

9 Rebuilding the South (1865–1900)

KEY EVENTS

1865	Slavery abolished
1866	Civil Rights Act passed
1867	Reconstruction Act of 1867
1868	President Johnson impeached
1870	Blacks gain voting rights
1896	<i>Plessy v. Ferguson</i> decision

1 The Challenge of Emancipation

Section Focus

Key Terms Reconstruction ■ amnesty
■ Thirteenth Amendment ■ black codes
■ Freedmen's Bureau

Main Idea Emancipation forced Congress, the President, and the southern states to work out a plan for rebuilding the government and society of the South.

Objectives As you read, look for answers to these questions:

1. What was the black response to emancipation?
2. What was the President's plan for rebuilding the South?
3. How did southern states seek to restore the old order?

When the Civil War ended in 1865, America had been transformed. The North was on the threshold of the modern industrial age. Business was booming in all the industries involved with the war effort. These included railroads, meat-packing plants, woolen mills, shoe-and-boot factories, and agriculture. The South, on the other hand, was in ruins. A South Carolina planter visiting Baltimore wrote that he found it "hard to bear . . . this exulting, abounding, overrunning wealth of the North in contrast with the utter desolation of the unfortunate South."

The Yankee invasion had wrecked the South. Its railroads were torn up, its barns and dwellings burned, its livestock destroyed. To ex-Confederate soldiers returning to their land and homes, the job of rebuilding the economy seemed overwhelming. But they faced an even greater challenge: to work out the meaning and consequences of emancipation. The federal government played an active role in both tasks. Its plan to rebuild and re-establish the states of the former Confederacy is known as **Reconstruction**. Reconstruction took place during the years 1865–1877.

THE BLACK RESPONSE TO EMANCIPATION

The day freedom came was an event former slaves could never forget. Decades later one freedman described the feeling:

The end of the war, it come just like that—like you snap your fingers. . . . Soldiers, all of a sudden, was everywhere—coming in bunches, crossing and walking and riding. Everyone was a-singing. We was all walking on golden clouds. Hallelujah! . . . Everybody went wild. We all felt like heroes, and nobody had made us that way but ourselves. We was free. Just like that, we was free.

Blacks' first reaction to freedom was to escape white domination over their lives. They began to move—to return to homes they had been sold away from, to search for scattered family members, or just to experience the open road. "Right off colored folks started on the move," recalled a freedman. "They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was—like it was a place or a city."



Winslow Homer's oil painting *Sunday Morning* depicts a black family reading from the Bible. Homer traveled to Petersburg, Virginia, to make the portrait in 1877. **CULTURAL PLURALISM** Which members of the family shown here were probably born into slavery?

Emancipation allowed families to reunite and strengthened family ties. Under slavery marriage had been an informal affair, but with freedom many couples went through marriage ceremonies.

Blacks also took steps to free their religion from white control. Throughout the South, blacks es-

tablished their own churches. The church then became the central institution in the black community. It was a place for social events and communal gatherings. Often it was also a school.

With emancipation, schools sprouted up everywhere in the South. Both adults and children flocked to these schools. Reading and writing, as many realized, paved the way to a new economic freedom. By 1870, black people had raised over \$1 million toward their own education. However, it was not enough to meet the need. In the long run, northern aid societies, the federal Freedmen's Bureau, and state governments would pay most of the cost of education.

The teachers in these schools were both black and white. Ten percent of the South's black adults were literate, and a number of them chose to become teachers. Other teachers included free northern blacks like Charlotte Forten of Philadelphia. "My heart sings a song of thanksgiving," she wrote, "that even I am permitted to do something for a long-abused race." But the teachers in black schools were often targets of harassment by white Confederate die-hards. In some parts of the South, schools were burned and teachers beaten or killed.



This illustration shows a class at the Zion School for Colored Children, a freedmen's school in Charleston, South Carolina. A federal agency, the Freedmen's Bureau established schools for black Americans during Reconstruction. Some of these schools developed into leading black colleges, such as Howard University and Hampton Institute. **HISTORY** Why might some white southerners have tried to keep blacks from getting an education?

