Reconstruction

1863–1877

CONTENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading and studying this chapter, you should be able to:

- Identify the challenges facing reconstruction efforts.
- Describe President Johnson’s reconstruction plan and the ways in which it aligned and differed from Lincoln’s.
- Recount the significance of the Fourteenth Amendment and why President Johnson advised southern states to reject it. Explain the terms of radical reconstruction and how Johnson’s interventions led some in Congress to seek his impeachment.
- Describe the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment, and explain why some women’s rights advocates were dissatisfied with it.
- Describe how congressional reconstruction altered life in the South. Explain why the North abandoned reconstruction, including the role of Grant’s troubled presidency and the election of 1877 in this abandonment.

IN 1856, JOHN RAPIER, A FREE BLACK BARBER IN FLORENCE, ALABAMA, urged his four freeborn sons to flee the increasingly repressive and dangerous South. James T. Rapier chose Canada, where he went to live with his uncle in a largely black community and studied Greek and Latin in a log schoolhouse. In a letter to his father, he vowed, “I will endeavor to do my part in solving the problems [of African Americans] in my native land.”

The Union victory in the Civil War gave James Rapier the opportunity to redeem his pledge. In 1865, after more than eight years of exile, the twenty-seven-year-old Rapier returned to Alabama, where he presided over the first political gathering of former slaves in the state. He soon discovered, however, that Alabama’s whites found it agonizingly difficult
to accept defeat and black freedom. They responded to the revolutionary changes under the banner “White Man — Right or Wrong — Still the White Man!”

During the elections of 1868, when Rapier and other Alabama blacks vigorously supported the Republican ticket, the recently organized Ku Klux Klan went on a bloody rampage. A mob of 150 outraged whites scoured Rapier’s neighborhood seeking four black politicians they claimed were trying to “Africanize Alabama.” They caught and hanged three, but the “nigger carpetbagger from Canada” escaped. After briefly considering fleeing the state, Rapier decided to stay and fight.

In 1872, Rapier won election to the House of Representatives, where he joined six other black congressmen in Washington, D.C. Defeated for reelection in 1874 in a campaign marked by ballot-box stuffing, Rapier turned to cotton farming. But persistent black poverty and unrelenting racial violence convinced him that blacks could never achieve equality and prosperity in the South. He purchased land in Kansas and urged Alabama’s blacks to escape with him. In 1883, however, before he could leave Alabama, Rapier died of tuberculosis at the age of forty-five.

Union general Carl Schurz had foreseen many of the troubles Rapier encountered in the postwar South. In 1865, Schurz concluded that the Civil War was “a revolution but half accomplished.” Northern victory had freed the slaves, he observed, but it had not changed former slaveholders’ minds about blacks’ unfitness for freedom. Left to themselves, whites would “introduce some new system of forced labor, not perhaps exactly slavery in its old form but something similar to it.” To defend their freedom, Schurz concluded, blacks would need federal protection, land of their own, and voting rights. Until whites “cut loose from the past, it will be a dangerous experiment to put Southern society upon its own legs.”

As Schurz understood, the end of the war did not mean peace. Indeed, the nation entered one of its most turbulent eras — Reconstruction. Answers to the era’s central questions — about the defeated South’s status within the Union and the meaning of freedom for ex-slaves — came not only from Washington, D.C., where the federal government played an active role, but also from the state legislatures and county seats of the South, where blacks eagerly participated in politics. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution strengthened the claim of African Americans to equal rights. The struggle also took place on the South’s farms and plantations, where former slaves sought to become free workers while former slaveholders clung to the Old South. A small band of white women joined in the struggle for racial
equality, and soon their crusade broadened to include gender equality. Their attempts to secure voting rights for women were thwarted, however, just as were the efforts of blacks and their allies to secure racial equality. In the contest to determine the consequences of Confederate defeat and emancipation, white Southerners prevailed.

Wartime Reconstruction

Reconstruction did not wait for the end of war. As the odds of a northern victory increased, thinking about reunification quickened. Immediately, a question arose: Who had authority to devise a plan for reconstructing the Union? President Abraham Lincoln firmly believed that reconstruction was a matter of executive responsibility. Congress just as firmly asserted its jurisdiction. Fueling the argument were significant differences about the terms of reconstruction.

In their eagerness to formulate a plan for political reunification, neither Lincoln nor Congress gave much attention to the South’s land and labor problems. But as the war rapidly eroded slavery and traditional plantation agriculture, Yankee military commanders in the Union-occupied areas of the Confederacy had no choice but to oversee the emergence of a new labor system. Freedmen’s aspirations played little role in the plans that emerged.

“To Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds”

As early as 1863, Lincoln began contemplating how “to bind up the nation’s wounds” and achieve “a lasting peace.” While deep compassion for the enemy guided his thinking about peace, his plan for reconstruction aimed primarily at shortening the war and ending slavery.

James T. Rapier

In 1874, when Representative James T. Rapier spoke before Congress on behalf of a civil rights bill, he described the humiliation of being denied service at inns all along his route from Montgomery to Washington. Elsewhere in the world, he said, class and religion were invoked to defend discrimination. But in America, “our distinction is color.” Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.
Lincoln’s Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction in December 1863 set out his terms. He offered a full pardon, restoring property (except slaves) and political rights, to most rebels willing to renounce secession and to accept emancipation. When 10 percent of a state’s voting population had taken an oath of allegiance, the state could organize a new government and be readmitted into the Union. Lincoln’s plan did not require ex-rebels to extend social or political rights to ex-slaves, nor did it anticipate a program of long-term federal assistance to freedmen. Clearly, the president looked forward to the rapid, forgiving restoration of the broken Union.

Lincoln’s easy terms enraged abolitionists such as Wendell Phillips of Boston, who charged that the president “makes the negro’s freedom a mere sham.” He “is willing that the negro should be free but seeks nothing else for him.” Comparing Lincoln to the Union’s most passive general, Phillips declared, “What McClellan was on the battlefield — ‘Do as little hurt as possible!’ — Lincoln is in civil affairs — ‘Make as little change as possible!’” Phillips and other northern Radicals called instead for a thorough overhaul of southern society. Their ideas proved to be too drastic for most Republicans during the war years, but Congress agreed that Lincoln’s plan was inadequate.

In July 1864, Congress put forward a plan of its own. Congressman Henry Winter Davis of Maryland and Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio jointly sponsored a bill that demanded that at least half of the voters in a conquered rebel state take the oath of allegiance before reconstruction could begin. The Wade-Davis bill also banned almost all ex-Confederates from participating in the drafting of new state constitutions. Finally, the bill guaranteed the equality of freedmen before the law. Congress’s reconstruction would be neither as quick nor as forgiving as Lincoln’s. When Lincoln refused to sign the bill and let it die, Wade and Davis charged the president with usurpation of power.

