Reconstruction

1863–1877
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n a bright Saturday morning in May 1867, 4,000 former slaves eagerly streamed into the town of Greensboro, the bustling seat of Hale County in west-central Alabama. They came to hear speeches from two delegates to a recent freedmen’s convention in Mobile and to find out about the political status of black people under the Reconstruction Act just passed by Congress. Tensions mounted in the days following this unprecedented gathering, as military authorities began supervising voter registration for elections to the upcoming constitutional convention that would rewrite the laws of Alabama. On June 13, John Orrick, a local white, confronted Alex Webb, a politically active freedman, on the streets of Greensboro. Webb had recently been appointed a voter registrar for the district. Orrick swore he would never be registered by a black man, and shot Webb dead. Hundreds of armed and angry freedmen formed a posse to search for Orrick, but failed to find him. Galvanized by Webb’s murder, 500 local freedmen formed a chapter of the Union League, the Republican Party’s organizational arm in the South. The chapter functioned as both a militia company and a forum to agitate for political rights.

Violent political encounters between black people and white people were common in southern communities in the wake of the Civil War. Communities throughout the South struggled over the meaning of freedom in ways that reflected their particular circumstances. The 4 million freed people constituted roughly one-third of the total southern population, but the black–white ratio in individual communities varied enormously. In some places, the Union army had been a strong presence during the war, hastening the collapse of the slave system and encouraging experiments in free labor. Other areas had remained relatively untouched by the fighting. In some areas, small farms prevailed; in others, including Hale County, large plantations dominated economic and political life.

West-central Alabama had emerged as a fertile center of cotton production just two decades before the Civil War. There, African Americans, as throughout the South’s black belt, constituted more than three-quarters of the population. With the arrival of federal troops in the spring of 1865, African Americans in Hale County, like their counterparts elsewhere, began to challenge the traditional organization of plantation labor.

One owner, Henry Watson, found that his entire workforce had deserted him at the end of 1865. “I am in the midst of a large and fertile cotton growing country,” Watson wrote to a partner. “Many plantations are entirely without labor, many plantations have insufficient labor, and upon none are the laborers doing their former accustomed work.” Black women refused to work in the fields, preferring to stay home with their children and tend garden plots. Nor would male field hands do any work, such as caring for hogs, that did not directly increase their share of the cotton crop.

Above all, freed people wanted more autonomy. Overseers and owners thus grudgingly allowed them to work the land “in families,” letting them choose their own supervisors and find their own provisions. The result was a shift from the gang labor characteristic of the antebellum period, in which large groups of slaves worked under the harsh and constant supervision of white overseers, to the sharecropping system, in which African American families worked small plots of land in exchange for a small share of the crop. This shift represented less of a victory for newly freed African Americans than a defeat for plantation owners, who resented even the limited economic independence it forced them to concede to their black workforce.

Only a small fraction—perhaps 15 percent—of African American families were fortunate enough to be able to buy land.
The majority settled for some version of sharecropping, while others managed to rent land from owners, becoming tenant farmers. Still, planters throughout Hale County had to change the old routines of plantation labor. Local African Americans also organized politically. In 1866, Congress had passed the Civil Rights Act and sent the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution to the states for ratification; both promised full citizenship rights to former slaves. Hale County freedmen joined the Republican Party and local Union League chapters. They used their new political power to press for better labor contracts, demand greater autonomy for the black workforce, and agitate for the more radical goal of land confiscation and redistribution. “The colored people are very anxious to get land of their own to live upon independently; and they want money to buy stock to make crops,” reported one black Union League organizer. “The only way to get these necessaries is to give our votes to the [Republican] party.” Two Hale County former slaves, Brister Reese and James K. Green, won election to the Alabama state legislature in 1869.

It was not long before these economic and political gains prompted a white counterattack. In the spring of 1868, the Ku Klux Klan—a secret organization devoted to terrorizing and intimidating African Americans and their white Republican allies—came to Hale County. Disguised in white sheets, armed with guns and whips, and making nighttime raids on horseback, Klansmen flogged, beat, and murdered freed people. They intimidated voters and silenced political activists. Planters used Klan terror to dissuade former slaves from leaving plantations or organizing for higher wages.

With the passage of the Ku Klux Klan Act in 1871, the federal government cracked down on the Klan, breaking its power temporarily in parts of the former Confederacy. But no serious effort was made to stop Klan terror in the west Alabama black belt, and planters there succeeded in reestablishing much of their social and political control.

The events in Hale County illustrate the struggles that beset communities throughout the South during the Reconstruction era after the Civil War. The destruction of slavery and the Confederacy forced African Americans and white people to renegotiate their old economic and political roles. These community battles both shaped and were shaped by the victorious and newly expansive federal government in Washington. In the end, Reconstruction was only partially successful. Not until the “Second Reconstruction” of the twentieth-century civil rights movement would the descendants of Hale County’s African Americans begin to enjoy the full fruits of freedom—and even then not without challenge.
posed by slavery were the root cause of the Civil War, and the war ultimately destroyed slavery, although not racism, once and for all.

The Civil War also settled the constitutional crisis provoked by the secession of the Confederacy and its justification in appeals to states’ rights. The name “United States” would from now on be understood as a singular rather than a plural noun, signaling an important change in the meaning of American nationality. The old notion of the United States as a voluntary union of sovereign states gave way to the new reality of a single nation, in which the federal government took precedence over the individual states. The key historical developments of the Reconstruction era revolved around precisely how the newly strengthened national government would define its relationship with the defeated Confederate states and the 4 million newly freed slaves.

**The Defeated South**

The white South paid an extremely high price for secession, war, and defeat. In addition to the battlefield casualties, the Confederate states sustained deep material and psychological wounds. Much of the best agricultural land lay waste, including the rich fields of northern Virginia, the Shenandoah Valley, and large sections of Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, and South Carolina. Many towns and cities—including Richmond, Atlanta, and Columbia, South Carolina—were in ruins. By 1865, the South’s most precious commodities, cotton and African American slaves, were no longer measures of wealth and prestige. Retreating Confederates destroyed most of the South’s cotton to prevent its capture by federal troops. What remained was confiscated by Union agents as contraband of war. The former slaves, many of whom had fled to Union lines during the latter stages of the war, were determined to chart their own course in the reconstructed South as free men and women.

It would take the South’s economy a generation to overcome the severe blows dealt by the war. In 1860, the South held roughly 25 percent of the nation’s wealth; a decade later it controlled only 12 percent. Many white southerners resented their conquered status, and white notions of race, class, and “honor” died hard. A white North Carolinian, for example, who had lost almost everything dear to him in the war—his sons, home, and slaves—recalled in 1865 that in spite of all his tragedy he...
still retained one thing: “They’ve left me one inestimable privilege—to hate ’em. I git up at half-past four in the morning, and sit up till twelve at night, to hate ’em.”

Emancipation proved the most bitter pill for white southerners to swallow, especially the planter elite. Conquered and degraded, and in their view robbed of their slave property, white people responded by regarding African Americans more than ever as inferior to themselves. In the antebellum South, white skin had defined a social bond that transcended economic class. It gave even the lowest poor white a badge of superiority over even the most skilled slave or prosperous free African American. Emancipation, however, forced white people to redefine their world. The specter of political power and social equality for African Americans made racial order the consuming passion of most white southerners during the Reconstruction years. In fact, racism can be seen as one of the major forces driving Reconstruction and, ultimately, undermining it.

**Abraham Lincoln’s Plan**

By late 1863, Union military victories had convinced President Lincoln of the need to fashion a plan for the reconstruction of the South (see Chapter 16). Lincoln based his reconstruction program on bringing the seceded states back into the Union as quickly as possible. He was determined to respect private property (except in the case of slave property), and he opposed imposing harsh punishments for rebellion. His Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction of December 1863 offered “full pardon” and the restoration of property, not including slaves, to white southerners willing to swear an oath of allegiance to the United States and its laws, including the Emancipation Proclamation. Prominent Confederate military and civil leaders were excluded from Lincoln’s offer, though he indicated that he would freely pardon them.

The president also proposed that when the number of any Confederate state’s voters who took the oath of allegiance reached 10 percent of the number who had voted in the election of 1860, this group could establish a state government that Lincoln would recognize as legitimate. Fundamental to this Ten Percent Plan was acceptance by the reconstructed governments of the abolition of slavery. Lincoln’s plan was designed less as a blueprint for Reconstruction than as a way to shorten the war and gain white people’s support for emancipation. It angered those Republicans—known as Radical Republicans—who advocated not only equal rights for the freedmen but a tougher stance toward the white South.

In July 1864, Senator Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio and Congressman Henry W. Davis of Maryland, both Radicals, proposed a harsher alternative to the Ten Percent Plan. The Wade-Davis bill required 50 percent of a seceding state’s white male citizens to take a loyalty oath before elections could be held for a convention to rewrite the state’s constitution. The bill also guaranteed equality before the law (although not suffrage) for former slaves. Unlike the president, the Radical Republicans saw Reconstruction as a chance to effect a fundamental transformation of southern society. They thus wanted to delay the process until war’s end and to limit participation to a small number of southern Unionists. Lincoln viewed Reconstruction as part of the larger effort to win the war and abolish slavery. He wanted to weaken the Confederacy by creating new state governments that could win broad support from southern white people. The Wade-Davis bill threatened his efforts to build political consensus within the southern states, and Lincoln therefore pocket-vetoed it, by refusing to sign it within ten days of the adjournment of Congress.

Redistribution of southern land among former slaves posed another thorny issue for Lincoln, Congress, and federal military officers. As Union armies occupied parts of the South, commanders had improvised a variety of arrangements involving...
confiscated plantations and the African American labor force. For example, in 1862, General Benjamin F. Butler began a policy of transforming slaves on Louisiana sugar plantations into wage laborers under the close supervision of occupying federal troops. Butler’s policy required slaves to remain on the estates of loyal planters, where they would receive wages according to a fixed schedule, as well as food and medical care for the aged and sick. Abandoned plantations would be leased to northern investors. By 1864, some 50,000 African American laborers on nearly 1,500 Louisiana estates worked either directly for the government or for individual planters under contracts supervised by the Army.

In January 1865, General William T. Sherman issued Special Field Order 15, setting aside the Sea Islands off the Georgia coast and a portion of the South Carolina low-country rice fields for the exclusive settlement of freed people. Each family would receive forty acres of land and the loan of mules from the Army—the origin, perhaps, of the famous call for “forty acres and a mule” that would soon capture the imagination of African Americans throughout the South. Sherman’s intent was not to revolutionize southern society, but to relieve the demands placed on his Army by the thousands of impoverished African Americans who followed his march to the sea. By the summer of 1865, some 40,000 freed people, eager to take advantage of the general’s order, had been settled on 400,000 acres of “Sherman land.”

Conflicts within the Republican Party prevented the development of a systematic land distribution program. Still, Lincoln and the Republican Congress supported other measures to aid the emancipated slaves. In March 1865, Congress established the Freedmen’s Bureau. Along with providing food, clothing, and fuel to destitute former slaves, the bureau was charged with supervising and managing “all the abandoned lands in the South and the control of all subjects relating to refugees and freedmen.” The act that established the bureau also stated that forty acres of abandoned or confiscated land could be leased to freed slaves or white Unionists, who would have an option to purchase after three years and “such title thereto as the United States can convey.”

