**Chapter 16**

**Reconstruction, 1865–1877**

**Learning Outcomes**

* 1. Describe the changed world of ex-slaves after the Civil War.

**Objectives**

1. Analyze how much or how little the ex-slaves’ lives changed immediately after the Civil War and emancipation.

2. Explain the purpose of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and assess its degree of success.

* 1. Outline the different phases of Reconstruction, beginning with Lincoln’s plan and moving through presidential Reconstruction to Congressional Reconstruction.

**Objectives**

1. Describe Lincoln’s ideas for bringing the southern states back into the Union, and give Congress’s reaction to that plan.

2. Explain how President Johnson’s plan differed from that of Lincoln’s, and describe the actions of the South that angered Congress.

3. Describe the Radical Republicans in Congress and how they began to implement Congressional Reconstruction against the president’s wishes.

4. Describe the purpose of the Reconstruction Acts, and explain the importance of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

5. Detail the significance of the Fifteenth Amendment on women’s rights.

* 1. Explain how Reconstruction evolved at the individual states’ level.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the reactions in the South to black officeholders, “carpetbaggers,” and “scalawags,” and show why these three groups greatly angered people in the South.

2. Describe the system of agricultural labor that developed in the South after the end of slavery, and assess just how much or how little it actually differed from slavery.

* 1. Evaluate and understand the relative success and failures of Reconstruction.

**Objectives**

1. Explain the events and attitudes in the North that made people there less willing to push earlier goals of Reconstruction.

2. Discuss the actions of southerners who were determined to “redeem” their governments from federal oversight.

3. Explain how the disputed election of 1876 led to the Compromise of 1877, which in turn led to the end of Reconstruction.

**Chapter Summary**

Shortly after gaining freedom, African Americans embarked on a series of changes, often relocating from the plantations where they were enslaved. The major priority for many ex-slaves of finding lost family members spurred travelers throughout the South. In the newly formed free black communities in the South, people built new churches, schools, and pushed for the right to vote. Facing a major task, the Freedmen’s Bureau, a government agency in charge of providing food, education, and medical and other assistance to freed slaves started operating in the South right after the war ended.

As Washington decided the South’s fate, a division erupted between the more moderate Lincoln and the more radical Republicans in the Congress. Their anger over Lincoln’s lenient plans was replaced by grief after Lincoln’s assassination. The new president, Andrew Johnson, pardoned many major Confederate leaders, who soon regained political power and imposed new black codes that effectively were a new form of slavery. Johnson did nothing to prevent the South from reimposing these conditions on the black population. The Radical Republicans in Congress were outraged, and they politically outmaneuvered Johnson. This led to the Fourteenth Amendment, which essentially made African Americans U.S. citizens, and the imposition of Congressional Reconstruction in the South.

In 1867, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act, which required the president to obtain the consent of the Senate before removing certain government officials from office. When Johnson violated the Tenure of Office Act, Congress commenced an impeachment process that almost led to his removal. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified shortly thereafter, preserved the right to vote for all men. After fighting for the rights of slaves for decades, women now had to ramp up their own struggle against second-class citizenship. Women were torn about whether or not to support the Reconstruction amendments, even if they excluded provisions for women’s rights.

Efforts were made across the South as radical changes took place in the political landscape. Ex-slaves, who were in chains just a few years back, now served as politicians. Even with the admission of black voters, the proportion of government positions held by black Americans was still smaller than their proportion in the population. Northerners who moved to the South along with local Republicans were derisively known as carpetbaggers and scalawags, respectively, by the former Confederates who hated them. This ire increased when Republican policies had some moderate successes.

Although plantation owners lost political power, they still had economic clout. They met with mixed results, but they showed a newfound commitment to greater equality and to bringing the gains of the Market Revolution southward. Their sharecropping system took advantage of poor farmers, especially blacks, but there was also a growing number of poor white farmers. Despite sharecropping’s prominent place in southern black history, there were more white sharecroppers in the South than black. Blacks also suffered disproportionately under the convict leasing system, where prisoners were loaned out as manual laborers.

Sadly, Reconstruction lasted just twelve years; conditions in the North and South caused its demise. Despite the obvious setbacks, the reconstruction of the South did have some significant achievements, including two new constitutional amendments, the passage of the nation’s first civil rights law, and the abolition of slavery. The North made efforts toward significant legislative changes but lost its focus after the Panic of 1873 led to turbulent economic conditions. The panic lasted four years and left three million Americans unemployed.

Southern Democrats found violence an effective tool for intimidating blacks from challenging white power. Most damningly, these crimes indicated how limited black freedom had become in the decade after the Civil War. Grant made some mild attempts to combat this form of domestic terrorism; the South responded with the Mississippi Plan, a scheme for organized ballots to thwart any Republican victories in the 1876 Election.

In the Compromise of 1877, where the presidential election results were disputed in some southern states, the Republicans gained presidency and the southern Democrats got the end of federal troops and Reconstruction. Despite the potential of the Reconstruction years, not much changed for blacks in the South, except that no one “owned” them. It would be almost another century before things improved markedly.