ISSUES OF LAND AND LABOR

More than anything else, freed slaves hoped to own land. General Sherman had ordered that coastal South Carolina be divided into 40-acre parcels of land and given to freedmen. The rumor then spread among the freedmen all over the South that they would be given “40 acres and a mule.” That was, most believed, no more than their right. As one Virginia freedman explained:

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?

In fact, most freedmen never received land, and those who did often had to return it. In the early years of Reconstruction, many blacks were without the means of earning a living. It was clear that the South needed a new system of labor. There were landowners with little cash and no laborers, and laborers without land.

The wage contract was a new experience for both planters and freedmen. Planters were reluctant to recognize that freedmen had the right to bargain over terms of work. On the other hand, many freedmen assumed that the wage was an extra—that the landowner still had the responsibility to clothe, house, and feed them.

A journal entry written by Henry William Ravenel, a South Carolina planter, described his reaction to the new system:

The new relation in which we now stand toward the Negroes, our former slaves, is a matter for grave and serious consideration, if we desire to act justly toward them. We are very apt to retain former feelings and wish to exact more service than what would be implied in a fair contract with a white worker. . . . The former relation has to be unlearned by both parties.

PRESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION

The policies of the federal government played a pivotal role in the Reconstruction of the South. In the last year of the war, Lincoln had begun to con-

sider how the South should be treated when peace came. In his Second Inaugural Address in March 1865, Lincoln declared:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds . . . to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

In a speech given during the last week of his life, Lincoln further explained his ideas on Reconstruction. From his point of view, the Confederate states had never left the Union. Therefore the task at hand was not to punish them, but “to restore the proper practical relations between these states and the Union.” What this meant exactly, Lincoln did not make clear. His policies for “restoration” would be forthcoming, he said. Lincoln said he would prefer that the vote be given to all black soldiers, but he did not call for universal black suffrage.

★ Historical Documents

For an excerpt from Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, see page R21 of this book.

At Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson became President. Johnson had been put on the Republican ticket in 1864 to broaden its appeal to the border states. A self-made man from Tennessee, Johnson was a former slaveholder. As a backcountry politician, Johnson was suspicious of the planter aristocracy and had little sympathy for black people. Johnson was also stubborn to a fault and had none of the political intuition of his predecessor.

Johnson held that Reconstruction was the job of the President, not of the Congress. Johnson's policies, called Presidential Reconstruction, were based on what he believed to be Lincoln's intentions: charity toward the former Confederates and the establishment of new state governments.

To most southerners Johnson offered **amnesty**—official pardon—and the restoration of their property. This was granted on the condition they take

an oath of allegiance to the Union. The great planters, high-ranking military officers, and ex-Confederate officials, were excluded from this arrangement. Even these, however, were often able to win amnesty. Johnson was easily flattered when the once high-and-mighty humbly asked him for pardon.

Johnson also took steps to set up provisional governments that would write new constitutions for the states. These constitutions, he said, must recognize the abolition of slavery and reject the principle of nullification (page 212). They would also have to repudiate—cancel—any state debts incurred during the time of the Confederacy.

REVIVING THE OLD SOUTH

Congress was not in session when Johnson became President in April 1865. It did not reconvene until the following December. During these eight months the former Confederate states moved to rebuild their governments and their society. The



This photograph shows laborers on a South Carolina rice plantation. Rice production dropped sharply after emancipation because many freedmen refused to return to plantation work. **ECONOMICS** Why might the establishment of black codes be viewed as an attempt to save the plantation system?

problem was, however, that the new forms looked suspiciously like the old ones. Much to the disappointment of black political leaders in the North and South, nothing was said about black suffrage. “This is a white man’s government,” said the provisional governor of South Carolina, “and intended for white men only. . . .” After all, the governor pointed out, the Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision had said blacks could not be citizens.

President Johnson’s “soft” and friendly attitude encouraged southern leaders to believe that they could resist his reconstruction policies. Mississippi and Texas refused to ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment** abolishing slavery in the United States. Several states refused to reject the principle of nullification or to repudiate Confederate debts.