Undeterred, Lincoln continued to nurture the formation of loyal state governments under his own plan. Four states — Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Virginia — fulfilled the president’s requirements, but Congress refused to seat representatives from the “Lincoln states.” Lincoln admitted that a government based on only 10 percent was not ideal, but he argued, “We shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it.” Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner responded, “The eggs of crocodiles can produce only crocodiles.” In his last public address in April 1865, Lincoln defended his plan but for the first time expressed publicly his endorsement of suffrage for southern blacks, at least “the very intelligent, and . . . those who serve our cause as soldiers.” The announcement demonstrated that Lincoln’s thinking about reconstruction was still evolving. Four days later, he was dead.

Land and Labor

Of all the problems raised by the North’s victory in the war, none proved more critical than the South’s transition from slavery to free labor. As federal armies invaded and occupied the Confederacy, hundreds of thousands of slaves became free workers. In addition, Union armies controlled vast territories in the South where legal title to land had become unclear. The Confiscation Acts passed during the war punished “traitors” by taking away their property. The question of what to do with federally occupied land and how to organize labor on it engaged ex-slaves, ex-slaveholders, Union military commanders, and federal government officials long before the war ended.
In the Mississippi valley, occupying federal troops announced a new labor code. It required landholders to give up whipping, sign contracts with ex-slaves, pay wages, and provide food, housing, and medical care. The code required black laborers to enter into contracts, work diligently, and remain subordinate and obedient. Military leaders clearly had no intention of promoting a social or economic revolution. Instead, they sought to restore traditional plantation agriculture with wage labor. The effort resulted in a hybrid system that one contemporary called “compulsory free labor,” something that satisfied no one.

Planters complained because the new system fell short of slavery. Blacks could not be “transformed by proclamation,” a Louisiana sugar planter declared. Without the right to whip, he argued, the new labor system did not have a chance. Either Union soldiers must “compel the negroes to work,” or the planters themselves must “be authorized and sustained in using force.”

African Americans found the new regime too reminiscent of slavery to be called free labor. Its chief deficiency, they believed, was the failure to provide them with land of their own. Freedmen believed they had a moral right to land because they and their ancestors had worked it without compensation for centuries. “What’s the use of being free if you don’t own land enough to be buried in?” one man asked. Several wartime developments led freedmen to believe that the federal government planned to undergird black freedom with landownership.

In January 1865, General William Tecumseh Sherman set aside part of the coast south of Charleston for black settlement. By June 1865, some 40,000 freedmen sat on 400,000 acres of “Sherman land.” In addition, in March 1865, Congress passed a bill establishing the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. The Freedmen’s Bureau, as it was called, distributed food and clothing to destitute Southerners and eased the transition of blacks from slaves to free persons. Congress also authorized the agency to divide abandoned and confiscated land into 40-acre plots, to rent them to freedmen, and eventually to sell them “with such title as the United States can convey.” By June 1865, the Bureau had situated nearly 10,000 black families on a half million acres abandoned by fleeing planters. Other ex-slaves eagerly anticipated farms of their own.

Despite the flurry of activity, wartime reconstruction failed to produce agreement about whether the president or Congress had the authority to devise policy or what proper policy should be.

The African American Quest for Autonomy

Ex-slaves never had any doubt about what they wanted from freedom. They had only to contemplate what they had been denied as slaves. Slaves had to remain on their plantations; freedom allowed blacks to see what was on the other side of the hill. Slaves had to be at work in the fields by dawn; freedom permitted blacks to sleep through a sunrise. Freedmen also tested the etiquette of racial subordination. “Lizzie’s maid passed me today when I was coming from church without speaking to me,” huffed one plantation mistress.

To whites, emancipation looked like pure anarchy. Blacks, they said, had reverted to their natural condition: lazy, irresponsible, and wild. Actually, former slaves were experimenting with freedom, but they could not long afford to roam the countryside, neglect work, and casually provoke whites. Soon, most were back at work in whites’ kitchens and fields.
But they continued to dream of land and independence. “The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land,” one former slave declared in 1865, “and turn it and till it by our own labor.” Another group of former slaves in South Carolina declared that they wanted land, “not a Master or owner[,] Neither a driver with his Whip.”

Slavery had deliberately kept blacks illiterate, and freedmen emerged from bondage eager to learn to read and write. “I wishes the Childern all in School,” one black veteran asserted. “It is beter for them then to be their Surveing a mistes [mistress].” Freemen looked on schools as “first proof of their independence.”

The restoration of broken families was another persistent black aspiration. Thousands of freedmen took to the roads in 1865 to look for kin who had been sold away or to free those who were being held illegally as slaves. A black soldier from Missouri wrote his daughters that he was coming for them. “I will have you if it cost me my life,” he declared. “Your Miss Kitty said that I tried to steal you,” he told them. “But I’ll let her know that god never intended for a man to steal his own flesh and blood.” And he swore that “if she meets me with ten thousand soldiers, she [will] meet her enemy.”

Independent worship was another continuing aspiration. African Americans greeted freedom with a mass exodus from white churches, where they had been required to worship when slaves. Some joined the newly established southern branches of all-black northern churches, such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Others formed black versions of the major southern denominations, Baptists and Methodists.

**REVIEW**

To what extent did Lincoln's wartime plan for reconstruction reflect the concerns of newly freed slaves?

**Presidential Reconstruction**

Abraham Lincoln died on April 15, 1865, just hours after John Wilkes Booth shot him at a Washington, D.C., theater. Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase immediately administered the oath of office to Vice President Andrew Johnson of Tennessee. Congress had adjourned in March and would not reconvene until December. Throughout the summer and fall, Johnson drew up and executed a plan of reconstruction without congressional advice.

Congress returned to the capital in December to find that, as far as the president and former Confederates were concerned, reconstruction was completed. Most Republicans, however, thought Johnson’s plan made far too few demands of ex-rebels and made a mockery of the sacrifice of Union soldiers. They claimed that Johnson’s leniency had acted as midwife to the rebirth of the Old South, that he had achieved political reunification at the cost of black freedom. Republicans in Congress then proceeded to dismantle Johnson’s program and substitute a program of their own.

**Johnson’s Program of Reconciliation**

Born in 1808 in Raleigh, North Carolina, Andrew Johnson was the son of illiterate parents. Self-educated and ambitious, Johnson moved to Tennessee, where he worked...
as a tailor, accumulated a fortune in land, acquired five slaves, and built a career in politics championing the South’s common white people and assailing its “illegitimate, swaggering, bastard, scrub aristocracy.” The only senator from a Confederate state to remain loyal to the Union, Johnson held the planter class responsible for secession. Less than two weeks before he became president, he announced what he would do to planters if he ever had the chance: “I would arrest them — I would try them — I would convict them and I would hang them.”

