CHAPTER 16

THE AGONY OF RECONSTRUCTION

SUMMARY
After the Civil War, the South and the nation as a whole faced a difficult period of rebuilding its government and economy and of dealing with the newly freed African Americans.

The President Versus Congress
In the absence of constitutional guidelines, the president and Congress struggled over how best to reconstruct the Union. The fight was colored by a debate over how far the federal government should go to secure equality and civil rights for the four million African Americans freed by the war.

Wartime Reconstruction
By 1863, Lincoln and Congress had begun to debate two divisive issues: the reconstruction of the southern states and former Confederates and the status of the freedmen. Lincoln proposed a moderate program to restore the southern states to the Union, but by 1865 showed some willingness to compromise with Congress’s more radical plan for reconstruction. With Lincoln’s death, the issue of Reconstruction remained unresolved.

Andrew Johnson at the Helm
The ascent of Andrew Johnson, a Southerner, to the presidency eventually led to a bitter clash with Congress. Though Congress and Johnson agreed that slavery should be abolished and that the power of the planter class had to be broken down, Congress supported federal guarantees for Black citizenship while Johnson insisted that the South should be permitted to reestablish White supremacy.

Congress Takes the Initiative
Determined to crush the old southern ruling class, the Republican-led Congress extended the life of the Freedmen’s Bureau and passed a civil rights bill to grant equal benefits and protection to the freedmen. Fearing that Johnson would not enforce the civil rights act, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteeing equal rights under the law to all Americans and defining national citizenship. After Johnson vetoed the two Reconstruction bills and the southern states rejected the Fourteenth Amendment, Congress initiated its own more radical program.

Congressional Reconstruction Plan Enacted
Often called Radical Reconstruction, Congressional Reconstruction began with the passage of the First Reconstruction Act of 1867 over Johnson’s veto. This act temporarily placed the South under military rule and allowed for the re-admittance of southern states,
only once African-American suffrage was legitimized. Congress assumed that once freedmen could vote, they could protect themselves.

**The Impeachment Crisis**
When the president obstructed the plan’s implementation, Congress retaliated with an attempt to remove him from office. Johnson narrowly avoided removal, preserving the office from congressional domination, but insuring also that Congress would have the upper hand in the reconstruction process.

**Reconstructing Southern Society**
The South was devastated and demoralized after the war. Though slavery was dead, the region was dominated by southern Whites who strived to deny all rights to freedmen. At the same time, southern Blacks tried to make their freedom meaningful by becoming land owners, acquiring education, and exercising the right to vote. These two opposing goals resulted in chaos and violence.

**Reorganizing Land and Labor**
Despite the desire of some radical Republicans for land redistribution, Congress failed to enact such a program, except among a very few families. Facing vast tracts of land with no one to work them, Southern landowners initiated a contract labor system that forced freedmen into virtual peonage. While some ex-slaves resisted returning to work for their former masters, most had no alternative. Evolving alongside of and eventually supplanting the contract labor system, sharecropping became the dominant agricultural system in the South. Although African Americans initially viewed sharecropping as step up from wage labor, they soon learned that it trapped them in a cycle of poverty and dependence.

**Black Codes: A New Name for Slavery?**
While sharecropping extended Black servitude and economic dependence on the farm, African Americans in southern towns and cities found themselves increasingly segregated from Whites by Black Codes, community pressure, or physical intimidation. At their root, the Black Codes were meant to control the Black population and insure White supremacy and privilege.

**Republican Rule in the South**
Politically, Reconstruction established southern governments made up of Republican business people (many of whom were from the North), poor Whites (many of whom had been Unionists during the war), and the freedmen. Although often corrupt, these radical regimes initiated significant progressive reforms, including establishing the South’s first public school systems, democratizing state and local governments, appropriating funds for an enormous expansion of public services, constructing internal improvements, and fostering economic development. They failed, however, to achieve interracial equality, and contributed to the hostility of southern Whites toward southern Blacks.
Claiming Public and Private Rights
Outside of the political process of Reconstruction, southern Blacks also reconstructed their lives in various ways, giving meaning to their freedom. They negotiated with employers and utilized the Freedmen’s Bureau and the courts to assert their rights against Whites as well as other Blacks. In the private realm, they established their own families, churches, political organizations, and community institutions and sought education for themselves, and more importantly, their children.

