

## Chapter 23

# The Reconstruction Era

*To what extent did Reconstruction bring African Americans closer to full citizenship?*

### 23.1 Introduction

By the end of the Civil War, Americans longed for peace. But what kind of peace? One that punished the South for its rebellion? A peace that helped rebuild the devastated region? A peace that helped the 4 million African Americans freed from slavery become full and equal citizens? In his second inaugural address, delivered in 1865, President Abraham Lincoln spoke of a healing peace:

*With malice [hatred] toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish [hold dear] a just and lasting peace.*

The nation would never know how Lincoln planned to achieve such a peace. On April 14, 1865, just five days after the war ended, the president was assassinated while attending a play at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C. The assassin was an actor named John Wilkes Booth. Booth thought that killing Lincoln would somehow save the Confederacy.

After Lincoln's death, Vice President Andrew Johnson became president. The task of rebuilding the South and bringing the Southern states back into the Union would not be easy for Johnson's administration. For while the nation was united again, Americans remained deeply divided.

As you read this chapter, think about Lincoln's dream of "a just and lasting peace." Did the end of the war and the end of slavery lead to a peace based on liberty and justice for all? Did these events bring African Americans closer to the ideals of liberty and justice, including the rights of citizenship?

◀ In the years following the Civil War, African American men were granted the right to vote.



Five days after the Civil War ended, President Lincoln was shot dead by an assassin. The task of rebuilding the nation fell to Vice President Andrew Johnson, who became president when Lincoln died. Pictured here is Lincoln's funeral procession from the White House to the Capitol on April 19, 1865.

**Reconstruction** the period of time after the Civil War in which Southern states were rebuilt and brought back into the Union

**Thirteenth Amendment** a change to the Constitution, ratified in 1865, abolishing slavery in the United States

**Freedmen's Bureau** an agency established by Congress at the end of the Civil War to help and protect newly freed black Americans

During Reconstruction, former slaves gained the rights to marry and to reunite families divided by slavery. Forms such as this one allowed freedmen to keep family records.



## 23.2 Presidential Reconstruction

As the Civil War ended, people in the United States had sharply different views about how to rebuild the Southern states and bring them back into the Union. This period of time came to be called **Reconstruction**. For President Andrew Johnson, a Southerner from Tennessee, Reconstruction had two major aims. First, Southern states had to create new governments that were loyal to the Union and that respected federal authority. Second, slavery had to be abolished once and for all.

These aims left many issues to be **resolved**. For example, who would control the new state governments in the South—former Confederates? Would freed slaves have the same rights as other citizens? And what would the relationship be between freed slaves and former slave owners?

Many Republicans in Congress believed that strong measures would be needed to settle these issues. To them, Reconstruction meant nothing less than a complete remaking of the South based on equal rights and a free-labor economy. The stage was set for a battle over the control—and even the meaning—of Reconstruction.

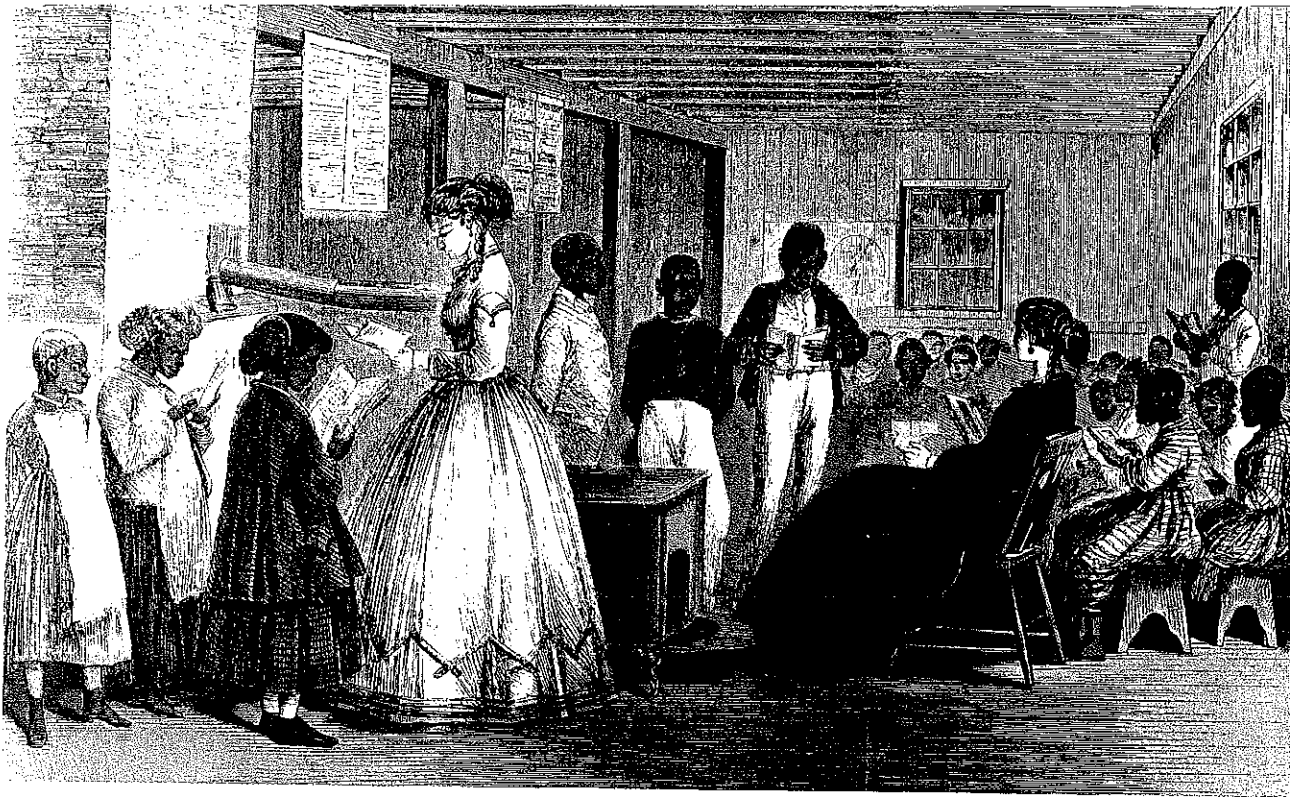
**President Johnson's Reconstruction Plan** In May 1865, President Johnson announced his Reconstruction plan. A former Confederate state could rejoin the Union once it had written a new state constitution, elected a new state government, repealed its act of secession, and canceled its war debts. There was a final requirement as well. Every Southern state had to ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which abolished slavery throughout the United States.