A Democrat all his life, Johnson occupied the White House only because the Republican Party in 1864 had needed a vice presidential candidate who would appeal to loyal, Union-supporting Democrats. Johnson vigorously defended states’ rights (but not secession) and opposed Republican efforts to expand the power of the federal government. A steadfast supporter of slavery, Johnson had owned slaves until 1862, when Tennessee rebels, angry at his Unionism, confiscated them. When he grudgingly accepted emancipation, it was more because he hated planters than sympathized with slaves. “Damn the negroes,” he said. “I am fighting those traitorous aristocrats, their masters.” The new president harbored unshakable racist convictions. Africans, Johnson said, were “inferior to the white man in point of intellect — better calculated in physical structure to undergo drudgery and hardship.”

Like Lincoln, Johnson stressed the rapid restoration of civil government in the South. Like Lincoln, he promised to pardon most, but not all, ex-rebels. Johnson recognized the state governments created by Lincoln but set out his own requirements for restoring the other rebel states to the Union. All that the citizens of a state had to do was to renounce the right of secession, deny that the debts of the Confederacy were legal and binding, and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, which became part of the Constitution in December 1865.

Johnson also returned all confiscated and abandoned land to pardoned ex-Confederates, even if it was in the hands of freedmen. Reformers were shocked. Instead of punishing planters as he had promised, Johnson canceled the promising beginnings made by General Sherman and the Freedmen’s Bureau to settle blacks on land of their own. As one freedman observed, “Things was hurt by Mr. Lincoln getting killed.”

**White Southern Resistance and Black Codes**

In the summer of 1865, delegates across the South gathered to draw up the new state constitutions required by Johnson’s plan of reconstruction. They refused to accept even the president’s mild requirements. Refusing to renounce secession, the South Carolina and Georgia conventions merely “repudiated” their secession ordinances, preserving in principle their right to secede. South Carolina and Mississippi refused to disown their Confederate war debts. Mississippi rejected the Thirteenth Amendment, and Alabama rejected it in part. Despite this defiance, Johnson did nothing. White Southerners began to think that by standing up for themselves they could shape the terms of reconstruction.

New state governments across the South adopted a series of laws known as **black codes**, which made a travesty of black freedom. The codes sought to keep ex-slaves subordinate to whites by subjecting them to every sort of discrimination. Several states made it illegal for blacks to own a gun. Mississippi made insulting gestures and language
by blacks a criminal offense. The codes barred blacks from jury duty. Not a single southern state granted any black the right to vote.

At the core of the black codes, however, lay the matter of labor. Legislators sought to hustle freedmen back to the plantations. Whites were almost universally opposed to black landownership. Whitelaw Reid, a northern visitor to the South, found that the “man who should sell small tracts to them would be in actual personal danger.” South Carolina attempted to limit blacks to either farmwork or domestic service by requiring them to pay annual taxes of $10 to $100 to work in any other occupation. Mississippi declared that blacks who did not possess written evidence of employment could be declared vagrants and be subject to involuntary plantation labor. Under so-called apprenticeship laws, courts bound thousands of black children — orphans and others whose parents they deemed unable to support them — to work for planter “guardians.”

Johnson refused to intervene. A staunch defender of states’ rights, he believed that citizens of every state should be free to write their own constitutions and laws. Moreover, Johnson was as eager as other white Southerners to restore white supremacy. “White men alone must manage the South,” he declared.

Johnson also recognized that his do-nothing response offered him political advantage. A conservative Tennessee Democrat at the head of a northern Republican Party, he had begun to look southward for political allies. Despite tough talk about punishing traitors, he personally pardoned fourteen thousand wealthy or high-ranking ex-Confederates. By pardoning powerful whites, by accepting state governments even when they failed to satisfy his minimal demands, and by acquiescing in the black codes, he won useful southern friends.

In the fall elections of 1865, white Southerners dramatically expressed their mood. To represent them in Congress, they chose former Confederates. Of the eighty senators and representatives they sent to Washington, fifteen had served in the Confederate army, ten of them as generals. Another sixteen had served in civil and judicial posts in the Confederacy. Nine others had served in the Confederate Congress. One — Alexander Stephens — had been vice president of the Confederacy. As one Georgian remarked, “It looked as though Richmond had moved to Washington.”

**Expansion of Federal Authority and Black Rights**

Southerners had blundered monumentally. They had assumed that what Andrew Johnson was willing to accept, Republicans would accept as well. But southern intransigence compelled even moderates to conclude that ex-rebels were a “generation of vipers,” still untrustworthy and dangerous. The black codes became a symbol of southern intentions to “restore all of slavery but its name.” “We tell the white men of Mississippi,” the Chicago Tribune roared, “that the men of the North will convert the State of Mississippi into a frog pond before they will allow such laws to disgrace one foot of the soil in which the bones of our soldiers sleep and over which the flag of freedom waves.”

The moderate majority of the Republican Party wanted only assurance that slavery and treason were dead. They did not champion black equality, the confiscation of plantations, or black voting, as did the Radical minority within the party. But southern obstinacy had succeeded in forging unity (at least temporarily) among Republican
factions. In December 1865, Republicans refused to seat the southern representatives elected in the fall elections. Rather than accept Johnson’s claim that the “work of restoration” was done, Congress challenged his executive power.

Republican senator Lyman Trumbull declared that the president’s policy meant that an ex-slave would “be tyrannized over, abused, and virtually reenslaved without some legislation by the nation for his protection.” Early in 1866, the moderates produced two bills that strengthened the federal shield. The first, the Freedmen’s Bureau bill, prolonged the life of the agency established by the previous Congress. Arguing that the Constitution never contemplated a “system for the support of indigent persons,” President Andrew Johnson vetoed the bill. Congress failed by a narrow margin to override the president’s veto.

The moderates designed their second measure, what would become the **Civil Rights Act of 1866**, to nullify the black codes by affirming African Americans’ rights to “full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property as is enjoyed by white citizens.” The act boldly required the end of racial discrimination in state laws and represented an extraordinary expansion of black rights and federal authority. The president argued that the civil rights bill amounted to “unconstitutional invasion of states’ rights” and vetoed it. In essence, he denied that the federal government possessed the authority to protect the civil rights of African Americans.

In April 1866, an incensed Republican Party again pushed the civil rights bill through Congress and overrode the presidential veto. In July, it passed another Freedmen’s Bureau bill and overrode Johnson’s veto. For the first time in American history, Congress had overridden presidential vetoes of major legislation. As a worried South Carolinian observed, Johnson had succeeded in uniting the Republicans and probably touched off “a fight this fall such as has never been seen.”

**Congressional Reconstruction**

By the summer of 1866, President Andrew Johnson and Congress had dropped their gloves and stood toe-to-toe in a bare-knuckle contest unprecedented in American history. Johnson made it clear that he would not budge on either constitutional issues or policy. Moderate Republicans responded by amending the Constitution. But the obstinacy of Johnson and white Southerners pushed Republican moderates ever closer to the Radicals and to acceptance of additional federal intervention in the South. To end presidential interference, Congress voted to impeach the president for the first time since the nation was formed. Soon after, Congress also debated whether to make voting rights color-blind, while women sought to make voting sex-blind as well.

