in major Southern cities such as Memphis and New Orleans, the violence that was perpetrated throughout the South eventually took a toll on the efforts of Reconstruction. The Ku Klux Klan became active after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 which, of course, led to the creation of the 14th Amendment. Due to Klan violence in the South during the election of 1868, the 15th Amendment had been proposed and was ratified in 1870— which led to an outburst of Klan activity in the fall of that mid-term election year as African-American political figures were elected into public office for the very first time in American history. In response, Congress passed both the Force Act and the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871, which gave President Grant the ability to use military force to suppress their activities and to enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments. Using military force proved difficult, as Klan members resembled the general population by day, but terrorized both African-American families and Republican officials by night.

In 1872, despite Grant winning re-election, the process of Reconstruction began to falter. Conservative Democrats began to regain power, many of them ex-Confederates, in the state governments throughout the South and increased their presence in the halls of Congress. From 1872-1876, most of the ex-Confederate states became re-admitted into the Union and during that time the activities of the Ku Klux Klan became increasingly violent. As the political will for Reconstruction began to crumble, the final straw was the economic devastation of the Panic of 1873. This financial catastrophe started in Europe, but, due to their financial losses, and the fact that so many Europeans had invested in American businesses— such as railroads, in particular, which, too, had been rapidly overbuilt— a cascading effect occurred, as smaller businesses closed their doors, farms collapsed, banks failed, and a credit crisis ensued. Already deeply embittered, it led the newly elected ex-Confederate political officials in the state governments of the South to begin slashing their budgets. Among their first targets were the public school systems that had been set-up in their states. As Reconstruction was coming to a close, these same public school systems would also become segregated, too.

The anger toward the financial panic in the North, the frustration towards Reconstruction by ex-Confederate Southern officials, along with the escalation of domestic terrorism in the South, all led to the demise of the process of Reconstruction. The final act of Reconstruction was the Civil Rights Act of 1875. It stated that all public accommodations, such as inns, theaters, and places of public amusement should be open to African-Americans on an equal basis. But, it was a short-lived victory for those who sought equal rights for the population of the freedmen in the South, as it would be declared unconstitutional just a few years later (in 1883) by a Supreme Court that was growing increasingly hostile toward the issue of civil rights. The finishing stroke came in the election of 1876, when Republican Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio won the presidency in a highly disputed and contested election. During this election, Hayes lost the popular vote, but won in the Electoral College by a single vote. In response to this hotly contested election, Hayes agreed to withdraw federal troops from the ex-Confederate states. With the withdrawal of federal troops, Reconstruction formally came to an end in the spring of 1877.