At the time of Lincoln’s assassination, his Reconstruction policy remained unsettled and incomplete. In its broad outlines, the president’s plans had seemed to favor a speedy restoration of the southern states to the Union and a minimum of federal intervention in their affairs. But with his death, the specifics of postwar Reconstruction had to be hammered out by a new president, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee, a man whose personality, political background, and racist leanings put him at odds with the Republican-controlled Congress.

Andrew Johnson and Presidential Reconstruction

Andrew Johnson, a Democrat and former slaveholder, was a most unlikely successor to the martyred Lincoln. By trade a tailor, and educated by his wife, Johnson overcame his impoverished background and served as state legislator, governor, and U.S. senator. Throughout his career, Johnson had championed yeoman farmers and viewed the South’s plantation aristocrats with contempt. He was the only southern member of the U.S. Senate to remain loyal to the Union, and he held the planter elite responsible for secession and defeat. In 1862, Lincoln appointed Johnson to the difficult post of military governor of Tennessee. There he successfully began wartime Reconstruction and cultivated Unionist support in the mountainous eastern districts of that state.
In 1864, the Republicans, in an appeal to northern and border state “War Democrats,” nominated Johnson for vice president. But despite Johnson’s success in Tennessee and in the 1864 campaign, many Radical Republicans distrusted him, and the hardscrabble Tennessean remained a political outsider in Republican circles. In the immediate aftermath of Lincoln’s murder, however, Johnson appeared to side with those Radical Republicans who sought to treat the South as a conquered province. The new president hinted at indicting prominent Confederate officials for treason, disfranchising them, and confiscating their property. Such tough talk appealed to Radical Republicans. But support for Johnson quickly faded as the new president’s policies unfolded. Johnson defined Reconstruction as the province of the executive, not the legislative branch, and he planned to restore the Union as quickly as possible. He blamed individual southerners—the planter elite—rather than entire states for leading the South down the disastrous road to secession. In line with this philosophy, Johnson outlined mild terms for reentry to the Union.

In the spring of 1865, Johnson granted amnesty and pardon, including restoration of property rights except slaves, to all Confederates who pledged loyalty to the Union and support for emancipation. Fourteen classes of southerners, mostly major Confederate officials and wealthy landowners, were excluded. But these men could apply individually for presidential pardons. During his tenure Johnson pardoned roughly 90 percent of those who applied. Significantly, Johnson instituted this plan while Congress was not in session.

By the fall of 1865, ten of the eleven Confederate states claimed to have met Johnson’s requirements to reenter the Union. On December 6, 1865, in his first annual message to Congress, the president declared the “restoration” of the Union virtually complete. But a serious division within the federal government was taking shape, for the Congress was not about to allow the president free rein in determining the conditions of southern readmission.

Andrew Johnson used the term “restoration” rather than “reconstruction.” A lifelong Democrat with ambitions to be elected president on his own in 1868, Johnson hoped to build a new political coalition composed of northern Democrats, conservative Republicans, and southern Unionists. Firmly committed to white supremacy, he opposed political rights for the freedmen, Johnson’s open sympathy for his fellow white southerners, his antiblack bias, and his determination to control the course of Reconstruction placed him on a collision course with the powerful Radical wing of the Republican Party.

**THE RADICAL REPUBLICAN VISION**

Most Radicals were men whose careers had been shaped by the slavery controversy. At the core of their thinking lay a deep belief in equal political rights and equal economic opportunity, both guaranteed by a powerful national government. They argued that once free labor, universal education, and equal rights were implanted in the South, that region would be able to share in the North’s material wealth, progress, and fluid social mobility. Representative George W. Julian of Indiana typified the Radical vision for the South. He called
for elimination of the region’s “large estates, widely scattered settlements, wasteful agriculture, popular ignorance, social degradation, the decline of manufactures, contempt for honest labor, and a pampered oligarchy.” This process would allow Republicans to develop “small farms, thrifty tillage, free schools, social independence, flourishing manufactures and the arts, respect for honest labor, and equality of political rights.”

In the Radicals’ view, the power of the federal government would be central to the remaking of southern society, especially in guaranteeing civil rights and suffrage for freedmen. In the most far-reaching proposal, Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania called for the confiscation of 400 million acres belonging to the wealthiest 10 percent of southerners, to be redistributed to black and white yeomen and northern land buyers. “The whole fabric of southern society must be changed,” Stevens told Pennsylvania Republicans in September 1865, “and never can it be done if this opportunity is lost. How can republican institutions, free schools, free churches, free social intercourse exist in a mingled community of nabobs and serfs?”

Northern Republicans were especially outraged by the stringent “black codes” passed by South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and other states. These were designed to restrict the freedom of the black labor force and keep freed people as close to slave status as possible. Laborers who left their jobs before contracts expired would forfeit wages already earned and be subject to arrest by any white citizen. Vagrancy, very broadly defined, was punishable by fines and involuntary plantation labor. Apprenticeship clauses obliged black children to work without pay for employers. Some states attempted to bar African Americans from land ownership. Other laws specifically denied African Americans equality with white people in civil rights, excluding them from juries and prohibiting interracial marriages.

The black codes underscored the unwillingness of white southerners to accept the full meaning of freedom for African Americans. The Radicals, although not a majority of their party, were joined by moderate Republicans, as growing numbers of northerners grew suspicious of white southern intransigence and the denial of political rights to freedmen. When the Thirty-ninth Congress convened in December 1865, the large Republican majority prevented the seating of the white southerners elected to Congress under President Johnson’s provisional state governments. Republicans also established the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. After hearing extensive testimony from a broad range of witnesses, it concluded that not only were old Confederates back in power in the South but that black codes and racial violence required increased protection for African Americans.

As a result, in the spring of 1866, Congress passed two important bills designed to aid African Americans. The landmark Civil Rights bill, which bestowed full citizenship on African Americans, overturned the 1857 _Dred Scott_ decision and the black codes. It defined all persons born in the United States (except Indian peoples) as national citizens, and it enumerated various rights, including the rights to make and enforce contracts, to sue, to give evidence, and to buy and sell property. Under this bill, African Americans acquired “full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property as is enjoyed by white citizens.”

Congress also voted to enlarge the scope of the Freedmen’s Bureau, empowering it to build schools and pay teachers, and also to establish courts to prosecute those charged with depriving African Americans of their civil rights. The bureau achieved important, if limited, success in aiding African Americans. Bureau-run schools helped lay the foundation for southern public education. The bureau’s network of courts allowed freed people to bring suits against white people in disputes involving violence, nonpayment of wages, or unfair division of crops. The very
existence of courts hearing public testimony by African Americans provided an important psychological challenge to traditional notions of white racial domination.

But an angry President Johnson vetoed both of these bills. In opposing the Civil Rights bill, Johnson denounced the assertion of national power to protect African American civil rights, claiming it was a "stride toward centralization, and the concentration of all legislative powers in the national Government." But Johnson’s intemperate attacks on the Radicals—he damned them as traitors unwilling to restore the Union—united moderate and Radical Republicans and they succeeded in overriding the vetoes. Congressional Republicans, led by the Radical faction, were now unified in challenging the president’s power to direct Reconstruction and in using national authority to define and protect the rights of citizens.

In June 1866, fearful that the Civil Rights Act might be declared unconstitutional, and eager to settle the basis for the seating of southern representatives, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment. The amendment defined national citizenship to include former slaves (“all persons born or naturalized in the United States”) and prohibited the states from violating the privileges of citizens without due process of law. It also empowered Congress to reduce the representation of any state that denied the suffrage to males over twenty-one. Republicans adopted the Fourteenth Amendment as their platform for the 1866 congressional elections and suggested that southern states would have to ratify it as a condition of readmission. President Johnson, meanwhile, took to the stump in August to support conservative Democratic and Republican candidates. His unrestrained speeches often degenerated into harangues, alienating many voters and aiding the Republican cause.

For their part, the Republicans skillfully portrayed Johnson and northern Democrats as disloyal and white southerners as unregenerate. Republicans began an effective campaign tradition known as “waving the bloody shirt”—reminding northern voters of the hundreds of thousands of Yankee soldiers left dead or maimed by the war. In the November 1866 elections, the Republicans increased their majority in both the House and the Senate and gained control of all the northern states. The stage was now set for a battle between the president and Congress. Was it to be Johnson’s “restoration” or Congressional Reconstruction?

**Congressional Reconstruction and the Impeachment Crisis**

United against Johnson, Radical and moderate Republicans took control of Reconstruction early in 1867. In March, Congress passed the First Reconstruction Act over Johnson’s veto. This act divided the South into five military districts subject to martial law. To achieve restoration, southern states were first required to call new constitutional conventions, elected by universal manhood suffrage. Once these states had drafted new constitutions, guaranteed African American voting rights, and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, they were eligible for readmission to the Union. Supplementary legislation, also passed over the president’s veto, invalidated the provisional governments established by Johnson, empowered the military to administer voter registration, and required an oath of loyalty to the United States (see Map 17-1).

Congress also passed several laws aimed at limiting Johnson’s power. One of these, the Tenure of Office Act, stipulated that any officeholder appointed by the president with the Senate’s advice and consent could not be removed until the Senate had approved a successor. In this way, congressional leaders could protect Republicans, such as Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, entrusted with implementing Congressional Reconstruction. In August 1867, with Congress adjourned,

**QUICK REVIEW**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Tenure of Office Act and Johnson’s Impeachment</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Act prohibited the president from removing certain officeholders with the Senate’s consent.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Johnson deliberately violated the act in February 1868.</td>
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<td>• Johnson escaped impeachment by one vote.</td>
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Lecture Suggestion 17.1, Reconstruction Policy and Conflicts

The Fourteenth Amendment (1868)

Out of Class Activity 17.1, Efforts to Impeach Andrew Johnson

Audio-Visual Aid, “Impeachment of Andrew Johnson”

Civil Rights Act 1866 act that gave full citizenship to African Americans.

Congressional Reconstruction Name given to the period 1867–1870 when the Republican-dominated Congress controlled Reconstruction-era policy.

Reconstruction Act 1867 act that divided the South into five military districts subject to martial law.

Tenure of Office Act Act stipulating that any officeholder appointed by the president with the Senate’s advice and consent could not be removed until the Senate had approved a successor.
Johnson suspended Stanton and appointed General Ulysses S. Grant as interim secretary of war. This move enabled the president to remove generals in the field who he judged to be too radical and replace them with men who were sympathetic to his own views. It also served as a challenge to the Tenure of Office Act. In January 1868, when the Senate overruled Stanton’s suspension, Grant broke openly with Johnson and vacated the office. Stanton resumed his position and barricaded himself in his office when Johnson attempted to remove him once again.

Outraged by Johnson’s relentless obstructionism, and seizing upon his violation of the Tenure of Office Act as a pretext, Radical and moderate Republicans in the House of Representatives again joined forces and voted to impeach the president by a vote of 126 to 47 on February 24, 1868, charging him with eleven counts of high crimes and misdemeanors. To ensure the support of moderate Republicans, the articles of impeachment focused on violations of the Tenure of Office Act. The case against Johnson would have to be made on the basis of willful violation of the law. Left unstated were the Republicans’ real reasons for wanting the president removed: Johnson’s political views and his opposition to the Reconstruction Acts.