**The Fourteenth Amendment and Escalating Violence**

In June 1866, Congress passed the **Fourteenth Amendment** to the Constitution, and two years later the states ratified it. The most important provisions of this complex
amendment made all native-born or naturalized persons American citizens and prohibited states from abridging the “privileges and immunities” of citizens, depriving them of “life, liberty, or property without due process of law,” and denying them “equal protection of the laws.” By making blacks national citizens, the amendment provided a national guarantee of equality before the law. In essence, it protected blacks against violation by southern state governments.

The Fourteenth Amendment also dealt with voting rights. It gave Congress the right to reduce the congressional representation of states that withheld suffrage from some of its adult male population. In other words, white Southerners could either allow black men to vote or see their representation in Washington slashed. Whatever happened, Republicans stood to benefit from the Fourteenth Amendment. If southern whites granted voting rights to freedmen, Republicans would gain valuable black votes. If whites refused, the number of southern Democrats in Congress would plunge.

The Fourteenth Amendment’s suffrage provisions ignored the small band of women who had emerged from the war demanding “the ballot for the two disenfranchised classes, negroes and women.” Founding the American Equal Rights Association in 1866, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton lobbied for “a government by the people, and the whole people; for the people and the whole people.” They felt betrayed when their old antislavery allies refused to work for their goals. “It was the Negro’s hour,” Frederick Douglass explained. Senator Charles Sumner suggested that woman suffrage could be “the great question of the future.”
The Fourteenth Amendment provided for punishment of any state that excluded
voters on the basis of race but not on the basis of sex. The amendment also introduced the
word male into the Constitution when it referred to a citizen’s right to vote. Stanton pre-
dicted that “if that word ‘male’ be inserted, it will take us a century at least to get it out.”

Tennessee approved the Fourteenth Amendment in July, and Congress promptly
welcomed the state’s representatives and senators back. Had President Johnson coun-
seled other southern states to ratify this relatively mild amendment, they might have
listened. Instead, Johnson advised Southerners to reject the Fourteenth Amendment
and to rely on him to trounce the Republicans in the fall congressional elections.

Johnson had decided to make the Fourteenth Amendment the overriding issue of
the 1866 elections and to gather its white opponents into a new conservative party, the
National Union Party. The president’s strategy suffered a setback when whites in several
southern cities went on rampages against blacks. Mobs killed thirty-four blacks in New
Orleans and forty-six blacks in Memphis. The slaughter shocked Northerners and
renewed skepticism about Johnson’s claim that southern whites could be trusted. “Who
doubts that the Freedmen’s Bureau ought to be abolished forthwith,” a New Yorker
observed sarcastically, “and the blacks remitted to the paternal care of their old masters,
who ‘understand the nigger, you know, a great deal better than the Yankees can.’”

The 1866 elections resulted in an overwhelming Republican victory. Johnson had
bet that Northerners would not support federal protection of black rights and that a
racist backlash would blast the Republican Party. But the war was still fresh in north-
ern minds, and as one Republican explained, southern whites “with all their intelligence
were traitors, the blacks with all their ignorance were loyal.”

Radical Reconstruction and Military Rule

When Johnson continued to urge Southerners to reject the Fourteenth Amendment,
every southern state except Tennessee voted it down. “The last one of the sinful ten,”
thundered Representative James A. Garfield of Ohio, “has flung back into our teeth
the magnanimous offer of a generous nation.” After the South rejected the moderates’
program, the Radicals seized the initiative.

Each act of defiance by southern whites had boosted the standing of the Radicals
within the Republican Party. Except for freedmen themselves, no one did more to
make freedom the “mighty moral question of the age.” Radicals such as Massachusetts
senator Charles Sumner and Pennsylvania representative Thaddeus Stevens united in
demanding civil and political equality. Southern states were “like clay in the hands of
the potter,” Stevens declared in January 1867, and he called on Congress to begin
reconstruction all over again.

In March 1867, Congress overturned the Johnson state governments and initiated
military rule of the South. The Military Reconstruction Act (and three subsequent
acts) divided the ten unreconstructed Confederate states into five military districts.
Congress placed a Union general in charge of each district and instructed him to “sup-
press insurrection, disorder, and violence” and to begin political reform. After the military
had completed voter registration, which would include black men, voters in each state
would elect delegates to conventions that would draw up new state constitutions. Each
constitution would guarantee black suffrage. When the voters of each state had approved
the constitution and the state legislature had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, the
state could submit its work to Congress. If Congress approved, the state’s senators and representatives could be seated, and political reunification would be accomplished.

Radicals proclaimed the provision for black suffrage “a prodigious triumph,” for it extended far beyond the limited suffrage provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment. When combined with the disfranchisement of thousands of ex-rebels, it promised to cripple any neo-Confederate resurgence and guarantee Republican state governments in the South.

Despite its bold suffrage provision, the Military Reconstruction Act of 1867 disappointed those who also advocated the confiscation of southern plantations and their redistribution to ex-slaves. Thaddeus Stevens agreed with the freedman who said, “Give us our own land and we take care of ourselves, but without land, the old masters can hire us or starve us, as they please.” But most Republicans believed they had provided blacks with what they needed: equal legal rights and the ballot. Besides, confiscation was too radical, even for some Radicals. Confiscating private property, declared the New York Times, “strikes at the root of all property rights in both sections. It concerns Massachusetts quite as much as Mississippi.” If blacks were to get land, they would have to gain it themselves.

Declaring that he would rather sever his right arm than sign such a formula for “anarchy and chaos,” Andrew Johnson vetoed the Military Reconstruction Act, but Congress overrode his veto. With the passage of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867, congressional reconstruction was virtually completed. Congress left whites owning most of the South’s land but, in a departure that justified the term radical reconstruction, had given black men the ballot.

**Impeaching a President**

Despite his defeats, Andrew Johnson had no intention of yielding control of reconstruction. In a dozen ways, he sabotaged Congress’s will and encouraged southern whites to resist. He issued a flood of pardons, waged war against the Freedmen’s Bureau, and replaced Union generals eager to enforce Congress’s Reconstruction Acts with conservative officers eager to block them. Johnson claimed that he was merely defending the “violated Constitution.” At bottom, however, the president subverted congressional reconstruction to protect southern whites from what he considered the horrors of “Negro domination.”

Radicals argued that Johnson’s abuse of constitutional powers and his failure to fulfill constitutional obligations to enforce the law were impeachable offenses. According to the Constitution, the House of Representatives can impeach and the Senate can try any federal official for “treason, bribery, or other high crimes and misdemeanors.” But moderates interpreted the Constitution to mean violation of criminal statutes. As long as Johnson refrained from breaking the law, impeachment (the process of formal charges of wrongdoing against the president or other federal official) remained stalled.