Retreat from Reconstruction
Serving during one of the most difficult periods in American history, Grant lacked the strong principles, consistency, and sense of purpose to be an effective administrator. His election marks the beginning of the end of Reconstruction as other political issues moved to forefront of Americans’ minds.

Rise of the Money Question
What to do with the greenbacks (paper money issued during the war) became a major problem by 1868. Hard money advocates clashed with “green backers” who wanted government-sponsored inflation. The panic of 1873 intensified the argument, and the Sherman Specie Resumption Act in 1874 failed to please either the inflationists or the hard-money advocates.

Final Efforts of Reconstruction
Republican efforts to secure Black rights culminated in the passage of the fifteenth amendment. The legislation was weakly-worded, however, leaving a great deal of room for violation of the spirit of the law. The amendment also split the age-old tie between Black rights and Woman rights and effectively divided the women’s suffrage movement. Many feminists were irate that women were denied the right to vote even as suffrage was extended to Black men.

A Reign of Terror Against Blacks
In the South, Grant’s administration failed to sustain Black suffrage against violent groups bent on restoring White supremacy. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan used terrorism, insurrection, and murder to intimidate southern Republican governments and prospective Black voters. With the Fifteenth Amendment and Republican rule in the South severely threatened, Congress passed the “Force” Acts, allowing the president to use military force to quell insurrections.

Spoilsmen Versus Reformers
The idealism of radical republicanism waned as new leaders—“spoilsmen”—came to power determined to further their own private interests. The Credit Mobilier scandal, the “Whiskey Ring,” and the impeachment of Secretary of War Belknap for accepting bribes left liberal reform Republicans aghast and the Grant administration in shambles.
Reunion and the New South
The reconciliation of the sections came at the expense of southern Blacks and poor Whites, and despite the rhetoric of the New South, the region remained poor and open to exploitation by northern business efforts.

The Compromise of 1877
In the 1876 presidential election, Samuel Tilden, the Democratic candidate, won the popular majority as well as the uncontested electoral vote. But disputed returns in the three Republican-controlled southern states threw the election into turmoil. The Compromise of 1877 ended military rule, insured that conservative “home rule” would be restored in the South, and effectively abandoned southern Blacks to their former masters. With southern Democratic acquiescence, Republican candidate Rutherford Hayes assumed the presidency, though he did so under a cloud of suspicion.

“Redeeming” a New South
In the South, upper-class “Redeemers” took power in the name of White supremacy and laissez-faire government, initiating a “New South.” As industrialism gained strength in the 1880s, the southern economy became dominated by northern capital and southern employers, landlords, and creditors. Though Redeemer governments were more economical than their Republican predecessors, cutting back funding for education and other public services, they were no less corrupt. Most hurt by the Redeemers were southern Blacks and poor Whites who were caught in the poverty of sharecropping.

The Rise of Jim Crow
Beginning in 1876 and culminating in the 1890s, southern governments began codifying the de facto segregation and discrimination of southern Blacks through the enactment of the infamous Jim Crow system. Economic and physical coercion, including hundreds of lynchings in the name of southern White womanhood, effectively disfranchised people of color while the convict-lease system reduced Blacks convicted of petty crimes to a system of forced labor that was often more cruel than slavery. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1875, the federal government did little to stem or even alleviate racial oppression in the South and the Supreme Court effectively condoned it through a series of court decisions including Plessy v. Ferguson.

Conclusion: Henry McNeal Turner and the “Unfinished Revolution”
Some Blacks like Henry McNeal Turner became justifiably bitter at the depth of White racism and the lack of action on the part of the federal government. They supported Black nationalism and emigration to Africa as a solution. Most Blacks, however, chose to struggle for their rights within American society. By the 1880s, Reconstruction was over, the nation was reunified, and Blacks were sentenced to oppression that would not be challenged for another century.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After mastering this chapter, you should be able to:

1. Contrast the presidential and congressional wartime reconstruction programs.

2. Explain how Andrew Johnson’s background shaped his attitudes and policies on Reconstruction.

3. Describe the processes by which Andrew Johnson lost support in Congress and the Radical Republicans gained control of Reconstruction.