By the fall of 1865, every Southern state had met the president's requirements. The Thirteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution. Presidential Reconstruction had begun.

**The Freedmen's Bureau** For former slaves, called freedmen, the freedom guaranteed by the Thirteenth Amendment brought problems as well as opportunities. Frederick Douglass described the freedman as "free from the individual master but a slave of society." Douglass wrote,

*He had neither money, property, nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dusty road under his feet . . . He was turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute [penniless] to the open sky.*

To assist former slaves, Congress established the **Freedmen's Bureau** in March 1865. Over the next four years, the bureau provided food and medical care to both blacks and whites in the South. It helped freedmen arrange for wages and good working conditions. It also distributed some land in 40-acre plots to "loyal refugees and freedmen."



Some whites, however, attacked the bureau as an example of Northern interference in the South. Ultimately, the hope of many freedmen for “forty acres and a mule” died when Congress refused to take land away from Southern whites.

The most lasting benefit of the Freedmen’s Bureau was in education. Thousands of former slaves, both young and old, flocked to free schools built by the bureau. Long after the bureau was gone, such institutions as Howard University in Washington, D.C., continued to provide educational opportunities for African Americans.

**Black Codes** As new state governments took power in the South, many Republicans in Congress were alarmed to see that they were headed by the same people who had led the South before the war—wealthy white planters. Once in office, these leaders began passing laws known as **black codes** to control their former slaves.

The black codes served three purposes. The first was to limit the rights of freedmen. Generally, former slaves received the rights to marry, to own property, to work for wages, and to sue in court. But they did not have other rights of citizenship. Blacks, for example, could not vote or serve on juries in the South.

The second purpose of the black codes was to help planters find workers to replace their slaves. The codes required freedmen to work. Those without jobs could be arrested and hired out to planters. The codes also limited freedmen to farming or jobs requiring few skills. African Americans could not enter most trades or start businesses.

The third purpose of the black codes was to keep freedmen at the bottom of the social order in the South. Most codes called for the segregation of blacks and whites in public places.

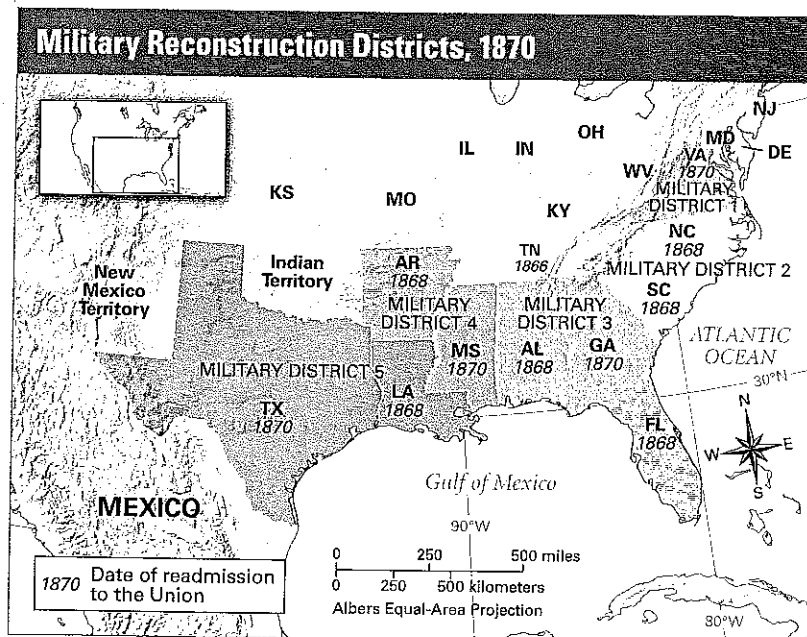
The Freedmen’s Bureau built more than 1,000 schools for African Americans between 1865 and 1872.