Then in August 1867, Johnson suspended Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton from office. As required by the Tenure of Office Act, which demanded the approval of the Senate for the removal of any government official who had been appointed with Senate approval, the president requested the Senate to consent to Stanton’s dismissal. When the Senate balked, Johnson removed Stanton anyway. “Is the President crazy,
or only drunk?” asked a dumbfounded Republican moderate. “I’m afraid his doings will make us all favor impeachment.”

News of Johnson’s open defiance of the law convinced every Republican in the House to vote for a resolution impeaching the president. Supreme Court chief justice Salmon Chase presided over the Senate trial, which lasted from March until May 1868. When the vote came, thirty-five senators voted guilty and nineteen not guilty. The impeachment forces fell one vote short of the two-thirds needed to convict.

After his trial, Johnson called a truce, and for the remaining ten months of his term, congressional reconstruction proceeded unhindered by presidential interference. Without interference from Johnson, Congress revisited the suffrage issue.

**The Fifteenth Amendment and Women’s Demands**
In February 1869, Republicans passed the **Fifteenth Amendment** to the Constitution, which prohibited states from depriving any citizen of the right to vote because of “race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 already required black suffrage in the South; the Fifteenth Amendment extended black voting nationwide.

Some Republicans, however, found the final wording of the Fifteenth Amendment “lame and halting.” Rather than absolutely guaranteeing the right to vote, the amendment merely prohibited exclusion on grounds of race. The distinction would prove to be significant. In time, white Southerners would devise tests of literacy and property and other apparently nonracial measures that would effectively disfranchise blacks yet not violate the Fifteenth Amendment. But an amendment that fully guaranteed the right to vote courted defeat outside the South. Rising antiforeign sentiment — against the Chinese in California and European immigrants in the Northeast — caused states to resist giving up total control of suffrage requirements. In March 1870, after three-fourths of the states had ratified it, the Fifteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution.

Woman suffrage advocates, however, were sorely disappointed with the Fifteenth Amendment’s failure to extend voting rights to women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony condemned the Republicans’ “negro first” strategy and pointed out that women remained “the only class of citizens wholly unrepresented in the government.” Increasingly, activist women concluded that woman “must not put her trust in man.” The Fifteenth Amendment severed the early feminist movement from its abolitionist roots. Over the next several decades, feminists established an independent suffrage crusade that drew millions of women into political life.

Republicans took enough satisfaction in the Fifteenth Amendment to conclude that black suffrage was the “last great point that remained to be settled of the issues of the war” and promptly scratched the “Negro question” from the agenda of national politics. Even that steadfast crusader for equality Wendell Phillips concluded that the black man now held “sufficient shield in his own hands. . . . Whatever he suffers will be largely now, and in future, his own fault.” Northerners had no idea of the violent struggles that lay ahead.

**REVIEW**  
Why did Congress impeach President Andrew Johnson?
The Struggle in the South

Northerners believed they had discharged their responsibilities with the Reconstruction Acts and the amendments to the Constitution, but Southerners knew that the battle had just begun. Black suffrage had destroyed traditional southern politics and established the foundation for the rise of the Republican Party. Gathering outsiders and outcasts, southern Republicans won elections, wrote new state constitutions, and formed new state governments.

Challenging the established class for political control was dangerous business. Equally dangerous were the confrontations that took place on southern farms and plantations, where blacks sought to give fuller meaning to their newly won legal and political equality. Ex-masters had their own ideas about the labor system that should replace slavery, and freedom remained contested territory. Southerners fought pitched battles with one another to determine the contours of their new world.

Freedmen, Yankees, and Yeomen

African Americans made up the majority of southern Republicans. After gaining voting rights in 1867, nearly all eligible black men registered to vote as Republicans, grateful to the party that had freed them and granted them the franchise. “It is the hardest thing in the world to keep a negro away from the polls,” observed an Alabama white man. Southern blacks did not all have identical political priorities, but they united in their desire for education and equal treatment before the law.

Northern whites who made the South their home after the war were a second element of the South’s Republican Party. Conservative white Southerners called them carpetbaggers, opportunists who stuffed all their belongings in a single carpet-sided suitcase and headed south to “fatten on our misfortunes.” But most Northerners who moved south were young men who looked upon the South as they did the West — as a promising place to make a living. Northerners in the southern Republican Party supported programs that encouraged vigorous economic development along the lines of the northern free-labor model.

Southern whites made up the third element of the South’s Republican Party. Approximately one out of four white Southerners voted Republican. The other three condemned the one who did as a traitor to his region and his race and called him a scalawag, a term for runty horses and low-down, good-for-nothing rascals. Yeoman farmers accounted for the majority of southern white Republicans. Some were Unionists who emerged from the war with bitter memories of Confederate persecution. Others were small farmers who wanted to end state governments’ favoritism toward plantation owners. Yeomen supported initiatives for public schools and for expanding economic opportunity in the South.

The South’s Republican Party, then, was made up of freedmen, Yankees, and yeomen — an improbable coalition. The mix of races, regions, and classes inevitably meant friction as each group maneuvered to define the party. But Reconstruction represented an extraordinary moment in American politics: Blacks and whites joined together in the Republican Party to pursue political change. Formally, of course, only men participated in politics — casting ballots and holding offices — but white and black women also played a part in the political struggle by joining in parades and rallies, attending stump speeches, and even campaigning.

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Most whites in the South condemned southern Republicans as illegitimate and felt justified in doing whatever they could to stamp them out. Violence against blacks — the “white terror” — took brutal institutional form in 1866 with the formation in Tennessee of the Ku Klux Klan, a social club of Confederate veterans that quickly developed into a paramilitary organization supporting Democrats. The Klan went on a rampage of whipping, hanging, shooting, burning, and throat-cutting to defeat Republicans and restore white supremacy. Rapid demobilization of the Union army after the war left only twenty thousand troops to patrol the entire South. Without effective military protection, southern Republicans had to take care of themselves.

**Republican Rule**

In the fall of 1867, southern states held elections for delegates to state constitutional conventions, as required by the Reconstruction Acts. About 40 percent of the white electorate stayed home because they had been disfranchised or because they had decided to boycott politics. Republicans won three-fourths of the seats. About 15 percent of the Republican delegates to the conventions were Northerners who had moved south, 25 percent were African Americans, and 60 percent were white Southerners. As a British visitor observed, the delegate elections reflected “the mighty revolution that had taken place in America.”

The conventions brought together serious, purposeful men who hammered out the legal framework for a new order. The reconstruction constitutions introduced two broad categories of changes in the South: those that reduced aristocratic privilege and increased democratic equality and those that expanded the state’s responsibility for the general welfare. In the first category, the constitutions adopted universal male suffrage, abolished property qualifications for holding office, and made more offices elective and fewer appointed. In the second category, they enacted prison reform; made the state responsible for caring for orphans, the insane, and the deaf and mute; and exempted debtors’ homes from seizure.