An influential group of moderate Senate Republicans feared the damage a conviction might do to the constitutional separation of powers. They also worried about the political and economic policies that might be pursued by Benjamin Wade, the president pro tem of the Senate and a leader of the Radical Republicans, who, because there was no vice president, would succeed to the presidency if Johnson were removed from office. Behind the scenes during his Senate trial, Johnson agreed to abide by the Reconstruction Acts. In May, the Senate voted 35 for conviction, 19 for acquittal—one vote shy of the two-thirds necessary for removal from office. Johnson’s narrow acquittal established the precedent that only criminal actions by a president—not political disagreements—warranted removal from office.

The Election of 1868

By the summer of 1868, seven former Confederate states (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee) had ratified the revised constitutions, elected Republican governments, and ratified the Fourteenth Amendment. They had thereby earned readmission to the Union. Though Georgia, Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia still awaited readmission, the presidential election of 1868 offered some hope that the Civil War’s legacy of sectional hate and racial tension might finally ease.

Republicans nominated Ulysses S. Grant, the North’s foremost military hero. An Ohio native, Grant had graduated from West Point in 1843, served in the Mexican War, and resigned from the army in 1854. Unhappy in civilian life, Grant received a second chance during the Civil War. He rose quickly to become commander in the western theater, and he later destroyed Lee’s army in Virginia. Although his armies suffered terrible losses, Grant enjoyed tremendous popularity after the war, especially when he broke with Johnson. Totally lacking in political experience, Grant admitted, after receiving the nomination, that he had been forced into it in spite of himself.

Significantly, at the very moment that the South was being forced to enfranchise former slaves as a prerequisite for readmission to the Union, the Republicans rejected a campaign plank endorsing black suffrage in the North. Their platform left

**MAP 17-1**

**Reconstruction of the South, 1866–77** Dates for the readmission of former Confederate states to the Union and the return of Democrats to power varied according to the specific political situations in those states.

**WHAT WERE** the competing plans for reconstructing the southern states?

"Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Virginia, to the People of the United States" (1865)
“the question of suffrage in all the loyal States . . . to the people of those States.” State referendums calling for black suffrage failed in eight northern states between 1865 and 1868, succeeding only in Iowa and Minnesota. The Democrats, determined to reverse Congressional Reconstruction, nominated Horatio Seymour, former governor of New York and a long-time foe of emancipation and supporter of states’ rights.

The Ku Klux Klan, founded as a Tennessee social club in 1866, emerged as a potent instrument of terror (see the opening of this chapter). In Louisiana, Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina the Klan threatened, whipped, and murdered black and white Republicans to prevent them from voting. This terrorism enabled the Democrats to carry Georgia and Louisiana, but it ultimately cost the Democrats votes in the North. In the final tally, Grant carried twenty-six of the thirty-four states for an electoral college victory of 214 to 80. But he received a popular majority of less than 53 percent, beating Seymour by only 306,000 votes. Significantly, more than 500,000 African American voters cast their ballots for Grant, demonstrating their overwhelming support for the Republican Party. The Republicans also retained large majorities in both houses of Congress.

In February 1869, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, providing that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” To enhance the chances of ratification, Congress required the three remaining unreconstructed states—Mississippi, Texas, and Virginia—to ratify both the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments before readmission. They did so, and rejoined the Union in early 1870. The Fifteenth Amendment was ratified in February 1870. In the narrow sense of simply readmitting the former Confederate states to the Union, Reconstruction was complete.
CHAPTER 17  RECONSTRUCTION, 1863–1877

Woman Suffrage and Reconstruction

The battles over the political status of African Americans proved an important turning point for women as well. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which granted citizenship and the vote to freedmen, both inspired and frustrated women’s rights activists. Many of these women had long been active in the abolitionist movement. During the war, they had actively supported the Union cause through their work in the National Woman’s Loyal League and the U.S. Sanitary Commission. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, two leaders with long involvement in both the antislavery and feminist movements, objected to the inclusion of the word "male" in the Fourteenth Amendment. “If that word ‘male’ be inserted,” Stanton predicted in 1866, “it will take us a century at least to get it out.”

Insisting that the causes of the African American vote and the women’s vote were linked, Stanton, Anthony, and Lucy Stone founded the American Equal Rights Association in 1866. The group launched a series of lobbying and petition campaigns to remove racial and sexual restrictions on voting from state constitutions. Throughout the nation, the old abolitionist organizations and the Republican Party emphasized passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and withdrew funds and support from the cause of woman suffrage. Disagreements over these amendments divided suffragists for decades.

The radical wing, led by Stanton and Anthony, opposed the Fifteenth Amendment, arguing that ratification would establish an “aristocracy of sex,” enfranchising all men while leaving women without political privileges. In arguing for a Sixteenth Amendment that would secure the vote for women, they used racist and elitist appeals. They urged “American women of wealth, education, virtue, and refinement” to support the vote for women and oppose the Fifteenth Amendment “if you do not wish the lower orders of Chinese, Africans, Germans, and Irish, with their

OVERVIEW

Reconstruction Amendments to the Constitution, 1865–1870

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amendment and Date Passed by Congress</th>
<th>Main Provisions</th>
<th>Ratification Process (3/4 of all states including ex-Confederate states required)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 (January 1865)</td>
<td>• Prohibited slavery in the United States</td>
<td>December 1865 (27 states, including 8 southern states)</td>
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<td>14 (June 1866)</td>
<td>• Conferring national citizenship on all persons born or naturalized in the United States</td>
<td>July 1868 (after Congress made ratification a prerequisite for readmission of ex-Confederate states to the Union)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reduced state representation in Congress proportionally for any state disfranchising male citizens</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Denied former Confederates the right to hold state or national office</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Repudiated Confederate debt</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 (February 1869)</td>
<td>• Prohibited denial of suffrage because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude</td>
<td>March 1870 (ratification required for readmission of Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, and Georgia)</td>
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</table>
low ideas of womanhood to make laws for you and your daughters." Other women’s rights activists, including Lucy Stone and Frederick Douglass, asserted that “this hour belongs to the Negro.” They feared a debate over woman suffrage at the national level would jeopardize passage of the two amendments.

By 1869, woman suffragists had split into two competing organizations. The moderate American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe, and Henry Blackwell, focused on achieving woman suffrage at the state level. It maintained close ties with the Republican Party and the old abolitionist networks, worked for the Fifteenth Amendment, and actively sought the support of men. The more radical wing founded the all-female National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). For the NWSA, the vote represented only one part of a broad spectrum of goals inherited from the Declaration of Sentiments manifesto adopted at the first women’s rights convention held in 1848 at Seneca Falls, New York (see Chapter 13).

Women did not win the vote in this period, but they did establish an independent suffrage movement that eventually drew millions of women into political life. The NWSA in particular demonstrated that self-government and democratic participation in the public sphere were crucial for women’s emancipation. The failure of woman suffrage after the Civil War was less a result of factional fighting than of the larger defeat of Radical Reconstruction and the ideal of expanded citizenship.

**The Meaning of Freedom**

For 4 million slaves, freedom arrived in various ways in different parts of the South. In many areas, slavery had collapsed long before Lee’s surrender at Appomattox. In regions far removed from the presence of federal troops, African Americans did not learn of slavery’s end until the spring of 1865. There were thousands of sharply contrasting stories, many of which revealed the need for freed slaves to confront their owners. One Virginia slave, hired out to another family during the war, had been working in the fields when a friend told her she was now free. “Is dat so?” she exclaimed. Dropping her hoe, she ran the seven miles to her old place, confronted her former mistress, and shouted, “I’se free! Yes, I’se free! Ain’t got to work fo’ you no mo’.” But regardless of specific regional circumstances, the meaning of “freedom” would be contested for years to come. The deep desire for independence from white control formed the underlying aspiration of newly freed slaves. For their part, most southern white people sought to restrict the boundaries of that independence. As individuals and as members of communities transformed by emancipation, former slaves struggled to establish economic, political, and cultural autonomy. They built on the twin pillars of slave culture—the family and the church—to consolidate and expand African American institutions and thereby laid the foundation for the modern African American community.

Emancipation greatly expanded the choices available to African Americans. It helped build confidence in their ability to effect change without deferring to white people. Freedom also meant greater uncertainty and risk. But the vast majority of African Americans were more than willing to take their chances.

**Moving About**

The first impulse of many emancipated slaves was to test their freedom. The simplest, most obvious way to do this involved leaving home. Throughout the summer and fall of 1865, observers in the South noted enormous numbers of freed people

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In this excerpt, Susan B. Anthony comments to the court that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments guaranteed all citizens the right to vote regardless of gender.

The only question left to be settled, now, is: Are women persons? And I hardly believe any of our opponents will have the hardihood to say they are not. Being persons, then, women are citizens, and no state has a right to make any new law, or to enforce any old law, that shall abridge their privileges or immunities. Hence, every discrimination against women in the constitutions and laws of the several states, is to-day null and void . . .

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In this excerpt, James T. Rapier testifies before the U.S. Senate concerning the desires of the newly freed African Americans to emigrate from Alabama.

. . . there are several reasons why the colored people desire to emigrate from Alabama; one among them is the poverty of the South. On a large part of it a man cannot make a decent living. Another is their want of school privileges in the State; and there is a majority of the people who believe that they cannot any longer get justice in the courts; and another and the greatest reason is found in the local laws that we have, and which are very oppressive . . .
on the move. One former slave squatting in an abandoned tent outside Selma, Alabama, explained his feeling to a northern journalist: “I’s want to be free man, cum when I please, and nobody say muffin to me, nor order me roun’.” When urged to stay on with the South Carolina family she had served for years as a cook, a slave woman replied firmly: “No, Miss, I must go. If I stay here I’ll never know I am free.”

Yet many who left their old neighborhoods returned soon afterward to seek work in the general vicinity, or even on the plantation they had left. Many wanted to separate themselves from former owners, but not from familial ties and friendships. Others moved away altogether, seeking jobs in nearby towns and cities. Many former slaves left predominantly white counties, where they felt more vulnerable and isolated, for new lives in the relative comfort of predominantly black communities. In most southern states, there was a significant population shift toward black belt plantation counties and towns after the war. Many African Americans, attracted by schools, churches, and fraternal societies as well as the army, preferred the city. Between 1865 and 1870, the African American population of the South’s ten largest cities doubled, while the white population increased by only 10 percent.

Disgruntled planters had difficulty accepting African American independence. During slavery, they had expected obedience, submission, and loyalty from African Americans. Now many could not understand why so many former slaves wanted to leave, despite urgent pleas to continue working at the old place. The deference and humility white people expected from African Americans could no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, many freed people went out of their way to reject the old subservience. Moving about freely was one way of doing this, as was refusing to tip one’s hat to white people, ignoring former masters or mistresses in the streets, and refusing to step aside on sidewalks. When freed people staged parades, dances, and picnics to celebrate their new freedom, as they did, for example, when commemorating the Emancipation Proclamation, white people invariably condemned them for “insolence,” “outrageous spectacles,” or “putting on airs.”

The African American Family

Emancipation allowed freed people to strengthen family ties. For many former slaves, freedom meant the opportunity to reunite with long-lost family members. To track down relatives, freed people trekked to faraway places, put ads in newspapers, sought the help of Freedmen’s Bureau agents, and questioned anyone who might have information about loved ones. Many thousands of family reunions, each with its own story, took place after the war. One North Carolina slave, who had seen his parents separated by sale, recalled many years later what for him had been the most significant aspect of freedom. “I has got thirteen great-gran’ chilluns an’ I know whar dey ever’one am. In slavery times dey’d have been on de block long time ago.” Thousands of African American couples who had lived together under slavery streamed to military and civilian authorities and demanded to be legally married. By 1870, the two-parent household was the norm for a large majority of African Americans. For many freed people, the attempt to find lost relatives dragged on for years. Searches often proved frustrating, exhausting, and ultimately disappointing. Some “reunions” ended painfully with the discovery that spouses had found new partners and started new families.