4. Summarize the goals of Radical Reconstruction and evaluate the success with which these goals were achieved.

5. Define the sections of the Fourteenth Amendment and understand why its enforcement was crucial to Reconstruction efforts.

6. Describe the Radicals’ attempt to remove President Johnson from office. Analyze the important results of the impeachment crisis on the federal government and the Reconstruction process.

7. Define the southern systems of contract labor and sharecropping with emphasis on their effects upon African Americans.

8. Analyze the failings of the Fifteenth Amendment. Consider how it might have been improved?

9. Identify the social and economic adjustments in the South during the Reconstruction years.

10. Identify the major groups that made up the southern Republican governments, then evaluate their achievements and list the reasons for their ultimate failure.

11. Summarize the worst of the scandals that rocked the Grant administration.

12. Evaluate Grant’s handling of the major problems of his administration: the money question, enforcement of Reconstruction, and governmental corruption.

13. Explain the nature of the political crisis involving the election of 1876 and discussion the terms and result of the “Compromise of 1877.”

14. Discuss the Black Codes. How were they like slavery? How were they unlike slavery?
15. Describe the social and political effects of the “Redeemer” regimes in the New South.

16. Discuss the meaning of freedom for African Americans. How did they experience Reconstruction in the public and private spheres?

17. Discuss the role of violence and groups like the Ku Klux Klan in Reconstruction.

18. Discuss the enactment of Jim Crow laws and their impact on the South.

19. Evaluate Reconstruction in terms of its successes and failures for the nation as a whole and for Black Americans in particular.

20. Evaluate historians’ changing views of Reconstruction.

GLOSSARY

To build your social science vocabulary, familiarize yourself with the following terms:

1. **crop lien** use of a farmer's crop as collateral for a loan. "... the notorious 'crop lien' system . . ."

2. **disfranchisement** the act of depriving a citizen of the right to vote. "Full-scale disfranchisement . . ."

3. **impeachment** the act of bringing charges against a government officer for official misconduct. "... to call for his impeachment."

4. **Jim Crow** segregated. "... Black, or 'Jim Crow,' cars . . ."

5. **laissez faire** government noninterference in the economy. "... advocated strict laissez-faire economic policies . . ."

6. **patronage** political control of the distribution of jobs and other favors. "... the corruption breeding patronage system . . ."

7. **referendum** the practice of referring a matter to the electorate for adoption or rejection. "... served as a referendum to the Fourteenth Amendment."

8. **specie** coined money, usually of gold or silver. "... redeemed in specie payments."

9. **amnesty** a pardon granted for past crimes. "... a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction . . ."
10. **habeas corpus** a legal writ used to protect individuals against unlawful detention. "... suspend the writ of habeas corpus ..."

11. **rider** a clause added to a bill as it passes a legislative body. "... a rider to an army appropriations bill sought to limit Johnson's authority to issue orders to military commanders."

12. **revisionism** proposing a revised historical interpretation. "The most powerful example of this early revisionism was W. E. B. DuBois' *Black Reconstruction in America.*"

13. **provisional** temporary, until a permanent replacement is made. "... appointed provisional governors ...

14. **sharecropping** the status of working a piece of land in return for a portion of the crop. "... an alternative capital-labor relationship – sharecropping ...

15. **autonomy** the right and power of self-government. "The president's case for state autonomy ...

**IDENTIFICATION**

Briefly identify the meaning and significance of the following terms:

1. Jim Crow

2. 10% Plan

3. Freedmen’s Bureau

4. Fourteenth Amendment

5. Radical Republicans
MATCHING

A. Match the following public figures with the appropriate description.

___ 1. Orville Babcock  a. secretary of war who resigned to prevent a Senate trial for taking bribes in the sale of Indian trading posts
___ 2. William Belknap  b. senator from Missouri who helped lead the crusade for civil service reform
___ 3. Schyler Colfax  c. president's private secretary who was indicted for his role in the "Whiskey Ring"
___ 4. Jay Gould  d. Speaker of the House and later vice-president who was implicated in the Credit Mobilier scandal
___ 5. Carl Schurz  e. financier who, with the help of a relative of the president, tried to corner the gold market

f. New York City "boss" who headed a corrupt Democratic political "machine"
B. Match the following bills and acts with the appropriate description.