To Democrats, however, these progressive constitutions looked like wild revolution. They were blind to the fact that no constitution confiscated and redistributed land, as virtually every former slave wished, or disfranchised ex-rebels wholesale, as most southern Unionists advocated. And Democrats were convinced that the new constitutions initiated “Negro domination.” In fact, although 80 percent of Republican voters were black men, only 6 percent of Southerners in Congress during Reconstruction were black. The sixteen black men in Congress included exceptional men, such as Representative James T. Rapier of Alabama (see pages 401–3). No state legislature experienced “Negro rule,” despite black majorities in the populations of some states.

Southern voters ratified the new constitutions and swept Republicans into power. When the former Confederate states ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, Congress readmitted them. Southern Republicans then turned to a staggering array of problems. Wartime destruction littered the landscape. Making matters worse, racial harassment and reactionary violence dogged Southerners who sought reform. Democrats mocked Republican officeholders as ignorant field hands who had only “agricultural degrees” and “brick yard diplomas,” but Republicans began a serious effort to rebuild and reform the region.
Activity focused on three areas — education, civil rights, and economic development. Every state inaugurated a system of public education. Before the Civil War, whites had deliberately kept slaves illiterate, and planter-dominated governments rarely spent tax money to educate the children of yeomen. By 1875, half of Mississippi’s and South Carolina’s eligible children were attending school. Although schools were underfunded, literacy rates rose sharply. Public schools were racially segregated, but education remained for many blacks a tangible, deeply satisfying benefit of freedom and Republican rule.

State legislatures also attacked racial discrimination and defended civil rights. Republicans especially resisted efforts to segregate blacks from whites in public transportation. Mississippi levied fines and jail terms for owners of railroads and steamboats that pushed blacks into “smoking cars” or to lower decks. But passing color-blind laws was one thing; enforcing them was another. A Mississippian complained: “Education amounts to nothing, good behavior counts for nothing, even money cannot buy for a colored man or woman decent treatment and the comforts that white people claim and can obtain.” Despite the laws, segregation — later called Jim Crow — developed at white insistence. Determined to underscore the social inferiority of blacks, whites saw to it that separation by race became a feature of southern life long before the end of the Reconstruction era.

Republican governments also launched ambitious programs of economic development. They envisioned a South of diversified agriculture, roaring factories, and booming towns. State legislatures chartered scores of banks and industrial companies, appropriated funds to fix ruined levees and drain swamps, and went on a railroad-building binge. These efforts fell far short of solving the South’s economic troubles, however. Republican spending to stimulate economic growth also meant rising taxes and enormous debt that siphoned funds from schools and other programs.

The southern Republicans’ record, then, was mixed. To their credit, the biracial party adopted an ambitious agenda to change the South. But money was scarce, the Democrats continued their harassment, and factionalism threatened the Republican Party from within. Moreover, corruption infected Republican governments. Nonetheless, the Republican Party made headway in its efforts to purge the South of aristocratic privilege and racist oppression. Republican governments had less success in overthrowing the long-established white oppression of black farm laborers in the rural South.

White Landlords, Black Sharecroppers
Ex-slaves who wished to escape slave labor and ex-masters who wanted to reinstitute old ways clashed repeatedly. Except for having to pay subsistence wages, planters had not been required to offer many concessions to emancipation. They continued to believe that African Americans would not work without coercion. A Tennessee man declared two years after the war ended that blacks were “a trifling set of lazy devils who will never make a living without Masters.” Whites moved quickly to restore as much of slavery as they could get away with.

Ex-slaves resisted every effort to turn back the clock. They argued that if any class could be described as “lazy,” it was the planters, who, as one former slave noted,
“lived in idleness all their lives on stolen labor.” Freedmen believed that land of their own would anchor their economic independence and end planters’ interference in their personal lives. They could then, for example, make their own decisions about whether women and children would labor in the fields. Indeed, within months after the war, perhaps one-third of black women abandoned field labor to work on chores in their own cabins just as poor white women did. Black women also negotiated about work ex-mistresses wanted done in the big house. Hundreds of thousands of black children enrolled in school. But without their own land, ex-slaves had little choice but to work on plantations.

Although forced to return to the planters’ fields, they resisted efforts to restore slavelike conditions. Instead of working for wages, a South Carolinian observed, “the negroes all seem disposed to rent land,” which increased their independence from whites. Out of this tug-of-war between white landlords and black laborers emerged a new system of southern agriculture.

Sharecropping was a compromise that offered something to both ex-masters and ex-slaves but satisfied neither. Under the new system, planters divided their cotton plantations into small farms that freedmen rented, paying with a share of each year’s crop, usually half. Sharecropping gave blacks more freedom than the system of wages and labor gangs and released them from day-to-day supervision by whites. Black families abandoned the old slave quarters and built separate cabins for themselves on the patches of land they rented (Map 16.1). Still, most black families remained dependent on white landlords, who had the power to evict them at the end of each growing season. For planters, sharecropping offered a way to resume agricultural production, but it did not allow them to restore the old slave plantation.
Sharecropping introduced the country merchant into the agricultural equation. Landlords supplied sharecroppers with land, mules, seeds, and tools, but blacks also needed credit to obtain essential food and clothing before they harvested their crops. Under an arrangement called a crop lien, a merchant would advance goods to a sharecropper in exchange for a lien, or legal claim, on the farmer’s future crop. Some merchants charged exorbitant rates of interest, as much as 60 percent, on the goods they sold. At the end of the growing season, after the landlord had taken half of the farmer’s crop for rent, the merchant took most of the rest. Sometimes, the farmer did not earn enough to repay the debt to the merchant, so he would have to borrow more from the merchant and begin the cycle again.

An experiment at first, sharecropping soon dominated the cotton South. Lien merchants forced tenants to plant cotton, which was easy to sell, instead of food crops. The result was excessive production of cotton and falling cotton prices, developments that cost thousands of small white farmers their land and pushed them into the great army of sharecroppers. The new sharecropping system of agriculture took shape just as the political power of Republicans in the South began to buckle under Democratic pressure.

**MAP 16.1  A Southern Plantation in 1860 and 1881**

These maps of the Barrow plantation in Georgia illustrate some of the ways in which ex-slaves expressed their freedom. Freedmen and freedwomen deserted the clustered living quarters behind the master’s house, scattered over the plantation, built family cabins, and farmed rented land. The former Barrow slaves also worked together to build a school and a church.

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**REVIEW**

How did politics and economic concerns shape reconstruction in the South?
Reconstruction Collapses

By 1870, after a decade of war and reconstruction, Northerners wanted to put “the southern problem” behind them. Practical business-minded men came to dominate the Republican Party, replacing the band of reformers and idealists who had been prominent in the 1860s. Civil War hero Ulysses S. Grant succeeded Andrew Johnson as president in 1869 and quickly became an issue himself, proving that brilliance on the battlefield does not necessarily translate into accomplishment in the White House. As northern commitment to defend black freedom eroded, southern commitment to white supremacy intensified. Without northern protection, southern Republicans were no match for the Democrats’ economic coercion, political fraud, and bloody violence. One by one, Republican state governments fell in the South. The election of 1876 both confirmed and completed the collapse of reconstruction.