**black codes** laws passed in 1855 and 1856 in the former Confederate states to limit the rights and freedoms of African Americans

**civil rights** the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to all people as citizens, especially equal treatment under the law

**Fourteenth Amendment** a change to the Constitution, ratified in 1868, granting citizenship to anyone born in the United States and guaranteeing all citizens equal protection of the law

Based on the belief that the South had no legal governments, Congress reorganized the South into the five military districts shown here. Tennessee, which met the standards for readmission before the military districts were established in 1867, was not included in one.



### 23.3 Congressional Reconstruction

As 1865 came to a close, President Johnson announced that Reconstruction was over. The Southern states were ready to rejoin the Union.

A group of Republicans in Congress did not agree with Johnson. Known as the Radical Republicans, these lawmakers had an additional goal for Reconstruction. They believed that the South would not be completely rebuilt until freedmen were granted the full rights of citizenship.

Radical Republicans wanted the federal government to take a more active role in Reconstruction—a role that would involve tougher requirements for restoring Southern governments. In the House of Representatives, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania led the Radical Republicans. In the Senate, they were led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts.

Early in 1866, Radical Republicans joined with more moderate lawmakers to enact two bills designed to help freedmen. The first extended the life of the Freedmen's Bureau. The second was the Civil Rights Act of 1866. It struck at the black codes by declaring freedmen to be full citizens with the same **civil rights** as whites. Johnson declared both bills unconstitutional and vetoed them. An angry Congress overrode his vetoes.

**The Fourteenth Amendment** To further protect the rights of African Americans, Congress approved the **Fourteenth Amendment**. This amendment granted citizenship to "all people born or naturalized in the United States." It also guaranteed all citizens "the equal protection of the laws." This meant that state governments could not treat some citizens as less equal than others.

President Johnson opposed the Fourteenth Amendment and called on voters to throw Republican lawmakers out of office. Instead, Republican candidates won a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress in the 1866 election. From then on, Congress controlled Reconstruction.

#### Military Reconstruction Act

Early in 1867, Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Act. Once again, it did so over Johnson's veto. This plan divided the South into five military districts, each governed by a general supported by federal troops. The state governments set up under Johnson's Reconstruction plan were declared illegal. New governments were to be formed by Southerners loyal to the United States—both black and white. Southerners who had supported the Confederacy were denied the right to vote.

Congress also passed two acts designed to reduce Johnson's power to interfere with congressional Reconstruction. The Command of the Army Act limited his power over the army. The Tenure of Office Act barred him from firing certain federal officials without the Senate's consent. President Johnson blasted both laws as unconstitutional. Then, to prove his point, he fired one of the officials protected under the Tenure of Office Act.

**President Johnson Is Impeached** The House of Representatives responded to Johnson's challenge by voting to impeach the president. Besides violating the Tenure of Office Act, the House charged, Johnson had brought "the high office of the President of the United States into contempt, ridicule, and disgrace, to the scandal of all good citizens."

During his trial in the Senate, the president's lawyers argued that Johnson's only "crime" had been to oppose Congress. If he were removed from office for that reason, they warned, "no future President will be safe who happens to differ with a majority of the House and Senate."

Two-thirds of the Senate had to find the president guilty to remove him from office. Despite heavy pressure to convict him, 7 Republicans and 12 Democrats voted "not guilty." Johnson escaped removal from office by one vote, but he had lost his power.