Emancipation brought changes to gender roles within the African American family as well. By serving in the Union army, African American men played a more direct role in the lives of their families. The African American woman assumed a more prominent role in the development of African American families.
role than women in the fight for freedom. In the political sphere, black men could now serve on juries, vote, and hold office; black women, like their white counterparts, could not. Freedmen’s Bureau agents designated the husband as household head and established lower wage scales for women laborers. African American editors, preachers, and politicians regularly quoted the biblical injunction that wives submit to their husbands.

African American men asserted their male authority, denied under slavery, by insisting their wives work at home instead of in the fields. African American women generally wanted to devote more time than they had under slavery to caring for their children and to performing such domestic chores as cooking, sewing, gardening, and laundering. Yet African American women continued to work outside the home, engaging in seasonal field labor for wages or working a family’s rented plot. Most rural black families barely eked out a living, and thus the labor of every family member was essential to survival. The key difference from slave times was that African American families themselves, not white masters and overseers, decided when and where women and children worked.

African American Churches and Schools

The creation of separate African American churches proved the most lasting and important element of the energetic institution building that went on in post-emancipation years. Before the Civil War, southern Protestant churches had relegated slaves and free African Americans to second-class membership. Black worshipers were required to sit in the back during services, they were denied any role in church governance, and they were excluded from Sunday schools. Even in larger cities, where all-black congregations sometimes built their own churches, the law required white pastors. In rural areas, slaves preferred their own preachers to the sermons of local white ministers, who quoted Scripture to justify slavery and white supremacy. “That old white preachin’ wasn’t nothin’,” former slave Nancy Williams recalled. “Old white preachers used to talk with their tongues without sayin’ nothin’, but Jesus told us slaves to talk with our hearts.”

In communities around the South, African Americans now pooled their resources to buy land and build their own churches. Before these structures were completed, they might hold services in a railroad boxcar, where Atlanta’s First Baptist Church began, or in an outdoor arbor, the original site of the First Baptist Church of Memphis. By late 1866, Charleston’s African American community could boast of eleven churches in the city—five Methodist, two Presbyterian, two Episcopalian, one Baptist, and one Congregational. In rural areas, different denominations frequently shared the same church building. Churches became the center not only for religious life, but for many other activities that defined the African American community: schools, picnics, festivals, and political meetings.

The church became the first social institution fully controlled by African Americans. In nearly every community, ministers, respected for their speaking and organizational skills, were among the most influential leaders. By 1877, the great majority of black southerners had
withdrawn from white-dominated churches. In South Carolina, for example, only a few hundred black Methodists attended biracial churches, down from more than 40,000 in 1865. Black Baptist churches, with their decentralized and democratic structure and more emotional services, attracted the greatest number of freed people. By the end of Reconstruction, the vast majority of African American Christians belonged to black Baptist or Methodist churches.

The rapid spread of schools reflected African Americans’ thirst for self-improvement. Southern states had prohibited education for slaves. But many free black people managed to attend school, and a few slaves had been able to educate themselves. Still, more than 90 percent of the South’s adult African American population was illiterate in 1860. Access to education thus became a central part of the meaning of freedom. Freedmen’s Bureau agents repeatedly expressed amazement at the number of makeshift classrooms organized by African Americans in rural areas. A bureau officer described these “wayside schools”: “A negro riding on a loaded wagon, or sitting on a hack waiting for a train, or by the cabin door, is often seen, book in hand delving after the rudiments of knowledge. A group on the platform of a depot, after carefully conning an old spelling book, resolves itself into a class.”

African American communities received important educational aid from outside organizations. By 1869, the Freedmen’s Bureau was supervising nearly 3,000 schools serving more than 150,000 students throughout the South. More than half the roughly 3,500 teachers in these schools were African Americans, many of whom had been free before the Civil War. Other teachers included dedicated northern white women, volunteers sponsored by the American Missionary Association (AMA). The bureau and the AMA also assisted in the founding of several black colleges, including Tougaloo, Hampton, and Fisk, designed to train black teachers. Black self-help proved crucial to the education effort. Throughout the South in 1865 and 1866, African Americans raised money to build schoolhouses, buy supplies, and pay teachers. Black artisans donated labor for construction, and black families offered room and board to teachers.

**Land and Labor after Slavery**

Most newly emancipated African Americans aspired to quit the plantations and to make new lives for themselves. Leaving the plantation was not as simple as walking off. Some freed people did find jobs in railroad building, mining, ranching, or construction work. Others raised subsistence crops and tended vegetable gardens as squatters. White planters, however, tried to retain African Americans as permanent agricultural laborers. Restricting the employment of former slaves was an important goal of the black codes. For example, South Carolina legislation in 1865 provided that “no person of color shall pursue or practice the art, trade, or business of an artisan, mechanic, or shopkeeper, or any other trade employment, or business, besides that of husbandry, or that of a servant under contract for service or labor” without a special and costly permit.

The majority of African Americans hoped to become self-sufficient farmers. Many former slaves believed they were entitled to the land they had worked throughout their lives. General Oliver O. Howard, chief commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, observed that many “supposed that the Government [would] divide among them the lands of the conquered owners, and furnish them with all that might be necessary to begin life as an independent farmer.” This perception was not merely a wishful fantasy. Frequent reference in the Congress and the press to the question of land distribution made the idea of “forty acres and a mule” not just a pipe dream but a matter of serious public debate.

Above all, African Americans sought economic autonomy, and ownership of land promised the most independence. “Give us our own land and we take care of ourselves,” was how one former slave saw it. “But widout land, de ole massas can hire

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**Quick Review**

- Many African Americans found inspiration and courage in their religious faith.
- Black churches split from white-dominated congregations after the war.
- Black churches created a variety of organizations that served the black community.
us or starve us, as dey please.” At the Colored Convention in Montgomery, Alabama, in May 1867, delegates argued that the property now owned by planters had been “nearly all earned by the sweat of our brows, not theirs. It has been forfeited to the government by the treason of its owners, and is liable to be confiscated whenever the Republican Party demands it.” But by 1866, the federal government had already pulled back from the various wartime experiments involving the breaking up of large plantations and the leasing of small plots to individual families. President Johnson directed General Howard of the Freedmen’s Bureau to evict tens of thousands of freed people settled on confiscated and abandoned land in southeastern Virginia, southern Louisiana, and the Georgia and South Carolina low country. These evictions created a deep sense of betrayal among African Americans. A former Mississippi slave, Merrimon Howard, bitterly noted that African Americans had been left with “no land, no house, not so much as a place to lay our head. . . . We were friends on the march, brothers on the battlefield, but in the peaceful pursuits of life it seems that we are strangers.” (See Map 17-2.)

MAP 17-2
The Barrow Plantation, Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1860 and 1881 (approx. 2,000 acres) These two maps, based on drawings from Scribner’s Monthly, April 1881, show some of the changes brought by emancipation. In 1860, the plantation’s entire black population lived in the communal slave quarters, right next to the white master’s house. In 1881, black sharecropper and tenant families lived on individual plots, spread out across the land. The former slaves had also built their own school and church.
By the late 1860s, sharecropping had emerged as the dominant form of working the land. Sharecropping represented a compromise between planters and former slaves. Under sharecropping arrangements that were usually very detailed, individual families contracted with landowners to be responsible for a specific plot. Large plantations were thus broken into family-sized farms. Generally, sharecropper families received one-third of the year’s crop if the owner furnished implements, seed, and draft animals, or one-half if they provided their own supplies. African Americans preferred sharecropping to gang labor, as it allowed families to set their own hours and tasks and offered freedom from white supervision and control. For planters, the system stabilized the workforce by requiring sharecroppers to remain until the harvest and to employ all family members. It also offered a way around the chronic shortage of cash and credit that plagued the postwar South.

Freed people did not aspire to sharecropping. Owning land outright or tenant farming (renting land) were both more desirable. But though black sharecroppers clearly enjoyed more autonomy than in the past, the vast majority never achieved economic independence or land ownership. They remained a largely subordinate agricultural labor force.

Sharecropping came to dominate the southern agricultural economy and African American life in particular. By 1880, about 80 percent of the land in the black belt states—Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia—had been divided into family-sized farms. Nearly three-quarters of black southerners were sharecroppers. Often several families worked adjoining parcels of land in common, pooling their labor in order to get by. Men usually oversaw crop production. Women went to the fields seasonally during planting or harvesting, but they mainly tended to household chores and child care. In addition, women frequently held jobs that might bring in cash, such as raising chickens or taking in laundry. The cotton harvest engaged all members of the community, from the oldest to the youngest.

**The Origins of African American Politics**

Inclusion, rather than separation, was the objective of early African American political activity. The greatest political activity by African Americans occurred in areas occupied by Union forces during the war. In 1865 and 1866, African Americans throughout the South organized scores of mass meetings, parades, and petitions that demanded civil equality and the right to vote. In the cities, the growing web of churches and fraternal societies helped bolster early efforts at political organization.

Hundreds of African American delegates, selected by local meetings or churches, attended statewide political conventions held throughout the South in 1865 and 1866. Previously, free African Americans, as well as black ministers, artisans, and veterans of the Union army, tended to dominate these proceedings, setting a pattern that would hold throughout Reconstruction. Convention debates sometimes reflected the tensions within African American communities, such as friction between poorer former slaves and better-off free black people, or between lighter- and darker-skinned African Americans. But most of these state gatherings concentrated on passing resolutions on issues that united all African Americans. The central concerns were suffrage and equality before the law. As the delegates to an Alabama convention asserted in 1867: “We claim exactly the same rights, privileges and immunities as are enjoyed by white men—we ask nothing more and will be content with nothing less. . . . The law no longer knows white nor black, but simply men, and consequently we are entitled to ride in public conveyances, hold office, sit on juries and do everything else which we have in the past been prevented from doing solely on the ground of color.”
The passage of the First Reconstruction Act in 1867 encouraged even more political activity among African Americans. The military started registering the South’s electorate, ultimately enrolling approximately 735,000 black and 635,000 white voters in the ten unreconstructed states. Five states—Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and South Carolina—had black electoral majorities. Fewer than half the registered white voters participated in the elections for state constitutional conventions in 1867 and 1868. In contrast, four-fifths of the registered black voters cast ballots in these elections. Much of this new African American political activism was channeled through local Union League chapters throughout the South. However, as the fate of Alex Webb in Hale County, Alabama, again makes clear, few whites welcomed this activism.

Begun during the war as a northern, largely white middle-class patriotic club, the Union League now became the political voice of the former slaves. Union League chapters brought together local African Americans, soldiers, and Freedmen’s Bureau agents to demand the vote and an end to legal discrimination against African Americans. It brought out African American voters, instructed freedmen in the rights and duties of citizenship, and promoted Republican candidates. Not surprisingly, newly enfranchised freedmen voted Republican and formed the core of the Republican Party in the South. For most ordinary African Americans, politics was inseparable from economic issues, especially the land question. Grass-roots political organizations frequently intervened in local disputes with planters over the terms of labor contracts. African American political groups followed closely the congressional debates over Reconstruction policy and agitated for land confiscation and distribution. Perhaps most important, politics was the only arena where black and white southerners might engage each other on an equal basis.