____ 1. Wade-Davis Bill   
a. congressional legislation designed to limit the authority of President Andrew Johnson

____ 2. Black Codes   
b. a series of laws designed to protect Black suffrage by authorizing use of the army against the KKK

____ 3. Tenure of Office Act   
c. initial congressional plan for Reconstruction vetoed by Lincoln

____ 4. Force Acts   
d. congressional attempt to provide the freedman “full and equal benefit of all laws”

____ 5. Civil Rights Bill of 1866   
e. southern state laws passed during Reconstruction to impose restrictions on former slaves

   f. congressional legislation creating a federal agency to aid the former slaves

COMPLETION

Answer the question or complete the statement by filling in the blanks with the correct word or words.

1. The 1915 epic film of D. W. Griffith that presented Reconstruction as a “tragic era” of misrule and corruption was entitled ________________.

2. Slavery was abolished with the ratification of the ____________________.

3. Lincoln refused to sign the Wade-Davis Bill of 1864 by exercising a ______

   ________________.

4. The physical destruction of the South would not have been so devastating had there been sufficient ____________________ available for rebuilding.

5. The ________________ Amendment restricted the power of the states to violate the life, liberty, or property of any citizen.

6. By the 1870s, most African Americans were relegated to the a system of____________

   ____________________, an arrangement whereby they agreed to work a small piece of land in return for a fixed share of the crop.
7. In 1874, President Grant discouraged inflation by vetoing a modest new issue of _________________.

8. The _________________ was a southern organization bent on restoring White supremacy by intimidating politically active African Americans.

9. The southern Republican party consisted of the following three groups, ____________, ____________, and _________________.

10. By the 1870s, leadership of the Republican party had passed to opportunistic politicians called _________________, who were more interested in personal gain than in public service or the rights of the freedmen.

TRUE/FALSE

Mark the following statements either T (True) or F (False).

___ 1. Lincoln favored a lenient plan for Reconstruction in order to shorten the war by attracting southern support.

___ 2. The dominant view of the Republican-led Congress toward the Reconstruction process was that strong executive leadership would be required.

___ 3. Andrew Johnson abandoned Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction by doing away with the requirement of an oath of allegiance for southern Whites.

___ 4. Women's rights leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony campaigned against ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.

___ 5. As a result of his impeachment trial, Andrew Johnson became the first president to be removed from office.

___ 6. Physical reconstruction of the South was difficult because its per capita wealth in 1865 was only about half of what it had been in 1860.

___ 7. The “greenbackers” in the credit-hungry West favored sound money policies.

___ 8. The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibited any state from denying any citizen the right to vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

___ 9. During Grant's first term, the greatest threat to southern Republican governments came from White supremacist societies like the KKK.
10. The factor that most contributed to Democrat Samuel Tilden's defeat in the presidential election in 1876 was the continued strength of the Republican regimes in the South and his consequent lack of popular support there.

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Circle the one alternative that best completes the statement or answers the question.

1. Which of the following statements reflects Lincoln's view of Reconstruction?
   a. Amnesty for those Southerners who had never willingly aided the Confederacy.
   b. Reconstruction would guarantee full political and civil equality for southern Blacks.
   c. Congress would determine the terms for readmission of the seceded states.
   d. Pardon would be granted to all Southerners taking an oath of allegiance to the Union and acknowledging the legality of emancipation.

2. President Andrew Johnson's plan for Reconstruction called for the southern states to
   a. declare their ordinances of secession illegal.
   b. repay their Confederate war debts.
   c. ratify the Fourteenth Amendment.
   d. prohibit former Confederates from holding government offices.

3. The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution
   a. prohibited slavery in the United States.
   b. provided for franchise regardless of race, color, or past servitude.
   c. defined national citizenship and prohibited the states from abridging the constitutional rights of people without due process of law.
   d. restored the former slave states to the union after congressional requirements were met.

4. President Johnson antagonized Republicans in Congress by
   a. calling for an extension of the Freedmen's Bureau.
   b. supporting a civil rights bill meant to guarantee equality for African Americans.
   c. urging confiscation and redistribution of land.
   d. campaigning against Radical Republicans in the elections of 1866.