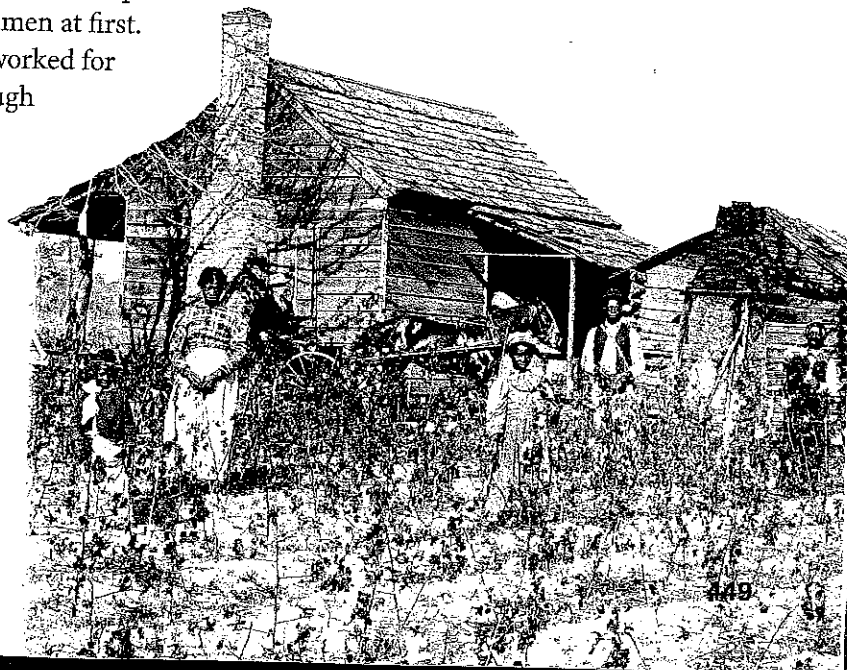
**Sharecropping** While Congress and the president battled over Reconstruction, African Americans in the South worked to build new lives. Most former slaves desperately wanted land to farm but had no money to buy it. Meanwhile, former slave owners needed workers to farm their land but had no money to pay them. Out of the needs of both groups came a farming system called sharecropping.

Planters who turned to sharecropping divided their land into small plots. They rented these plots to individual tenant farmers—farmers who paid rent for the land they worked. A few tenants paid the rent for their plots in cash. But most paid their rent by giving the landowner a portion of what they raised. This payment of crops was called a share. Usually it was about a third or a half of the tenant's crop.

Sharecropping looked promising to freedmen at first. They liked being independent farmers who worked for themselves. In time, they hoped to earn enough money to buy a farm of their own.

However, most sharecroppers had to borrow money from planters to buy the food, seeds, tools, and supplies they needed to survive until harvest. Few ever earned enough from their crops to pay back what they owed. Rather than leading to independence, share-cropping usually led to a life-time of poverty and debt.

Sharecroppers, such as these cotton growers, rented their land from plantation owners. In exchange, most paid one-third to one-half of their crops back to the landowners.



**Fifteenth Amendment** a change to the Constitution, ratified in 1870, declaring that states cannot deny anyone the right to vote because of race or color, or because the person was once a slave

## 23.4 Southern Reconstruction

Under the terms of the Military Reconstruction Act, the U.S. Army returned to the South in 1867. The first thing it did was begin to register voters. Because Congress had banned former Confederates from voting, the right to vote in the South was limited to three groups: freedmen, white Southerners who had opposed the war, and Northerners who had moved south after the war.

**The South's New Voters** African Americans made up the South's largest group of new voters. Most black voters joined the Republican Party—the party of Lincoln and emancipation.

White Southerners who had not supported secession were the next largest group. Many were poor farmers who had never voted before. In their eyes, the Democratic Party was the party of wealthy planters and secession. As a result, they also supported the Republican Party. Southern Democrats were appalled. They saw any white man who voted Republican as a traitor to the South. Democrats scorned such people as scalawags, or worthless scoundrels.

The last group of new voters were Northerners who had moved south after the war. Southerners called these newcomers “carpetbaggers” after a type of handbag used by many travelers. They saw carpetbaggers as fortune hunters who had come south to “fatten” themselves on Southerners’ misfortunes.

**The Election of 1868** New voters in the South cast their first ballots in the 1868 presidential election. The Republican candidate was former Union general Ulysses S. Grant. Grant supported Reconstruction and promised to protect the rights of African Americans in the South. His Democratic opponent, Horatio Seymour, promised to end Reconstruction and return the South to its traditional leaders—white Democrats.

Seymour won a majority of white votes. Grant, however, was elected with the help of half a million black votes. The election's lesson to Republicans was that if they wanted to keep control of the White House and Congress, they needed the support of African American voters.

**The Fifteenth Amendment** In 1869, at President Grant's urging, Congress passed the **Fifteenth Amendment**. This amendment said that a citizen's right to vote “shall not be denied . . . on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” It guaranteed every male citizen the right to vote, regardless of race.

This poster—which pictures students, soldiers, preachers, teachers, and lawmakers—celebrated the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment.



With the passage of this amendment, most abolitionists felt their work was done. The American Anti-Slavery Society declared the Fifteenth Amendment to be “the capstone and completion of our movement; the fulfillment of our pledge to the Negro race; since it secures to them equal political rights with the white race.”