**Southern Politics and Society**

By the summer of 1868, when the South had returned to the Union, the majority of Republicans believed the task of Reconstruction to be finished. Ultimately, they put their faith in a political solution to the problems facing the vanquished South. That meant nurturing a viable two-party system in the southern states, where no Republican Party had ever existed. If that could be accomplished, Republicans and Democrats would compete for votes, offices, and influence, just as they did in northern states. Most Republican congressmen were moderates, conceiving Reconstruction in limited terms. They rejected radical calls for confiscation and redistribution of land, as well as permanent military rule of the South. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 and 1868 laid out the requirements for the readmission of southern states, along with the procedures for forming and electing new governments.

Yet over the next decade, the political structure created in the southern states proved too restricted and fragile to sustain itself. To most southern whites, the active participation of African Americans in politics seemed extremely dangerous. Federal troops were needed to protect Republican governments and their supporters from violent opposition. Congressional action to monitor southern elections and protect black voting rights became routine. Despite initial successes, southern Republicanism proved an unstable coalition of often conflicting elements, unable
to sustain effective power for very long. By 1877, Democrats had regained political control of all the former Confederate states.

### Southern Republicans

Three major groups composed the fledgling Republican coalition in the postwar South. African American voters made up a large majority of southern Republicans throughout the Reconstruction era. Yet African Americans outnumbered whites in only three southern states; thus, Republicans would have to attract white support to win elections and sustain power.

A second group consisted of white northerners, derisively called “carpetbaggers” by native white southerners. Most carpetbaggers combined a desire for personal gain with a commitment to reform the “unprogressive” South by developing its material resources and introducing Yankee institutions, such as free labor and free public schools. Most were veterans of the Union army who stayed in the South after the war. Others included Freedmen’s Bureau agents and businessmen who had invested capital in cotton plantations and other enterprises.

Carpetbaggers tended to be well educated and from the middle class. Albert Morgan, for example, was an army veteran from Ohio who settled in Mississippi after the war. When he and his brother failed at running a cotton plantation and sawmill, Morgan became active in Republican politics as a way to earn a living. He won election to the state constitutional convention, became a power in the state legislature, and risked his life to keep the Republican organization alive in the Mississippi Delta region. Although they made up a tiny percentage of the population, carpetbaggers played a disproportionally large role in southern politics. They won a large share of Reconstruction offices, particularly in Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana and in areas with large African American constituencies.

The third major group of southern Republicans were the native whites pejoratively termed “scalawags.” They had even more diverse backgrounds and motives than the northern-born Republicans. Some were prominent prewar Whigs who saw the Republican Party as their best chance to regain political influence. Others viewed the party as an agent of modernization and economic expansion. “Yankees and Yankee notions are just what we want in this country,” argued Thomas Settle of North Carolina. “We want their capital to build factories and workshops. We want their intelligence, their energy and enterprise.” Loyalists during the war and traditional enemies of the planter elite (most were small farmers), these white southerners looked to the Republican Party for help in settling old scores and relief from debt and wartime devastation.

Yet few white southerners identified with the political and economic aspirations of African Americans. Moderate elements more concerned with maintaining white control of the party, and encouraging economic investment in the region, outnumbered and defeated “confiscation radicals” who focused on obtaining land for African Americans.

### Reconstructing the States: A Mixed Record

With the old Confederate leaders barred from political participation, and with carpetbaggers and newly enfranchised African Americans representing many of the plantation districts, Republicans managed to dominate the ten southern constitutional conventions of 1867–69.

Most of the conventions produced constitutions that expanded democracy and the public role of the state. The new documents guaranteed the political and civil rights of African Americans, and they abolished property qualifications for
officeholding and jury service, as well as imprisonment for debt. They created the first state-funded systems of education in the South, to be administered by state commissioners. The new constitutions also mandated establishment of orphanages, penitentiaries, and homes for the insane. The changes wrought in the South’s political landscape seemed quite radical to many. In 1868, only three years after the end of the war, Republicans came to power in most of the southern states. By 1869, new constitutions had been ratified in all the old Confederate states. “These constitutions and governments,” one South Carolina Democratic newspaper vowed bitterly, “will last just as long as the bayonets which ushered them into being, shall keep them in existence, and not one day longer.”

Republican governments in the South faced a continual crisis of legitimacy that limited their ability to legislate change. They had to balance reform against the need to gain acceptance, especially by white southerners. Their achievements were thus mixed. In the realm of race relations there was a clear thrust toward equal rights and against discrimination. Republican legislatures followed up the federal Civil Rights Act of 1866 with various antidiscrimination clauses in new constitutions and laws prescribing harsh penalties for civil rights violations. While most African Americans supported autonomous African American churches, fraternal societies, and schools, they insisted that the state be “color-blind.” African Americans could now be employed in police forces and fire departments, serve on juries, school boards, and city councils, and they could hold public office at all levels of government.

Segregation, though, became the norm in public school systems. African American leaders often accepted segregation because they feared that insistence on integrated education would jeopardize funding for the new school systems. They generally agreed with Frederick Douglass that separate schools were “infinitely superior” to no schools at all. So while they opposed constitutional language requiring racial segregation in schools, most African Americans were less interested in the abstract ideal of integrated education than in ensuring educational opportunities for their children and employment for African American teachers.

Demands by African Americans to prohibit segregation in railroad cars, steamboats, theaters, and other public spaces revealed and heightened the divisions within the Republican Party. Moderate white Republicans feared such laws would only further alienate potential white supporters. But by the early 1870s, as black influence and assertiveness grew, laws guaranteeing equal access to transportation and public accommodation were passed in many states. By and large, though, such civil rights laws were difficult to enforce in local communities.

In economic matters, Republican governments failed to fulfill African Americans’ hopes of obtaining land. Few former slaves possessed the cash to buy land in the open market, and they looked to the state for help. Republicans tried to weaken the plantation system and promote black ownership by raising taxes on land. Yet, even when state governments seized land for nonpayment of taxes, the property was never used to help create black homesteads. In Mississippi, for example, 6 million acres, or about 20 percent of the land, had been forfeited by 1875. Yet virtually all of it found its way back to the original owners after they paid minimal penalties.

Republican leaders envisioned promoting northern-style capitalist development—factories, large towns, and diversified agriculture—through state aid. Much Republican state lawmaking was devoted to encouraging railroad construction. This government backing gave railroad companies credibility and helped them raise capital. In exchange, states received liens on railroads as security against defaults on payments to bondholders.
Between 1868 and 1872, the southern railroad system was rebuilt and more than 3,000 new miles of track added, an increase of almost 40 percent. But in spite of all the new laws, it proved impossible to attract significant amounts of northern and European investment capital. The obsession with railroads withdrew resources from education and other programs. As in the North, it also opened the doors to widespread corruption and bribery of public officials. Railroad failures eroded public confidence in the Republicans’ ability to govern. The “gospel of prosperity” ultimately failed to modernize the economy or solidify the Republican Party in the South.

White Resistance and “Redemption”

The emergence of a Republican Party in the reconstructed South brought two parties, but not a two-party system, to the region. The opponents of Reconstruction, the Democrats, refused to acknowledge Republicans’ right to participate in southern political life. In their view, the Republican Party, supported primarily by the votes of former slaves, was the partisan instrument of the northern Congress. Since Republicans controlled state governments, this denial of legitimacy meant, in effect, a rejection of state authority itself. In each state, Republicans were split between those who urged conciliation in an effort to gain white acceptance and those who emphasized consolidating the party under the protection of the military.

From 1870 to 1872, the Ku Klux Klan fought an ongoing terrorist campaign against Reconstruction governments and local leaders. Although not centrally organized, the Klan was a powerful presence in nearly every southern state. It acted as a kind of guerrilla military force in the service of the Democratic Party, the planter class, and all those who sought the restoration of white supremacy. Planters sometimes employed Klansmen to enforce labor discipline by driving African Americans off plantations to deprive them of their harvest share.

In October 1870, after Republicans carried Laurens County in South Carolina, bands of white people drove 150 African Americans from their homes and murdered 13 black and white Republican activists. In March 1871, three African Americans were arrested in Meridian, Mississippi, for giving “incendiary” speeches. At their court hearing, Klansmen killed two of the defendants and the Republican judge, and thirty more African Americans were murdered in a day of rioting. The single bloodiest episode of Reconstruction-era violence took place in Colfax, Louisiana, on Easter Sunday 1873. Nearly 100 African Americans were murdered after they failed to hold a besieged courthouse during a contested election.

Southern Republicans looked to Washington for help. In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed three Enforcement Acts designed to counter racial terrorism. These declared that interference with voting was a federal offense. The acts provided for federal supervision of voting, and authorized the president to send the army and to suspend the writ of habeas corpus in districts declared to be in a state of insurrection. The most sweeping measure was the Ku Klux Klan Act of April 1871, which made the violent infringement of civil and political rights a federal crime punishable by the national government. Attorney General Amos T. Akerman prosecuted hundreds of Klansmen in North Carolina and Mississippi. In October 1871, President Grant sent federal troops to occupy nine South Carolina counties; they rounded up thousands of Klan members. By the election of 1872, the federal government’s intervention had helped break the Klan and restore a semblance of law and order.

The Civil Rights Act of 1875 outlawed racial discrimination in theaters, hotels, railroads, and other public places. But the law proved more an assertion of principle than a direct federal intervention in southern affairs. Enforcement required African Americans to take their cases to the federal courts, a costly and time-consuming procedure.
As wartime idealism faded, northern Republicans became less inclined toward direct intervention in southern affairs. They had enough trouble retaining political control in the North. In 1874, the Democrats gained a majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since 1856. Key northern states also began to fall to the Democrats. Northern Republicans slowly abandoned the freedmen and their white allies in the South. Southern Democrats were also able to exploit a deepening fiscal crisis by blaming Republicans for excessive extension of public credit and the sharp increase in tax rates. Republican governments had indeed spent public money for new state school systems, orphanages, roads, and other internal improvements.

Gradually, conservative Democrats “redeemed” one state after another. Virginia and Tennessee led the way in 1869, North Carolina in 1870, Georgia in 1871, Texas in 1873, and Alabama and Arkansas in 1874. In Mississippi, white conservatives employed violence and intimidation to wrest control in 1875 and “redeemed” the state the following year. Republican infighting in Louisiana in 1871 and 1874 led to a series of contested election results, including bloody clashes between black militia and armed whites, and finally to “redemption” by the Democrats in 1877. Once these states returned to Democratic rule, African Americans faced obstacles to voting, more stringent controls on plantation labor, and deep cuts in social services.

Several Supreme Court rulings involving the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments effectively constrained federal protection of African American civil rights. The Ku Klux Klan emerged as a potent political and social force during Reconstruction, terrorizing freed people and their white allies. An 1868 Klan warning threatens Louisiana governor Henry C. Warmoth with death. Warmoth, an Illinois-born “carpetbagger,” was the state’s first Republican governor. Two Alabama Klansmen, photographed in 1868, wear white hoods to hide their identities.