5. After rejecting Johnson's Reconstruction plan, Congress enacted a program based on
   a. the social and moral regeneration of the South.
   b. the confiscation and redistribution of land.
   c. immediate enfranchisement of both the freedmen and ex-Confederates.
   d. guarantees for the rights of all citizens with the Fourteenth Amendment.
6. The House of Representatives impeached President Johnson on the grounds that he
   a. dismissed officers in the southern military districts.
   b. challenged the Tenure of Office Act by removing Secretary of War Edwin
      Stanton.
   c. vetoed the Reconstruction Bill.
   d. attempted to abolish the Freedmen's Bureau.

7. “Regeneration before Reconstruction” referred to
   a. restructuring southern state governments before readmission to the union.
   b. funding the rehabilitation of those areas in the South damaged during the war.
   c. transforming southern society, including land reform, before readmission.
   d. repudiating the debts owed by the former Confederate states to the Union.

8. Hard-money proponents favored
   a. more money in circulation to spur economic growth.
   b. retirement of greenbacks as quickly as possible and payment in silver and gold
      only.
   c. redemption of much of the war debt in greenbacks.
   d. easy credit terms to encourage economic expansion in the West.

9. Farmers and debtors generally favored a monetary policy that
   a. expanded the currency and inflated prices.
   b. contracted the currency and deflated prices.
   c. legally backed all currency with gold only.
   e. kept commodity prices stable and dependable.

10. The main reason[s] for the Ku Klux Klan's success in the South after 1868 would be
    a. popular support from Whites of all social classes for White supremacy.
    b. its centralized political organization.
    c. its support from the southern state Republican governments.
    d. the persistent threat of a violent black uprising against the White planter class.

11. Southern Blacks tried to make their freedom meaningful during Reconstruction by
    a. legalizing their marriages.
    b. seeking education for themselves and their children.
    c. establishing their own churches, political organizations, and community
        institutions.
    d. all of the above.

12. In defending Republican governments in the South, President Grant
    a. was quick to react with the military to any threat of violence.
    b. intervened only to protect the civil rights of African Americans.
    c. was inconsistent and hesitant because of northern political realities.
    d. left these governments on their own to defend themselves.
13. How should Grant's personal role in the corruption that marked his administration be assessed?
   a. He should be considered completely blameless.
   b. He vigorously prosecuted all wrongdoing.
   c. He protected some corrupt officials from justice.
   d. He made a great deal of money from illegal activities.

14. To ensure the election of Rutherford Hayes, Republican leaders agreed to
   a. offer lucrative positions to members of the electoral commission.
   b. end federal support for southern radical regimes.
   c. support fraudulent elections with federal troops.
   d. continue federal support for southern radical regimes.

15. The "Redeemers" in the South favored
   a. egalitarian democracy and continued Republican leadership.
   e. government appropriations for schools and public services and economic diversification.
   c. strengthening the Black Codes and support for White supremacist organizations like the Klan.
   d. political restoration of White supremacy and the gospel of industrial progress.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

To check your understanding of the key issues of this period, solve the following problems:

1. If Lincoln had lived, would the events and outcome of Reconstruction have been substantially different?

2. Was radical Reconstruction policy based more on humanitarian concern for the freedmen or on selfish political and economic interests?

3. Andrew Johnson was the only U.S. president impeached in our history. (Richard M. Nixon tendered a timely resignation.) What does it mean to impeach a president? Should Andrew Johnson have been convicted?

4. What factors contributed to the development of segregation in the late nineteenth century?

5. Government plays a role in determining the supply of money and, therefore, the general price levels. During Grant’s administration, what factors led the president to allow special interests to determine his policy on the money question?
6. Why did professional historians from the 1890s to the 1940s regard Reconstruction as a “tragic era”? In the eyes of the revisionists, what was the real tragedy of Reconstruction?

7. Would the redistribution of land have changed the outcome of Reconstruction for southern Blacks and poor Whites? How?

CRITICAL THINKING EXERCISE

Using material in Chapter 16 of the text and the primary sources provided below, please answer the questions that follow the reading selections.