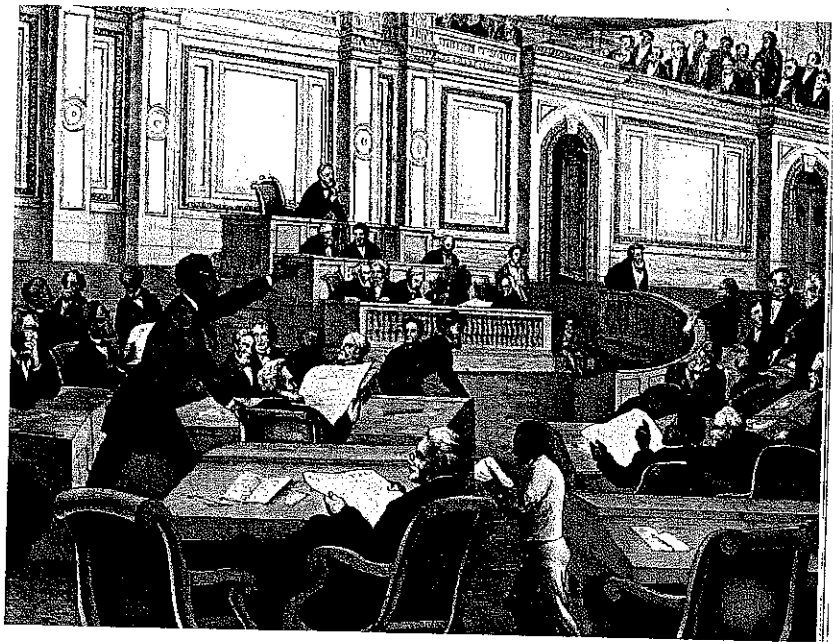
**New State Constitutions** When the army finished registering voters, Southern Reconstruction got underway. Across the South, delegates were elected to constitutional conventions. About a fourth of those elected were African Americans.

The conventions met and wrote new constitutions for their states. These constitutions were the most progressive, or advanced, in the nation. They guaranteed the right to vote to every adult male, regardless of race. They ended imprisonment for debt. They also established the first public schools in the South. The Georgia constitution stated that these schools should be “forever free to all the children of the state.” However, under the new state constitutions, these schools were open only to whites.

**New State Governments** Elections were then held to fill state offices. To the dismay of Southern Democrats, a majority of those elected were Republicans. About a fifth were African Americans.

The South’s new state governments quickly ratified the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. By 1870, every Southern state had finished this final step of Reconstruction and rejoined the Union.

Next, Southern governments turned to the task of rebuilding. Work was begun on damaged roads, bridges, and railroads. Schools and hospitals were built. To pay for these projects, state legislatures raised taxes. Between 1860 and 1870, taxes in the South increased by up to 400 percent.



**African Americans in Office** About a fifth of the South’s new officeholders were African Americans. Blacks served in every Southern legislature and held high offices in three states. Twenty-two African Americans represented their states in Congress—20 in the House and 2 in the Senate. After watching these representatives, many of whom had been born slaves, Pennsylvania congressman James G. Blaine said,

*The colored men who took their seats in both the Senate and House did not appear ignorant or helpless. They were as a rule studious, earnest, ambitious men, whose public conduct . . . would be honorable to any race.*

During Reconstruction, many African Americans were elected to the House of Representatives and the Senate. Robert B. Elliott, a congressman from South Carolina, delivers a speech in support of civil rights.



Thomas Nast's political cartoon "Is This a Republican Form of Government?" condemns Northern indifference to the violence African Americans endured as Reconstruction ended.

## 23.5 The End of Reconstruction

Most whites in the South bitterly resented the Southern Reconstruction governments. They hated the fact that these governments had been "forced" on them by Yankees.

Many taxpayers also blamed their soaring tax bills on corruption—the misuse of public office for personal gain—by the South's new leaders. While some Southern officeholders did line their pockets with public funds, most, whether black or white, were honest, capable leaders. Still, when taxes increased, opposition to the new state governments increased as well.

But what bothered many Southerners most about their Reconstruction governments was seeing former slaves voting and holding public office. Across the South, Democrats vowed to regain power and return their states to "white man's rule."

**Violence Against African Americans** At first, Democrats tried to win black voters away from the Republican Party. When that tactic failed, they attempted to use legal means to keep blacks from voting or from taking office. In Georgia, for example, the legislature refused to seat elected black lawmakers until they were forced to by the state supreme court. When legal methods failed, whites turned to violence.

Throughout the South, whites formed secret societies to drive African Americans out of political life. The most infamous of these groups was the Ku Klux Klan. Dressed in long, hooded robes and armed with guns and swords, Klansmen did their work at night. They started by threatening black voters and officeholders. African Americans who did not heed their threats were beaten, tarred and feathered, and even murdered.