(a) From The Henry Clay Warmoth Papers # 752, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; (b) Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Center.
rights. In the so-called Slaughterhouse cases of 1873, the Court issued its first ruling on the Fourteenth Amendment. The cases involved a Louisiana charter that gave a New Orleans meat-packing company a monopoly over the city’s butchering business on the grounds of protecting public health. A rival group of butchers had sued, claiming the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment, which prohibited states from depriving any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law. The Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment protected only the former slaves, not butchers, and that it protected only national citizenship rights, not the regulatory powers of states. The ruling in effect denied the original intent of the Fourteenth Amendment—to protect against state infringement of national citizenship rights as spelled out in the Bill of Rights.

Three other decisions curtailed federal protection of black civil rights. In United States v. Reese (1876) and United States v. Cruikshank (1876), the Court restricted congressional power to enforce the Ku Klux Klan Act. Future prosecution would depend on the states, rather than on federal authorities. In these rulings, the Court held that the Fourteenth Amendment extended the federal power to protect civil rights only in cases involving discrimination by states; discrimination by individuals or groups was not covered. The Court also ruled that the Fifteenth Amendment did not guarantee a citizen’s right to vote; it only barred certain specific grounds for denying suffrage—“race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” This interpretation opened the door for southern states to disfranchise African Americans for allegedly nonracial reasons. States back under Democratic control began to limit African American voting by passing laws restricting voter eligibility through poll taxes and property requirements.

Finally, in the 1883 Civil Rights Cases decision, the Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, holding that the Fourteenth Amendment gave Congress the power to outlaw discrimination by states, but not by private individuals. The majority opinion held that black people must no longer “be the special favorite of the laws.” Together, these Supreme Court decisions marked the end of federal attempts to protect African American rights until well into the next century.

**White Yeomen, White Merchants, and “King Cotton”**

The Republicans’ vision of a “New South” remade along the lines of the northern economy failed to materialize. Instead, the South declined into the country’s poorest agricultural region. Unlike midwestern and western farm towns burgeoning from trade in wheat, corn, and livestock, southern communities found themselves almost entirely dependent on the price of one commodity. In the post–Civil War years, “King Cotton” expanded its realm, as greater numbers of small white farmers found themselves forced to switch from subsistence crops to growing cotton for the market (see Map 17-3).

A chronic shortage of capital and banking institutions made local merchants and planters the sole source of credit. They advanced loans and supplies to small owners, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers in exchange for a lien, or claim, on the year’s cotton crop. They often charged usurious interest rates on advances, while marking up the prices of the goods sold in their stores. Taking advantage of the high illiteracy rates among poor southerners, landlords and merchants easily altered their books to inflate the figures. At the end of the year, sharecroppers and tenants found themselves deep in debt to stores for seed, supplies, and clothing. Despite hard work and even bountiful harvests, few small farmers could escape from heavy debt.

The spread of the “crop lien” system as the South’s main form of agricultural credit forced more and more farmers into cotton growing. The transition to cotton dependency developed unevenly, at different speeds in different parts of the South. Penetration by railroads, the availability of commercial fertilizers, and the opening

*Slaughterhouse cases*  Group of cases resulting in one sweeping decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1873 that contradicted the intent of the Fourteenth Amendment by decreeing that most citizenship rights remained under state, not federal, control.
up of new lands to cultivation were key factors in transforming communities from diversified, locally oriented farming to the market-oriented production of cotton.

The pent-up demand for cotton following the war brought high prices (as much as 43 cents per pound) through the late 1860s. But as the crop lien system spread, and as more and more farmers turned to cotton growing as the only way to obtain credit, expanding production depressed prices. Competition from new cotton centers in the world market, such as Egypt and India, accelerated the downward spiral. As cotton prices declined alarmingly, to roughly 11 cents per pound in 1875 to 5 cents by the early 1890s, per capita wealth in the South fell steadily, equaling only one-third that of the East, Midwest, or West by the 1890s. Small farmers caught up in a vicious cycle of low cotton prices, debt, and dwindling food crops found their old ideal of independence sacrificed to the cruel logic of the cotton market.

By 1880, nearly 40 percent of all southern farms were operated by tenants and sharecroppers. About one-third of the white farmers and nearly three-quarters of the

MAP 17-3
Southern Sharecropping and the Cotton Belt, 1880  The economic depression of the 1870s forced increasing numbers of southern farmers, both white and black, into sharecropping arrangements. Sharecropping was most pervasive in the cotton belt regions of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and east Texas.

HOW DID this new form of labor affect the lives of former slaves?
African American farmers in the cotton states were sharecroppers or tenants. To obtain precious credit, most found themselves forced to produce cotton for market, and thus became ensnared in the debt-ridden crop lien system. In traditional cotton producing areas, especially the black belt, landless farmers growing cotton had replaced slaves growing cotton. In the upcountry and newer areas of cultivation, cotton-dominated commercial agriculture, with landless tenants and sharecroppers as the main workforce, had replaced the more diversified subsistence economy of the antebellum era.

One class of white southerners benefiting from these arrangements was made up of local merchants. As hundreds of new villages (communities of fewer than 2,500 people) sprang up in every corner of the South, especially in the new upcountry and the Piedmont settlements, local merchants provided both goods and credit for local farmers. With their power based on control of credit and marketing, merchants emerged as a new economic elite unconnected to the antebellum planters whose power had rested on the ownership of land and slaves. But within both the new towns and the old planter elite, white families increasingly defined their social position by celebrating a certain type of ideal household. Women found meaning in their role as upholders of domestic virtue by creating a comfortable home environment and tending to the needs of children and husbands. Men were to be of strong moral fiber and to provide material support for the family. These elite ideals, articulated in magazines, schools, sermons, and other public discourse, rested on a belief that one’s ability to reach the standards of womanhood and manhood rested solely on moral character and individual choice.

Reconstructing the North

Abraham Lincoln liked to cite his own rise as proof of the superiority of the northern system of “free labor” over slavery. “There is no permanent class of hired laborers amongst us,” Lincoln asserted. “Twenty-five years ago, I was a hired laborer. The hired laborer of yesterday, labors on his own account today; and will hire others to labor for him tomorrow. Advancement—improvement in condition—is the order of things in a society of equals.” But the triumph of the North brought with it fundamental changes in the economy, labor relations, and politics that brought Lincoln’s ideal vision into question. The spread of the factory system, the growth of large and powerful corporations, and the rapid expansion of capitalist enterprise all hastened the development of a large unskilled and routinized workforce. Rather than becoming independent producers, more and more workers found themselves consigned permanently to wage labor.

The old Republican ideal of a society bound by a harmony of interests had become overshadowed by a grimmer reality of class conflict. A violent national railroad strike in 1877 was broken only with the direct intervention of federal troops. That conflict struck many Americans as a turning point. Northern society, like the society of the South, appeared more hierarchical than equal. That same year, the last federal troops withdrew from their southern posts, marking the end of the Reconstruction era. By then, the North had undergone its own “reconstruction” as well.

The Age of Capital

In the decade following Appomattox, the North’s economy continued the industrial boom begun during the Civil War. By 1873, America’s industrial production had grown 75 percent over the 1865 level. By that time, too, the number of nonagricultural workers in the North had surpassed the number of farmers. Between 1860 and 1880, the number of wage earners in manufacturing and construction more than doubled, from 2 million to more than 4 million. Only Great Britain boasted a larger manufacturing...
economy than the United States. During the same period, nearly 3 million immigrants arrived in America, almost all of whom settled in the North and West.

The railroad business both symbolized and advanced the new industrial order. Shortly before the Civil War, enthusiasm mounted for a transcontinental line. Private companies took on the huge and expensive job of construction, but the federal government funded the project, providing the largest subsidy in American history. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 granted the Union Pacific and the Central Pacific rights to a broad swath of land extending from Omaha, Nebraska, to Sacramento, California. An 1864 act bestowed a subsidy of $15,000 per mile of track laid over smooth plains country and varying larger amounts up to $48,000 per mile in the foothills and mountains of the Far West. The Union Pacific employed gangs of Irish American and African American workers to lay track heading west from Omaha.

Meanwhile the Central Pacific, pushing east from California, had a tougher time finding workers, and began recruiting thousands of men from China. In 1868, the Senate ratified the Burlingame Treaty, giving Chinese the right to emigrate to the United States, while specifying that “nothing contained herein shall be held to confer naturalization.” The right to work in America, in other words, did not bestow any right to citizenship. Some 12,000 Chinese laborers (about 90 percent of the workforce) bore the brunt of the difficult conditions in the Sierra Nevada, where blizzards, landslides, and steep rock faces took an awful toll. Chinese workers earned a reputation for toughness and efficiency. “If we found we were in a hurry for a job of work,” wrote one of the Central Pacific’s superintendents, “it was better to put on Chinese at once.” Working in baskets suspended by ropes, Chinese laborers chipped away at solid granite walls and became experts in the use of nitroglycerin for blasting through the mountains. But after completion of the transcontinental line threw thousands of Chinese railroad workers onto the California labor market, the open door immigration pledge in the Burlingame Treaty would soon be eclipsed by a virulent tide of anti-Chinese agitation among western politicians and labor unions. In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, suspending any further Chinese immigration for ten years.

On May 10, 1869, Leland Stanford, the former governor of California and president of the Central Pacific Railroad, traveled to Promontory Point in Utah Territory to hammer a ceremonial golden spike, marking the finish of the first transcontinental line. Other railroads went up with less fanfare. The Southern Pacific, chartered by the state of California, stretched from San Francisco to Los Angeles, and on through Arizona and New Mexico to connections with New Orleans. The Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe reached the Pacific in 1887 by way of a southerly route across the Rocky Mountains. The Great Northern, one of the few lines financed by private capital, extended west from St. Paul, Minnesota, to Washington’s Puget Sound.

Railroad corporations became America’s first big businesses. Railroads required huge outlays of investment capital, and their growth increased the economic power of banks and investment houses centered in Wall Street. Bankers often gained seats on the boards of
directors of these railroad companies, and their access to capital sometimes gave them the real control of railways. By the early 1870s the Pennsylvania Railroad stood as the nation’s largest single company, with more than 20,000 employees. A new breed of aggressive entrepreneur sought to ease cutthroat competition by absorbing smaller companies and forming “pools” that set rates and divided the market. A small group of railroad executives, including Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jay Gould, Collis P. Huntington, and James J. Hill, amassed unheard-of fortunes. When Vanderbilt died in 1877, he left his son $100 million. By comparison, a decent annual wage for working a six-day week was around $350.

Railroad promoters, lawyers, and lobbyists became ubiquitous figures in Washington and state capitals, wielding enormous influence among lawmakers. “The galleries and lobbies of every legislature,” one Republican leader noted, “are thronged with men seeking . . . an advantage.” Railroads benefited enormously from government subsidies. Between 1862 and 1872, Congress awarded more than 100 million acres of public lands to railroad companies and provided them more than $64 million in loans and tax incentives.

Some of the nation’s most prominent politicians routinely accepted railroad largesse. Republican senator William M. Stewart of Nevada, a member of the Committee on Pacific Railroads, received a gift of 50,000 acres of land from the Central Pacific for his services. The worst scandal of the Grant administration grew out of corruption involving railroad promotion. As a way of diverting funds for the building of the Union Pacific Railroad, an inner circle of Union Pacific stockholders created the dummy Crédit Mobilier construction company. In return for political favors, a group of prominent Republicans received stock in the company. When the scandal broke in 1872, it politically ruined Vice President Schuyler Colfax and led to the censure of two congressmen.