Northerners were particularly distressed that southern states began to pass laws restricting the freedom of black people. The **black codes** were laws intended to stop the movement of freedmen and to return blacks to plantation labor. In effect, the black codes set up another form of black servitude.

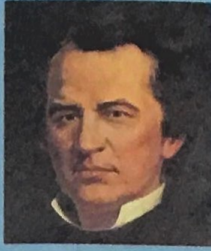
In Mississippi, for instance, the black codes decreed that each person must have written proof of employment. Vagrants could be punished with forced labor on plantations. Contracts of employment were for one year, and a black person had no right to break such a contract. Upset that so many black women had withdrawn from field labor, Louisiana and Texas required that a labor contract include the whole family.

In South Carolina, blacks who chose to pursue any occupation other than farmer or servant were required to pay a heavy tax. Other codes declared that blacks working on plantations had to labor from sunup to sundown. They could not leave the plantation without permission. Using “insulting” language and preaching without a license were considered criminal offenses.

Even harder for many blacks to stomach were the apprenticeship laws. These laws allowed courts to assign black orphans to white masters. In fact, many of these “orphans” had parents and were required to work without pay well past the age of sixteen.



THE PRESIDENTS



Andrew Johnson

1865–1869

17th President, National Unionist/Democrat

- Born December 29, 1808, in North Carolina
- Married Eliza McCardle in 1827; 5 children
- Tailor's apprentice; governor of Tennessee; representative and senator from Tennessee; Vice President under Lincoln
- Lived in Tennessee when elected Vice President
- Vice President: none
- Died July 31, 1875, in Tennessee
- Only President to be impeached
- Key events while in office: Civil War ended; Alaska purchased; Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments; Nebraska became a state

THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU

In 1865 the only institution that opposed restrictions against blacks was the **Freedmen's Bureau**. This federal agency had been established in the waning days of the war in order to distribute clothing, food, and fuel to the poor of the South. The bureau was also given the authority to manage abandoned and confiscated Confederate land. It divided this land into 40-acre plots, which were rented to freedmen until the land could be sold.

But Johnson's liberal grants of amnesty undermined the bureau's efforts to give freedmen their own land. Johnson arranged for pardoned Confederate landowners to have their land returned to them. All too often, therefore, freedmen were forced to give up their new farms, to give up their hopes of economic independence.

The Freedmen's Bureau did what it could to oversee labor contracts and to protect freedmen

from exploitation. But, as one bureau agent wrote, the former masters "still have the ingrained feeling that the black people at large belong to the whites at large."

CONGRESS TAKES A STAND

When Congress convened in December 1865, senators and representatives from the southern states were there to take their seats. President Johnson was ready to welcome them. But Congress was not willing to forget old differences quite so fast.

Under the Constitution, Congress has the right to judge the qualifications of its own members. Northern members of Congress were alarmed that so many of the new representatives had been Confederate officeholders only the year before. This list included 4 Confederate generals, 6 Confederate cabinet officers, and 58 Confederate congressmen, as well as the former vice president of the Confederacy. Northerners were also concerned about conditions in the southern states, particularly the black codes. Northerners asked: Had the Civil War been fought just to allow the South to return to its old ways?

Instead of admitting the southerners, Congress voted to establish the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. The Committee would investigate conditions in the South and decide whether the southern states were entitled to representation. Congress thus put the President on notice: Reconstruction was also Congress's responsibility.

SECTION REVIEW

- 1. KEY TERMS** Reconstruction, amnesty, Thirteenth Amendment, black codes, Freedmen's Bureau
- 2. PEOPLE** Andrew Johnson
- 3. COMPREHENSION** How did the lives of southern blacks change after emancipation?
- 4. COMPREHENSION** How did the South respond to President Johnson's reconstruction policies?
- 5. CRITICAL THINKING** Do you think Lincoln would have approved of President Johnson's policies on Reconstruction? Why or why not?