**The Enforcement Acts** In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed three laws to combat violence against African Americans. Known as the Enforcement Acts, these laws made it illegal to prevent another person from voting by bribery, force, or scare tactics.

President Grant sent troops into the South to enforce these acts. Hundreds of people were arrested for violence against blacks. Those who were brought to trial, however, were seldom convicted. Few witnesses and jurors wanted to risk the Klan's revenge by speaking out against one of its members.

**The Amnesty Act of 1872** By this time, most Northerners were losing interest in Reconstruction and the plight of the freedmen. It was time, many people said, to "let the South alone."

One indication of this changing attitude was the passage of the Amnesty Act of 1872. Amnesty means forgiveness for past offenses. The Amnesty Act allowed most former Confederates to vote once again.



The effects of the Amnesty Act were seen almost immediately. By 1876, Democrats had regained control of all but three states in the South. Republicans clung to power in South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida, but only with the help of federal troops.

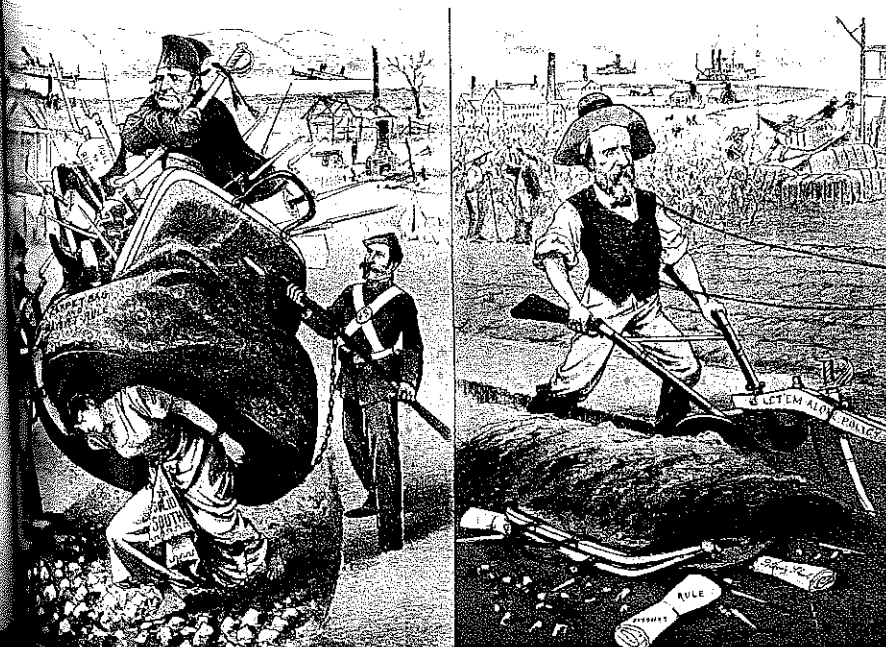
**The Disputed Election of 1876** In 1876, Americans went to the polls to choose a new president. The Democrats nominated New York governor Samuel J. Tilden as their candidate. Rutherford B. Hayes was the Republican nominee. When the votes were counted, Tilden won a majority of popular votes and 184 electoral votes, just one short of the 185 needed for election. Hayes received 165 electoral votes. Twenty electoral votes from four states were in dispute.

Congress, which was controlled by Republicans, appointed a commission to decide which candidate should get the disputed electoral votes. The commission awarded all 20 to Hayes, giving him exactly the 185 electoral votes he needed to win. The Democrats threatened to block the commission's decision. Inauguration day grew near with no new president in sight.

**The Compromise of 1877** After weeks of negotiation, Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress agreed to a compromise. The Democrats accepted the electoral commission's decision, allowing Hayes to become president. In return, Hayes agreed to withdraw the remaining federal troops still occupying Southern states.

Once President Hayes withdrew all remaining federal troops from the South in 1877, Reconstruction was officially over. After that, Democrats quickly took control of the last Southern states. "This is a white man's country," boasted South Carolina senator Ben Tillman, "and white men must govern it."

Most white Southerners celebrated the end of Reconstruction. But for freedmen, the return of the South to "white man's rule" was a giant step backward. "The whole South—every state in the South," observed a Louisiana freedman, "has got into the hands of the very men that held us as slaves."



This cartoon compares the Reconstruction policies of President Grant and President Hayes, who succeeded Grant in office. In the first panel, Grant is shown riding in a carpetbag supported by an oppressed South. Two soldiers symbolize martial law. In the second panel, Hayes is shown plowing under the carpetbag. The label on the plow reads "Let 'Em Alone Policy." Which president do you think the cartoonist favored?