Grant’s Troubled Presidency

In 1868, the Republican Party’s presidential nomination went to Ulysses S. Grant, the North’s favorite general. His Democratic opponent, Horatio Seymour of New York, ran on a platform that blasted reconstruction as “a flagrant usurpation of power . . . unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void.” The Republicans answered by “waving the bloody shirt” — that is, they reminded voters that the Democrats were “the party of rebellion.” Despite a reign of terror in the South, costing hundreds of Republicans their lives, Grant gained a narrow 309,000-vote margin in the popular vote and a substantial victory (214 votes to 80) in the electoral college (Map 16.2).

Grant was not as good a president as he was a general. The talents he had demonstrated on the battlefield — decisiveness, clarity, and resolution — were less obvious in the White House. Grant sought both justice for blacks and sectional reconciliation. But he surrounded himself with fumbling kinfolk and old friends from his army days and made a string of dubious appointments that led to a series of damaging scandals. Charges of corruption tainted his vice president, Schuyler Colfax, and brought down two of his cabinet officers. Though never personally implicated in any scandal, Grant was aggravatingly naive and blind to the rot that filled his administration. Republican congressman James A. Garfield declared: “His imperturbability is amazing. I am in doubt whether to call it greatness or stupidity.”

<table>
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<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Percent of Popular Vote</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ulysses S. Grant (Republican)</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>3,012,833</td>
<td>52.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horatio Seymour (Democrat)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>2,703,249</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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MAP 16.2 The Election of 1868
In 1872, anti-Grant Republicans bolted and launched the Liberal Party. To clean up the graft and corruption, Liberals proposed ending the spoils system, by which victorious parties rewarded loyal workers with public office, and replacing it with a nonpartisan civil service commission that would oversee competitive examinations for appointment to office (as discussed in chapter 18). Liberals also demanded that the federal government remove its troops from the South and restore “home rule” (southern white control). Democrats liked the Liberals’ southern policy and endorsed the Liberal presidential candidate, Horace Greeley, the longtime editor of the New York Tribune. The nation, however, still felt enormous affection for the man who had saved the Union and reelected Grant with 56 percent of the popular vote.

Northern Resolve Withers

Although Grant genuinely wanted to see blacks’ civil and political rights protected, he understood that most Northerners had grown weary of reconstruction and were increasingly willing to let southern whites manage their own affairs. Citizens wanted to shift their attention to other issues, especially after the nation slipped into a devastating economic depression in 1873. More than eighteen thousand businesses collapsed, leaving more than a million workers on the streets. Northern businessmen wanted to invest in the South but believed that recurrent federal intrusion was itself a major cause of instability in the region. Republican leaders began to question the wisdom of their party’s alliance with the South’s lower classes — its small farmers and sharecroppers. One member of Grant’s administration proposed allying with the “thinking and influential native southerners . . . the intelligent, well-to-do, and controlling class.”

Congress, too, wanted to leave reconstruction behind, but southern Republicans made that difficult. When the South’s Republicans begged for federal protection from increasing Klan violence, Congress enacted three laws in 1870 and 1871 that were intended to break the back of white terrorism. The severest of the three, the Ku Klux Klan Act (1871), made interference with voting rights a felony. Federal marshals arrested thousands of Klansmen and came close to destroying the Klan, but they did not end all terrorism against blacks. Congress also passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which boldly outlawed racial discrimination in transportation, public accommodations, and juries. But federal authorities never enforced the law aggressively, and segregation remained the rule throughout the South.

By the early 1870s, the Republican Party had lost its leading champions of African American rights to death or defeat at the polls. Other Republicans concluded that the quest for black equality was mistaken or hopelessly naive. In May 1872, Congress restored the right of officeholding to all but three hundred ex-rebels. Many Republicans had come to believe that traditional white leaders offered the best hope for honesty, order, and prosperity in the South.

Underlying the North’s abandonment of reconstruction was unyielding racial prejudice. Northerners had learned to accept black freedom during the war, but deep-seated prejudice prevented many from accepting black equality. Even the actions they took on behalf of blacks often served partisan political advantage. Northerners generally supported Indiana senator Thomas A. Hendricks’s harsh declaration that “this is a white man’s Government, made by the white man for the white man.”
The U.S. Supreme Court also did its part to undermine reconstruction. The Court issued a series of decisions that significantly weakened the federal government’s ability to protect black Southerners. In the *Slaughterhouse* cases (1873), the Court distinguished between national and state citizenship and ruled that the Fourteenth Amendment protected only those rights that stemmed from the federal government, such as voting in federal elections and interstate travel. Since the Court decided that most rights derived from the states, it sharply curtailed the federal government’s authority to defend black citizens. Even more devastating, the *United States v. Cruikshank* ruling (1876) said that the reconstruction amendments gave Congress the power to legislate against discrimination only by states, not by individuals. The “suppression of ordinary crime,” such as assault, remained a state responsibility. The Supreme Court did not declare reconstruction unconstitutional but eroded its legal foundation.

The mood of the North found political expression in the election of 1874, when for the first time in eighteen years the Democrats gained control of the House of Representatives. As one Republican observed, the people had grown tired of the “negro question, with all its complications, and the reconstruction of Southern States, with all its interminable embroilments.” Reconstruction had come apart. Rather than defend reconstruction from its southern enemies, Northerners steadily backed away from the challenge. By the early 1870s, southern Republicans faced the forces of reaction largely on their own.

**White Supremacy Triumphs**

Reconstruction was a massive humiliation to most white Southerners. Republican rule meant intolerable insults: Black militiamen patrolled town streets, black laborers negotiated contracts with former masters, black maids stood up to former mistresses, black voters cast ballots, and black legislators such as James T. Rapier enacted laws. Whites fought back by extolling the “great Confederate cause,” or Lost Cause. They celebrated their soldiers, “the noblest band of men who ever fought,” and by making an idol of Robert E. Lee, the embodiment of the southern gentleman.

But the most important way white Southerners responded to reconstruction was their assault on Republican governments in the South. These Republican governments attracted more hatred than did any other political regimes in American history. The northern retreat from reconstruction permitted southern Democrats to set things right. Taking the name *Redeemers*, Democrats in the South promised to replace “bayonet rule” (a few federal troops continued to be stationed in the South) with “home rule.” They promised that honest, thrifty Democrats would supplant corrupt tax-and-spend Republicans. Above all, Redeemers swore to save southern civilization from a descent into “African barbarism.” As one man put it, “We must render this either a white man’s government, or convert the land into a Negro man’s cemetery.”