Other industries also boomed in this period, especially those engaged in extracting minerals and processing natural resources. Railroad growth stimulated expansion in the production of coal, iron, stone, and lumber, and these also received significant government aid. For example, under the National Mineral Act of 1866, mining companies received millions of acres of free public land. Oil refining enjoyed a huge expansion in the 1860s and 1870s. As with railroads, an early period of fierce competition soon gave way to concentration. By the late 1870s, John D. Rockefeller’s Standard Oil Company controlled almost 90 percent of the nation’s oil-refining capacity.

**Liberal Republicans and the Election of 1872**

With the rapid growth of large-scale, capital-intensive enterprises, Republicans increasingly identified with the interests of business rather than the rights of freedmen or the antebellum ideology of “free labor.” The old Civil War-era Radical Republicans had declined in influence. State Republican parties now organized themselves around the spoils of federal patronage rather than grand causes such as preserving the Union or ending slavery. Despite the Crédit Mobilier affair, Republicans had no monopoly on political scandal. In 1871, New York City newspapers reported the shocking story of how Democratic Party boss William M. Tweed and his friends had systematically stolen tens of millions of dollars from the city treasury. The “Tweed Ring” had received enormous bribes and kickbacks from city contractors and businessmen. Grotesquely caricatured by Thomas Nast’s cartoons in *Harper’s Weekly*, Tweed emerged as the preeminent national symbol of increasingly degraded and dishonest urban politics. But to many, the scandal represented only the most extreme case of the routine corruption that now plagued American political life.

By the end of President Grant’s first term, a large number of disaffected Republicans sought an alternative. The **Liberal Republicans**, as they called themselves,
shared several core values. First, they emphasized the doctrines of classical economics, stressing the law of supply and demand, free trade, defense of property rights, and individualism. They called for a return to limited government, arguing that bribery, scandal, and high taxes all flowed from excessive state interference in the economy.

Liberal Republicans were also suspicious of expanding democracy. "Universal suffrage," Charles Francis Adams Jr. wrote in 1869, "can only mean in plain English the government of ignorance and vice—it means a European, and especially Celtic, proletariat on the Atlantic coast, an African proletariat on the shores of the Gulf, and a Chinese proletariat on the Pacific." Liberal Republicans believed that politics ought to be the province of "the best men"—educated and well-to-do men like themselves, devoted to the "science of government." They proposed civil service reform as the best way to break the hold of party machines on patronage.

Although most Liberal Republicans had enthusiastically supported abolition, the Union cause, and equal rights for freedmen, they now opposed continued federal intervention in the South. The national government had done all it could for the former slaves; they must now take care of themselves. "Root, Hog, or Die" was the harsh advice offered by Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune. In the spring of 1872, a diverse collection of Liberal Republicans nominated Greeley to run for president. A longtime foe of the Democratic Party, Greeley nonetheless won that party's presidential nomination as well. He made a new policy for the South the center of his campaign against Grant. The "best men" of both sections, he argued, should support a more generous Reconstruction policy based on "universal amnesty and impartial suffrage." All Americans, Greeley urged, must put the Civil War behind them and "clasp hands across the bloody chasm."

Grant easily defeated Greeley, carrying every state in the North and winning 56 percent of the popular vote. Most Republicans were not willing to abandon the regular party organization, and "waving the bloody shirt" was still a potent vote-getter. But the 1872 election accelerated the trend toward federal abandonment of African American citizenship rights. The Liberal Republicans quickly faded as an organized political force. But their ideas helped define a growing conservative consciousness among the northern public. For the rest of the century, their political and economic views attracted a growing number of middle-class professionals and businessmen. This agenda included retreat from the ideal of racial justice, hostility toward trade unions, suspicion of working-class and immigrant political power, celebration of competitive individualism, and opposition to government intervention in economic affairs.

**The Depression of 1873**

In the fall of 1873, the postwar boom came to an abrupt halt as a severe financial panic triggered a deep economic depression. The collapse resulted from commercial overexpansion, especially speculative investing in the nation’s railroad system. The investment banking house of Jay Cooke and Company failed in September 1873, when it found itself unable to market millions of dollars in Northern Pacific Railroad bonds. Soon, other banks and brokerage houses, especially those dealing in railroad securities, caved in as well, and the New York Stock Exchange suspended operations.

“The Tramp,” Harper’s Weekly, September 2, 1876. The depression that began in 1873 forced many thousands of unemployed workers to go “on the tramp” in search of jobs. Men wandered from town to town, walking or riding railroad cars, desperate for a chance to work for wages or simply for room and board. The “tramp” became a powerful symbol of the misery caused by industrial depression and, as in this drawing, an image that evoked fear and nervousness among the nation’s middle class.

The Picture Bank, Frank & Marie-Therese Wood Print Collection.
By 1876, half the nation’s railroads had defaulted on their bonds. Over the next two years, more than 100 banks folded and 18,000 businesses shut their doors. The depression that began in 1873 lasted sixty-five months—the longest economic contraction in the nation’s history up until that time.

The human toll of the depression was enormous. As factories began to close across the nation, the unemployment rate soared to about 15 percent. In many cities, the jobless rate was much higher; roughly one-quarter of New York City workers were unemployed in 1874. Many thousands of men took to the road in search of work, and the “tramp” emerged as a new and menacing figure on the social landscape. The Pennsylvania Bureau of Labor Statistics noted that never before had “so many of the working classes, skilled and unskilled . . . been moving from place to place seeking employment that was not to be had.” Farmers were also hard hit by the depression. Agricultural output continued to grow, but prices and land values fell sharply.

Mass meetings of workers in New York and other cities issued calls to government officials to create jobs through public works. But these appeals were rejected. Indeed, many business leaders and political figures denounced even meager efforts at charity. E.L. Godkin wrote in the Christmas 1875 issue of The Nation that “free soup must be prohibited, and all classes must learn that soup of any kind, beef or turtle, can be had only by being paid for.” Men such as Godkin saw the depression as a natural, if painful, part of the business cycle, one that would allow only the strongest enterprises (and workers) to survive. They dismissed any attempts at government interference, in the form of either job creation or relief for the poor.

The depression of the 1870s prompted many workers and farmers to question the old free-labor ideology that celebrated a harmony of interests in northern society. More people voiced anger at and distrust of large corporations that exercised great economic power from outside their communities. Businessmen and merchants, meanwhile, especially in large cities, became more conscious of their own class interests. New political organizations, such as Chicago’s Citizens’ Association, united businessmen in campaigns for fiscal conservatism and defense of property rights. In national politics, the persistent depression made the Republican Party, North and South, more vulnerable than ever.

**The Electoral Crisis of 1876**

With the economy mired in depression, Democrats looked forward to capturing the White House in 1876. New scandals plaguing the Grant administration also weakened the Republican Party. In 1875, a conspiracy surfaced between distillers and U.S. revenue agents to cheat the government out of millions in tax revenues. The government secured indictments against more than 200 members of this “Whiskey Ring,” including Orville E. Babcock, Grant’s private secretary. Though acquitted, thanks to Grant’s intervention, Babcock resigned in disgrace. In 1876, Secretary of War William W. Belknap was impeached for receiving bribes for the sale of trading posts in Indian Territory, and he resigned to avoid conviction (see Map 17-4).

Democrats hammered away at the Grant administration’s low standard of honesty in government, and for president, they nominated Governor Samuel J. Tilden of New York, who brought impeccable reform credentials to his candidacy. In 1871, he had helped expose and prosecute the “Tweed Ring” in New York City. As governor, he had toppled the “Canal Ring,” a graft-ridden scheme involving inflated contracts for repairs on the Erie Canal. In their platform, the Democrats linked the issue of corruption to an attack on Reconstruction policies. They blamed the Republicans for instituting “a corrupt centralism” that subjected southern states to “the rapacity of carpetbag tyrannies,” riddled the national government “with incapacity, waste,
After the Civil War, northern journalists and illustrators went south to describe Reconstruction in action. They took a keen interest in how the newly freed slaves were reshaping local and national politics. A drawing by Harper’s Weekly illustrator William L. Sheppard titled “Electioneering in the South” clearly approved of the freedmen’s exercise of their new citizenship rights. “Does any man seriously doubt,” the caption asked, “whether it is better for this vast population to be sinking deeper and deeper in ignorance and servility, or rising into general intelligence and self-respect? They can not be pariahs; they can not be peons; they must be slaves or citizens.”

Thomas Nast was the nation’s best-known political cartoonist during the 1860s and 1870s. During the Civil War he strongly supported the Union cause and the aspirations of the newly freed slaves. But by 1876, like many northerners originally sympathetic to guaranteeing blacks full political and civil rights, Nast had turned away from the early ideals of Reconstruction. Nast used grotesque racial caricature to depict southern African Americans and northern Irish immigrants as undeserving of the right to vote. The aftermath of the disputed 1876 presidential election included charges of widespread vote fraud from both Republicans and Democrats. Nast’s view—published in Harper’s Weekly in December 1876, while the election’s outcome was still in doubt—reflected concerns among many middle-class northerners that the nation’s political system was tainted by the manipulation of “ignorant” voters in both the South and the North.
and fraud," and "locked fast the prosperity of an industrious people in the paralysis of hard times."

Republican nominee Rutherford B. Hayes, governor of Ohio, also sought the high ground. As a lawyer in Cincinnati, he had defended runaway slaves. Later, he had distinguished himself as a general in the Union army. Republicans charged Tilden with disloyalty during the war, income tax evasion, and close relations with powerful railroad interests. Hayes promised, if elected, to support an efficient civil service system, to vigorously prosecute officials who betrayed the public trust, and to introduce a system of free universal education.

On an election day marred by widespread vote fraud and violent intimidation, Tilden received 250,000 more popular votes than Hayes. But Republicans refused to concede victory, challenging the vote totals in the electoral college. Tilden garnered 184 uncontested electoral votes, one shy of the majority required to win, while Hayes received 165. The problem centered in 20 disputed votes from Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Oregon. In each of the three southern states, two sets of electoral votes were returned. In Oregon, which Hayes had unquestionably carried, the Democratic governor nevertheless replaced a disputed Republican elector with a Democrat.

The crisis was unprecedented. In January 1877, Congress moved to settle the deadlock, establishing an Electoral Commission composed of five senators, five representatives, and five Supreme Court justices; eight were Republicans and seven were Democrats. The commission voted along strict partisan lines to award all the contested electoral votes to Hayes.

Outraged by this decision, Democratic congressmen threatened a filibuster to block Hayes’s inauguration. Violence and stalemate were avoided when Democrats and Republicans struck a compromise in February. In return for Hayes’s ascendance to the presidency, the Republicans promised to appropriate more money for southern internal improvements, to appoint a southerner to Hayes’s cabinet, and to pursue a policy of noninterference (“home rule”) in southern affairs.

Shortly after assuming office, Hayes ordered removal of the remaining federal troops in Louisiana and South Carolina. Without this military presence to sustain them, the Republican governors of those two states quickly lost power to Democrats.

"Home rule" meant Republican abandonment of freed people, Radicals, carpetbaggers, and scalawags. It also effectively nullified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The “Compromise of 1877” completed repudiation of the idea, born during the Civil War and pursued during congressional Reconstruction, of a powerful federal government protecting the rights of all American citizens. As one black Louisianan lamented, “The whole South—every state in the South—had got into the hands of the very men that held us slaves.” Other voices hailed this turning point in policy. “The negro,” declared The Nation, “will disappear from the field of national politics. Henceforth, the nation, as a nation, will have nothing more to do with him.”