This painting shows a new South rising from the ashes of the Civil War. Although Southern leaders hoped this would be the future of the South, most whites and blacks continued to live in poverty.

## 23.6 Reconstruction Reversed

With Reconstruction over, Southern leaders talked of building a “New South” humming with mills, factories, and cities. Between 1880 and 1900, the number of textile mills in the South grew rapidly. Birmingham, Alabama, became a major iron-making center. Still, most Southerners, black and white, remained trapped in an “Old South” of poverty.

**Losing Ground in Education** During Reconstruction, freedmen had pinned their hopes for a better life on education provided by the South’s first public schools. When Southern Democrats regained control of states, however, they cut spending on education. “Free schools are not a necessity,” explained the governor of Virginia. Schools, he said, “are a luxury . . . to be paid for, like any other luxury, by the people who wish their benefits.”

As public funding dried up, many schools closed. Those that stayed open often charged fees. By the 1880s, only about half of all black children in the South were attending school.

**Losing Voting Rights** Southern Democrats also reversed political gains made by freedmen after the war. Many Southern states passed laws requiring citizens

who wanted to vote to pay a poll tax. The tax was set high enough that voting, like education, became a luxury that many black Southerners could not afford.

Some Southern states also required citizens to pass a literacy test to show they could read before allowing them to vote. These tests were designed so that any African American, regardless of his education, would fail.

In theory, these laws applied equally to blacks and whites and, for that reason, did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment. In practice, however, whites were excused from paying poll taxes or taking literacy tests by a so-called “grandfather clause” in the laws. This clause said the taxes and tests did not apply to any man whose father or grandfather could vote on January 1, 1867. Since no blacks could vote on that date, the grandfather clause applied only to whites.

African Americans protested that these laws denied them their constitutional right to vote. The Supreme Court, however, found that the new voting laws did not violate the Fifteenth Amendment because they did not deny anyone the right to vote on the basis of race.

**Drawing a “Color Line”** During Reconstruction, most Southern states had outlawed segregation in public places. When Democrats returned to power, they reversed these laws and drew a “color line”

between blacks and whites in public life. Whites called the new segregation acts Jim Crow laws. Jim Crow was a black character in an entertainer's act in the mid-1800s.

Not all white Southerners supported segregation. When a Jim Crow law was proposed in South Carolina, a *Charleston News and Courier* editorial tried to show how unjust it was by taking segregation to ridiculous extremes.

*If there must be Jim Crow cars on railroads, there should be Jim Crow cars on the street railways. Also on all passenger boats . . . There should be Jim Crow waiting saloons [waiting rooms] at all stations, and Jim Crow eating houses . . . There should be Jim Crow sections of the jury box, and a separate Jim Crow . . . witness stand in every court—and a Jim Crow Bible for colored witnesses to kiss.*

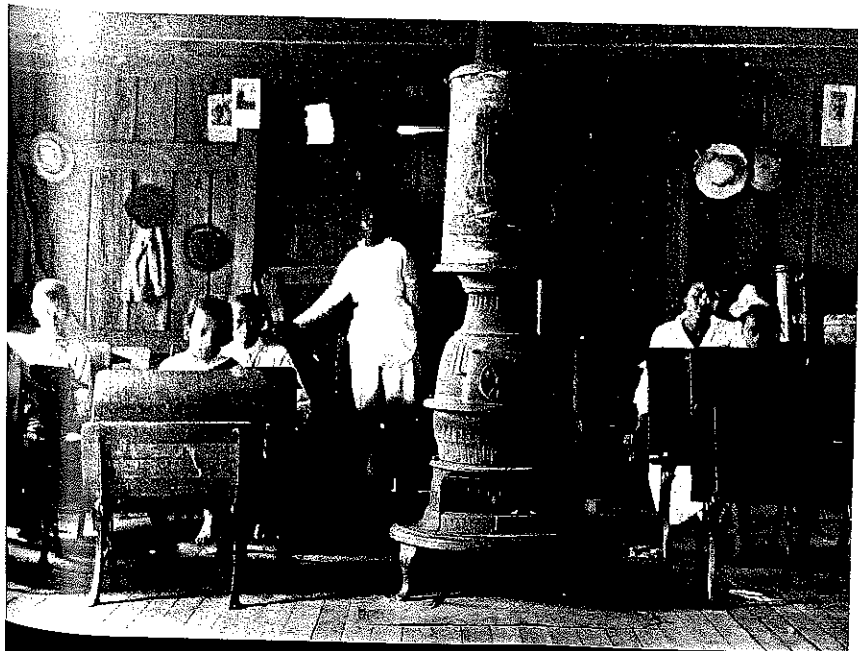
Instead of being a joke, as intended, most of these ridiculous suggestions soon became laws.