“The Freedman’s Agenda for Reconstruction”
Bayley Wyatt, “A Right to the Land”
Henry Blake, “Working on Shares”

The Freedmen’s Agenda for Reconstruction

1st. Resolved, That the rights and interests of the colored citizens of Virginia are more directly, immediately and deeply affected in the restoration of the State to the Federal Union than any other class of citizens; and hence, that we have peculiar claims to be heard in regard to the question of its reconstruction, and that we cannot keep silence without dereliction of duty to ourselves, to our country, and to our God.

2d. Resolved, That personal servitude having been abolished in Virginia, it behooves us, and is demanded of us, by every consideration of right and duty, to speak and act as freemen, and as such to claim and insist upon equality before the law, and equal rights of suffrage at the “ballot box.”

3d. Resolved, That it is a wretched policy and most unwise statesmanship that would withhold from the laboring population of the country any of the rights of citizenship essential to their well-being and to their advancement and improvement as citizens.

4th. Resolved, That invidious political or legal distinctions, on account of color merely, if acquiesced in, or voluntarily submitted to, is inconsistent with our own self-respect, or to the respect of others, placing us at great disadvantages, and seriously retards our advancement or progress in improvement, and that the removal of such disabilities and distinctions are alike demanded by sound political economy, by patriotism, humanity and religion.

5th. Resolved, That we will prove ourselves worthy of the elective franchise, by insisting upon it as a right, by not tamely submitting to its deprivation, by never abusing it by voting the state out of the Union, and never using it for purposes of rebellion, treason, or oppression.

6th. Resolved, That the safety of all loyal men, black or white, in the midst of the recently slaveholding States, requires that all loyal men, black or white, should have equal political and civil rights, and that this is a necessity as a protection against the votes of secessionists and disloyal men.

7th. Resolved, That traitors shall not dictate or prescribe to us the terms or conditions of our citizenship, so help us God.

8th. Resolved, That as far as in us lies, we will not patronize or hold business relations with those who deny to us our equal rights.

Bayley Wyatt, A Right to the Land

We made bricks without straw under old Pharaoh. . . . We now, as a people desires to be elevated, and we desires to do all we can to be educated, and we hope our friends will aid us all they can. . . .

I may state to all our friends, and to all our enemies, that we has a right to the land where we are located. For why? I tell you. Our wives, our children, our husbands, has been sold over and over again to purchase the lands we now locate upon; for that reason we have a divine right to the land. . . .
And then didn’t we clear the land and raise the crops of corn, of cotton, of tobacco, of rice, of sugar, of everything? And then didn’t them large cities in the North grow up on the cotton and the sugars and the rice that we made? Yes! I appeal to the South and the North if I hasn’t spoken the words of truth. I say they have grown rich, and my people is poor.

Henry Blake, Working on Shares

After freedom, we worked on shares a while. Then we rented. When we worked on shares, we couldn’t make nothing—just overalls, and something to eat. Half went to the white man, and you would destroy your half, if you weren’t careful. A man that didn’t know how to count would always lose. He might lose anyhow. The white folks didn’t give no itemized statements. No, you just had to owe so much. No matter how good account you kept, you had to go by their account, and—now, brother, I’m telling you the truth about this—it’s been that way for a long time. You had to take the white man’s words and notes on everything. Anything you wanted you could get, if you were a good hand. If you didn’t make no money, that’s all right; they would advance you more. But you better not try to leave and get caught. They’d keep you in debt. They were sharp. Christmas come, you could take up twenty dollars in somethin’-to-eat and as much as you wanted in whiskey. You could buy a gallon of whiskey—anything that kept you a slave. Because he was always right and you were always wrong, if there was a difference. If there was an argument, he would get mad and there would be a shooting take place.

1. After reading the text, explain the labor system that put the freedmen back to work in the planters’ fields. How free were the farmer slaves in the “New South”?

2. Were the resolutions of the “Freedmen’s Agenda for Reconstruction” primarily political or economic?

3. Why, in Bayley Wyatt’s view, did freedmen have a “divine right” to own land?

4. Describe the operation and effects of sharecropping as Henry Blake explains the system.

5. Given your answer on sharecropping in question 5, which plan would have promoted most effectively the welfare of freedom: that in question 2, or that in question 3?