**Chapter Outline**

I. Freedmen, Freedwomen

A. The Freedmen’s Bureau

II. Political Plans for Reconstruction

A. Lincoln’s Plan for Reconstruction and His Assassination

1. Congress Bristles

2. Lincoln’s Assassination

B. Andrew Johnson and Presidential Reconstruction

1. Presidential Reconstruction, 1865–1867

2. Black Codes

C. Congressional Reconstruction

1. The Radical Republicans

2. The Radicals versus Johnson

3. The Fourteenth Amendment

4. Congressional Reconstruction, 1867–1877

5. The Second Reconstruction Act

6. Frustrations

D. Johnson’s Impeachment

1. The Tenure of Office Act

2. The Impeachment

E. The Fifteenth Amendment

F. Women’s Rights

III. Grassroots Reconstruction

A. Black Officeholders

B. Carpetbaggers and Scalawags

1. Southern Republican Successes

C. Sharecropping

1. The Battle of Labor

2. The Sharecropping System

3. Convict Leasing

IV. The Collapse of Reconstruction

A. In the North

B. In the South

1. Intimidation of Black and Republican Voters

2. Terror in the Heart of Freedom

3. Grant’s Response

4. The Mississippi Plan

5. “Redeemers” Win the Presidential Election of 1876

6. The Compromise of 1877

V. Looking Ahead…

**Suggested Lecture Topics**

1. Presidential Reconstruction Plans Compared

2. Amnesty, His to Give: Andrew Johnson Has His Revenge

3. Grant as President—Yes, We Have Had Worse, But Not Many

4. A Review of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments

5. The Radicals Take Control: Congress Oversees Reconstruction

6. Black Officeholders, Carpetbaggers, and Scalawags: The Truth vs. Hype

7. The Disputed Election of 1876 and the End of Reconstruction

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| **The Reasons Why…** |
| (16-4b). There were three prominent reasons why Reconstruction ended in 1877, before equality could be ensured for southern African Americans:  a. Northern indifference  b. Southern recalcitrance  c. National political ambivalence  A current theme in all three reasons is racism. Either individually, or as a class, have students examine the role of racism for each of the three reasons. Then expand the scope to include a comparison to racism in the North and South and the impact of economics. What do the students think was the more compelling reason why people (or specific groups of people) would support an end to Reconstruction: economics or racism? Finally, ask students to project what they think would be the impact on African Americans for the end of Reconstruction in the South in the next several decades. |

**Research Topics—Projects and Papers**

Students might choose to do a project to be presented in class or write a more traditional research paper, or the instructors could decide which they prefer to have them do. Below are a few topics that are relevant to this chapter. Instructors may, of course, choose to develop their own topics.

1. The Freedmen’s Bureau: Students should explore the history of the Freedmen’s Bureau in their area or in an area they choose. They can use historical societies, libraries, genealogical societies, and courthouses as sources if possible and online research if not. Students should share their findings with the class in a round-table discussion.

2. A Biographical Sketch of Andrew Johnson: Have students research Johnson’s personal and professional history and prepare a two-page paper on what they find. Before papers are turned in, discuss their discoveries in class. Students may be surprised at what they find.

3. Carpetbaggers and Scalawags: Find out more about who these people were. Have students research the terms and then follow up on a particular person they find in their examination of sources. Take turns in class to discuss each person.

4. Sharecropping as a Way of Life after the Civil War: Have students prepare a collage of drawings and photos they find relevant to the time period in the South. They should also include a few quotes in their presentation. Encourage creativity.

**Additional www Resources**

“The Freedmen’s Bureau Online.” Freedmensbureau.com.

<http://www.freedmensbureau.com/>

“The Impeachment of Andrew Johnson,” HarpWeek Presents.

<http://www.impeach-andrewjohnson.com/>

“The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow,” PBS Mini-series website.

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/jimcrow/stories.html>

“Diary and Letters of Rutherford B. Hayes,” Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center.

<http://apps.ohiohistory.org/hayes/index.php>

**Primary Source Discussions**

**Assignment Name: Wade-Davis Bill**

*Introduction:* The Wade-Davis Bill passed during the final days of Congress’s session in 1864, leaving President Lincoln less than the number of days he was legally allowed to consider proposed legislation. This factor allowed the president to “pocket-veto” the bill, meaning that he neither signed it nor officially vetoed it. Thus the explanation given by Lincoln here appears a bit vague. He seems to be making comments that contradict each other. But is he really?

*Visit URL:* *http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/abraham-lincoln/proclamation-on-the-wade-davis-bill-july-8-1864.php*

[Read Lincoln’s proclamation on vetoing the Wade-Davis Bill](http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/abraham-lincoln/proclamation-on-the-wade-davis-bill-july-8-1864.php) and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.

*Reflection Questions:*

1. The Wade-Davis Bill was much harsher than the plan Lincoln had proposed for bringing the southern states back into the Union. Yet what is he saying in the last paragraph?

2. In three to four sentences, recap in your own words the main points the president is making.

**Assignment Name: Second Reconstruction Act**

*Introduction:* When southerners balked at the provisions of the Military Reconstruction Act, Congress enacted even more detailed and more hated legislation. The text of the Second Reconstruction Act provides a clear picture of just how serious the Radical Republicans were about moving the country in a different direction. Sadly, they were unable, or unwilling, to follow through and make sure that southerners actually followed the new laws.

*Visit URL:* *http://www.historycentral.com/documents/secondreconstruction.html*

[Read the Second Reconstruction Act and then take a brief quiz to check your understanding.](http://www.historycentral.com/documents/secondreconstruction.html)

*Reflection Questions:*

1. List the conditions that had to be met before a new state constitution could be ratified. Why do you think these were spelled out so clearly?

2. Analyze the oath that all potential voters in the southern states had to sign. Do you consider the terms reasonable or excessive? Explain your answer.