**Plessy v. Ferguson** African Americans argued that segregation laws violated the Fourteenth Amendment's guarantee of equal protection of the laws. Homer Plessy, who was arrested for refusing to obey a Jim Crow law, took his protest all the way to the Supreme Court.

The Supreme Court decided his case, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in 1896. The majority of the Supreme Court justices found that segregation laws did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment as long as the facilities available to both races were roughly equal. Justice John Marshall Harlan, a former slaveholder, disagreed. In his dissenting opinion, he wrote, "Our Constitution is color blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens."

After the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy*, states passed additional Jim Crow laws. Blacks and whites attended separate schools, played in separate parks, and sat in separate sections in theaters. Despite the Court's decision that these separate facilities must be equal, those set aside for African Americans were almost always **inferior** to facilities labeled "whites only."

**Jim Crow laws** laws enforcing segregation of blacks and whites in the South after the Civil War



For decades, African Americans lived under segregation legalized by the *Plessy* decision. Separate facilities for blacks were rarely equal. This photograph is of a one-room segregated school in Kentucky in 1916.

Two units of African American cavalrymen, the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, fought in the Indian wars. Known as "Buffalo Soldiers," the men served loyally but were often mistreated by the white settlers they were protecting. Twenty-three Buffalo Soldiers earned the Medal of Honor for heroism.



### 23.7 Responding to Segregation

African Americans responded to segregation in many ways. The boldest protested openly. Doing so, however, was dangerous. Blacks who spoke out risked being attacked by white mobs. Some were lynched, or murdered, often by hanging, for speaking out against "white rule." During the 1890s, an African American was lynched somewhere in the United States almost every day.

**African American Migration** Thousands of African Americans responded to segregation by leaving the South. A few chose to return to Africa. In 1878, some 200 Southern blacks chartered a ship and sailed to Liberia, a nation in West Africa that had been founded in 1821 for the settlement of freed American slaves.

Many more African Americans migrated to other parts of the United States. Not only were they pushed from the South by racism and poverty, but they were pulled by the lure of better opportunities and more equal treatment. Some sought a new life as wage earners by migrating to cities in the North. There, they competed for jobs with recent immigrants from Europe and often faced racism, if not Southern-style segregation. Others headed to the West, where they found work as cowboys and Indian fighters. Two all-black U.S. Cavalry units known as the Buffalo Soldiers fought on the front lines of the Indian wars. Some blacks found new homes with American Indian nations.

Thousands of black families left the South for Kansas in the Exodus of 1879. The "exodusters," as the migrants were known, faced many hardships on their journey west. Bands of armed whites patrolled roads in Kansas in an effort to drive the migrants away. Still, the exodusters pushed on, saying, "We had rather suffer and be free."

**Self-Help** Most African Americans, however, remained in the South. They worked hard in their families, churches, and communities to improve their lives. While most blacks farmed for a living, a growing number started their own businesses. Between 1865 and 1903, the number of black-owned businesses in the South soared from about 2,000 to 25,000.

Families, churches, and communities also banded together to build schools and colleges for black children. Because of these efforts, literacy among African Americans rose rapidly. When slavery ended in 1865, only 5 percent of African Americans could read. By 1900, more than 50 percent could read and write.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you learned about the period of Reconstruction in the South from 1865 to 1877.

**Presidential Reconstruction** Under President Johnson's Reconstruction plan, every Southern state rejoined the Union after it had written a new constitution, elected a new state government, cancelled its war debts, and ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery.

**Congressional Reconstruction** Congressional Reconstruction began in 1866, when Republican leaders in Congress worked to give freedmen the full rights of citizenship. Congress passed, and the states ratified, the Fourteenth Amendment, which gave citizenship to all people born in the United States and equal protection of the law to all citizens.

**Southern Reconstruction** Under the Military Reconstruction Act, federal troops returned to the South in 1867 and began registering voters. New Southern voters helped former Union general Ulysses S. Grant become president. In 1869, Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which protected the right of African American men to vote. Many blacks were elected to state government offices during this third phase of Reconstruction.

**The End of Reconstruction** Southern whites used legal means as well as violence to keep blacks from voting or taking office. Reconstruction officially ended in 1877, when President Rutherford B. Hayes withdrew all remaining federal troops from the South once he took office after the disputed election of 1876.

**Reconstruction Reversed** After Reconstruction, African Americans lost educational and political gains. Many Southern states closed schools that had been opened to freedmen. They also passed laws designed to keep blacks from voting. Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* legalized many forms of discrimination against blacks.

**Responding to Segregation** Many African Americans responded to segregation by leaving the South. Many migrated to other parts of the United States. Those who remained in the South worked hard to improve their lives.

This Thomas Nast cartoon celebrates the Civil Rights Bill of 1875. This bill and other Reconstruction legislation tried to give full citizenship rights to African Americans.



The Granger Collection, New York