### Conclusion

Reconstruction succeeded in the limited political sense of reuniting a nation torn apart by the Civil War. The Radical Republican vision, emphasizing racial justice, equal civil and political rights guaranteed by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, and a new southern economy organized
around independent small farmers, never enjoyed the support of the majority of its party or the northern public. By 1877, the political force of these ideals was spent, and the national retreat from them nearly complete.

The end of Reconstruction left the way open for the return of white domination in the South. The freed people’s political and civil equality proved only temporary. It would take a “Second Reconstruction,” the civil rights movement of the next century, to establish full black citizenship rights once and for all. The federal government’s failure to pursue land reform left former slaves without the economic independence needed for full emancipation. Yet the newly autonomous black family, along with black-controlled churches, schools, and other social institutions, provided the foundations for the modern African American community. If the federal government was not yet fully committed to protecting equal rights in local communities, the Reconstruction era at least pointed to how that goal might be achieved. Even as the federal government retreated from the defense of equal rights for black people, it took a more aggressive stance as the protector of business interests. The Hayes administration responded decisively to one of the worst outbreaks of class violence in American history by dispatching federal troops to several northern cities to break the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. In the aftermath of Reconstruction, the struggle between capital and labor had clearly replaced “the southern question” as the number one political issue of the day. “The overwhelming labor question has dwarfed all other questions into nothing,” wrote an Ohio Republican. “We have home questions enough to occupy attention now.”

**CHRONOLOGY**

| 1865 | Freedmen’s Bureau established |
|      | Abraham Lincoln assassinated  |
|      | Andrew Johnson begins presidential Reconstruction |
|      | Black codes begin to be enacted in southern states |
|      | Thirteenth Amendment ratified |
| 1866 | Civil Rights Act passed |
|      | Congress approves Fourteenth Amendment |
|      | Ku Klux Klan founded |
| 1867 | Reconstruction Acts, passed over President Johnson’s veto, begin congressional Reconstruction |
|      | Tenure of Office Act |
|      | Southern states call constitutional conventions |
| 1868 | President Johnson impeached by the House, but acquitted in Senate trial |
|      | Fourteenth Amendment ratified |
|      | Most southern states readmitted to the Union |
|      | Ulysses S. Grant elected president |
| 1869 | Congress approves Fifteenth Amendment |
|      | Union Pacific and Central Pacific tracks meet at Promontory Point in Utah Territory |
|      | Suffragists split into National Woman Suffrage Association and American Woman Suffrage Association |
| 1870 | Fifteenth Amendment ratified |
| 1871 | Ku Klux Klan Act passed |
|      | “Tweed Ring” in New York City exposed |
| 1872 | Liberal Republicans break with Grant and Radicals, nominate Horace Greeley for president |
|      | Crédit Mobilier scandal |
|      | Grant reelected president |
| 1873 | Financial panic and beginning of economic depression |
|      | Slaughterhouse cases |
| 1874 | Democrats gain control of House for first time since 1856 |
| 1875 | Civil Rights Act |
| 1876 | Disputed election between Samuel Tilden and Rutherford B. Hayes |
| 1877 | Electoral Commission elects Hayes president |
|      | President Hayes dispatches federal troops to break Great Railroad Strike and withdraws last remaining federal troops from the South |
CHAPTER 17  RECONSTRUCTION, 1863–1877

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTION

Directions: This exercise requires you to construct a valid essay that directly addresses the central issues of the following question. You will have to use facts from the documents provided and from the chapter to prove the position you take in your thesis statement.

For the period between 1863 and 1877, evaluate how the Emancipation Proclamation (1863), the Thirteenth Amendment (1865), and other federal civil rights legislation altered the lives of African Americans. Was this change genuine and permanent, or simply a beginning?

**Document A**

Examine the army proclamation to the citizens of Winchester, Virginia (January 1863), shown on the right.

- Why does it proclaim that only slaves in certain regions are emancipated?
- What does this reveal about the intentions of the Union government concerning slavery elsewhere?
- Why did Lincoln pursue this contradictory policy?
- Were there different points of view within the Union government about how to deal with slaves?

**Document B**

Examine the wood engraving from *Leslie’s Illustrated* (May 5, 1864) below.

- How did the Louisiana state government treat freed African Americans?
- What were these black codes?
- How did Republicans in Congress and northerners react to this?

*Suggested Answer:*

Successful essays should note:

- The slaves in only certain areas were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation because of the ongoing Civil War, 1863 (Document A)
- President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in an effort to broaden the Union war goals, from not only the preservation of the Union, but also the abolition of slavery (Document A)
- Slaves were not free in all of the United States because the Union did not want to lose the border states that allowed slavery (Document A)
- Lincoln pursued a contradictory policy of civil rights because, while he said he wanted the slaves to be free, certain political factors kept him from extending that freedom to all slaves in the country (Document A)
**Document C**
Examine the summary of Reconstruction constitutional amendments shown in the chart on page 578.

- Did these amendments change the lives of African Americans?
- Do they demonstrate a genuine concern for what happened to the freed slaves?

**Document D**
Examine the Harper’s Weekly drawing (May 17, 1879) below.

- Who were the “Exodusters”?
- What were they seeking in Kansas? Were they successful?

![Harper’s Weekly drawing](image)

**Document E**
Examine the maps of the Barrow Plantation for 1860 and 1881 on page 583.

- What does this reveal about the changes in the lives of freed African Americans?
- Why do so many of the sharecroppers and tenants carry the Barrow family name?
- Notice the names beside the cabins. What were a sharecropper and a tenant farmer?

**Document F**
Section 1. The general assembly shall establish, organize, and maintain a system of public schools throughout the state, for the equal benefit of the children thereof between the ages of seven and twenty-one years; but separate schools shall be provided for the children of citizens of African descent.

—1875 ARTICLE XIII. EDUCATION.
The Code of Alabama, v.1. 1923. Atlanta

This is one of hundreds of Jim Crow laws passed by state legislatures between the end of Reconstruction and the civil rights movement of the 1950s.

- What has happened to the rights of African Americans?
- How did this happen?
**Document G**

Examine the letter addressed to Governor Henry C. Warmoth and the photo of Klansmen on page 589.

- *What was the purpose of the Ku Klux Klan?*
- *How did it operate and what methods did it use?*
- *How did the Republican-dominated Congress react?*
- *How did the Klan affect the lives of African Americans?*

**AP* PREP TEST**

Select the response that best answers each question or best completes each sentence.

1. The Reconstruction era:
   a. guaranteed the freed slaves political and social equality.
   b. failed to provide former slaves full and complete freedom.
   c. was more successful than earlier historians realized.
   d. did nothing to help former slaves as they gained freedom.
   e. gave birth to the civil rights movement.

2. One result of the Civil War was:
   a. the recognition of the autonomy and sovereignty of the various states.
   b. the realization that the Constitution created a voluntary union of states.
   c. destruction of the tenets of racism.
   d. an amendment to the Constitution that prevented future secession.
   e. the growing authority that the federal government had over the states.

3. When Andrew Johnson became president:
   a. he was often in disagreement with the Reconstruction policies of the Radical Republicans.
   b. he had the ideal background and temperament to work well with congressional leaders.
   c. he used his authority to make sure that the southern planter elite quickly regained power.
   d. he allowed Congress to take the lead in determining how to treat former Confederates.
   e. he defined Reconstruction as the province of the legislative branch.

4. The southern laws designed to keep former slaves in a virtual state of servitude were known as:
   a. Agricultural laws.
   b. Black codes.
   d. Slave codes.
   e. Jim Crow laws.

5. A critical element in the Republican presidential victory in the election of 1868 was:
   a. the party’s decision to re-nominate the incumbent president Andrew Johnson.
   b. the support of white southerners who were former Whigs and strong unionists.
   c. Ulysses S. Grant’s successful record as the governor of the state of Illinois.
   d. the overwhelming support that former slaves gave to the party in the South.
   e. was the overwhelming success of the Republican platform endorsing black suffrage.

6. The Fourteenth Amendment did all of the following except:
   a. confer American citizenship on all those born or naturalized in the United States.
   b. repudiate the Confederate debt.
   c. prohibit slavery in the United States.
   d. deny former Confederates the right to hold state or national office.
   e. reduce state representation in Congress for those states disfranchising male citizens.

7. During the years following the Civil War:
   a. most African American families moved north in search of socioeconomic opportunity.
   b. former slave males refused to allow their wives and children to work to help support the family.
   c. most southern states passed laws that made it virtually impossible for former slaves to have families.
   d. southern African Americans made few changes in their family structure or in gender relationships.
   e. former slaves were for the first time able to make fundamental decisions regarding familial roles.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Answer Key</th>
<th>1-B</th>
<th>4-B</th>
<th>7-E</th>
<th>10-D</th>
<th>13-B</th>
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<td>5-D</td>
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<td>11-C</td>
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8. By the end of Reconstruction:
   a. the Republican Party had established a power base in the South that lasted until the 1930s.
   b. the Democratic Party had regained political control over all the former Confederate states.
   c. most of the southern states had established a viable two-party system for the very first time.
   d. the vast majority of southerners had been disfranchised and could not vote for either party.
   e. southern Republicanism proved to demonstrate the advantages of party stability.

9. The “crop lien” system:
   a. transformed most rural towns into diversified locally oriented farm communities.
   b. provided an effective means of restoring economic growth to the war-devastated areas of the South.
   c. proved devastating to African American southerners but had little real influence on white farmers.
   d. created a network of state banks that were encouraged to provide low-interest loans to farmers.
   e. compelled most southerners to plant cotton, which undermined the economic vitality of the region.

10. In the North during the 1870s:
    a. factory production expanded to create the world’s largest manufacturing economy.
    b. the high demand for corn led to a remarkable growth of the agricultural sector.
    c. the massive immigration of former slaves forced higher wages and lowered profits.
    d. the number of wage earners surpassed the number of farmers for the first time.
    e. the success of the manufacturing industry proved to make it the largest economy in the world.

11. The Depression of 1873 resulted from:
    a. a collapse in the real estate market that undermined state banks.
    b. an increase in foreign imports that forced American factories to close.
    c. commercial overexpansion and speculative investment in railroads.
    d. the expansion of federal currency in circulation that led to inflation.
    e. the international decrease in demand for manufactured goods.

12. In the 1870s, the Republican Party:
    a. suffered because of economic problems and scandals within the party.
    b. continued to dominate national politics as it had during the Civil War.
    c. lost influence in the South but had no real opposition in the North.
    d. lost the support of the American people and failed to win any elections.
    e. was able to gain national support in the face of Democratic corruption.

13. The Compromise of 1877:
    a. indicated that the Republican Party remained firmly committed to the ideals of equality.
    b. rejected the concept that the federal government would protect the rights of all Americans.
    c. effectively destroyed the Republican Party and ensured the resurgence of the Democrats.
    d. meant that the Civil War had no real lasting influence on American society and culture.
    e. marked the beginning of the second stage of reconstruction.

14. As the age of Reconstruction came to an end:
    a. the Fourteenth Amendment meant that the national government would protect the rights of minorities.
    b. the nation for the most part returned to the way things had been in the years prior to the Civil War.
    c. all of the issues associated with sectional differences were resolved and a true healing had taken place.
    d. the national government showed an increasing interest in protecting the economic rights of corporations.
    e. the success of land reform gave birth to a new economically independent African American populace.

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