Southern Democrats adopted a multipronged strategy to overthrow Republican governments. First, they sought to polarize the parties around race. They went about gathering all the South’s white voters into the Democratic Party, leaving the Republicans to depend on blacks, who made up a minority of the population in almost
every southern state. To dislodge whites from the Republican Party, Democrats fanned the flames of racism. A South Carolina Democrat crowed that his party appealed to the “proud Caucasian race, whose sovereignty on earth God has proclaimed.” Ostracism also proved effective. Local newspapers published the names of whites who kept company with blacks. So complete was the ostracism that one of its victims said, “No white man can live in the South in the future and act with any other than the Democratic party unless he is willing and prepared to live a life of social isolation.”

Democrats also exploited the severe economic plight of small white farmers by blaming it on Republican financial policy. Government spending soared during Reconstruction, and small farmers saw their tax burden skyrocket. “This is tax time,” a South Carolinian reported. “We are nearly all on our head about them. They are so high & so little money to pay with” that farmers were “selling every egg and chicken they can get.” In 1871, Mississippi reported that one-seventh of the state’s land — 3.3 million acres — had been forfeited for nonpayment of taxes. The small farmers’ economic distress had a racial dimension. Because few freedmen succeeded in acquiring land, they rarely paid taxes. In Georgia in 1874, blacks made up 45 percent of the population but paid only 2 percent of the taxes. From the perspective of a small white farmer, Republican rule meant that he was paying more taxes and paying them to aid blacks.

If racial pride, social isolation, and financial hardship proved insufficient to drive yeomen from the Republican Party, Democrats turned to terrorism. “Night riders” targeted white Republicans as well as blacks for murder and assassination. Whether white or black, a “dead Radical is very harmless,” South Carolina Democratic leader Martin Gary told his followers.

But the primary victims of white violence were black Republicans. Violence escalated to an unprecedented ferocity on Easter Sunday in 1873 in tiny Colfax, Louisiana. The black majority in the area had made Colfax a Republican stronghold until 1872, when Democrats turned to intimidation and fraud to win the local election. Republicans refused to accept the result and occupied the courthouse in the middle of the town. After three weeks, 165 white men attacked. They overran the Republicans’ defenses and set the courthouse on fire. When the blacks tried to surrender, the whites murdered them. At least 81 black men were slaughtered that day. Although the federal government indicted the attackers, the Supreme Court ruled that it did not have the right to prosecute. And since local whites would not prosecute neighbors who killed blacks, the defendants in the Colfax massacre went free.

Even before adopting the all-out white supremacist tactics of the 1870s, Democrats had taken control of the governments of Virginia, Tennessee, and North Carolina. The new campaign brought fresh gains. The Redeemers retook Georgia in 1871, Texas in 1873, and Arkansas and Alabama in 1874. As the state election approached in Mississippi in 1876, Governor Adelbert Ames appealed to Washington for federal troops to control the violence, only to hear from the attorney general that the “whole public are tired of these annual autumnal outbreaks in the South.” Abandoned, Mississippi Republicans succumbed to the Democratic onslaught in the fall elections. By 1876, only three Republican state governments survived in the South (Map 16.3).
An Election and a Compromise

The year 1876 witnessed one of the most tumultuous elections in American history. The election took place in November, but not until March 2 of the following year did the nation know who would be inaugurated president on March 4. Sixteen years after Lincoln’s election, Americans feared that a presidential election would again precipitate civil war.

The Democrats nominated New York’s governor, Samuel J. Tilden, who immediately targeted the corruption of the Grant administration and the “despotism” of Republican reconstruction. The Republicans put forward Rutherford B. Hayes, governor of Ohio. Privately, Hayes considered “bayonet rule” a mistake but concluded that waving the bloody shirt remained the Republicans’ best political strategy.

On election day, Tilden tallied 4,288,590 votes to Hayes’s 4,036,298. But in the all-important electoral college, Tilden fell one vote short of the majority required for victory. The electoral votes of three states — South Carolina, Louisiana, and Florida, the only remaining Republican governments in the South — remained in doubt because both Republicans and Democrats in those states claimed victory. To win, Tilden needed only one of the nineteen contested votes. Hayes had to have all of them.

Congress had to decide who had actually won the elections in the three southern states and thus who would be president. The Constitution provided no guidance for this situation. Moreover, Democrats controlled the House, and Republicans controlled the Senate. Congress created a special electoral commission to arbitrate the disputed returns. All of the commissioners voted their party affiliation, giving every state to the Republican Hayes and putting him over the top in electoral votes (Map 16.4).

MAP 16.3 The Reconstruction of the South

Myth has it that Republican rule of the former Confederacy was not only harsh but long. In most states, however, conservative southern whites stormed back into power in months or just a few years. By the election of 1876, Republican governments could be found in only three states, and they soon fell.
Some outraged Democrats vowed to resist Hayes’s victory. Rumors flew of an impending coup and renewed civil war. But the impasse was broken when negotiations behind the scenes resulted in an informal understanding known as the Compromise of 1877. In exchange for a Democratic promise not to block Hayes’s inauguration and to deal fairly with the freedmen, Hayes vowed to refrain from using the army to uphold the remaining Republican regimes in the South and to provide the South with substantial federal subsidies for railroads.

Stubborn Tilden supporters bemoaned the “stolen election” and damned “His Fraudulency,” Rutherford B. Hayes. Old-guard Radicals such as William Lloyd Garrison denounced Hayes’s bargain as a “policy of compromise, of credulity, of weakness, of subserviency, of surrender.” But the nation as a whole celebrated, for the country had weathered a grave crisis. The last three Republican state governments in the South fell quickly once Hayes abandoned them and withdrew the U.S. Army. Reconstruction came to an end.

**REVIEW**
Why did northern support for Reconstruction collapse?

### Conclusion: “A Revolution but Half Accomplished”

In 1865, when General Carl Schurz visited the South, he discovered “a revolution but half accomplished.” White Southerners resisted the passage from slavery to free labor, from white racial despotism to equal justice, and from white political monopoly to biracial democracy. The old elite wanted to get “things back as near to slavery as possible,” Schurz reported, while African Americans such as James T. Rapier and some whites were eager to exploit the revolutionary implications of defeat and emancipation.

Although the northern-dominated Republican Congress refused to provide for blacks’ economic welfare, it employed constitutional amendments to require ex-Confederates to accept legal equality and share political power with black men. Congress was not willing to extend such power to women, however. Conservative southern whites fought ferociously to recover their power and privilege. When Democrats
regained control of politics, whites used both state power and private violence to wipe out many of the gains of Reconstruction, leading one observer to conclude that the North had won the war but the South had won the peace.

The Redeemer counterrevolution, however, did not mean a return to slavery. Northern victory in the Civil War ensured that ex-slaves no longer faced the auction block and could send their children to school, worship in their own churches, and work independently on their own rented farms. Sharecropping, with all its hardships, provided more autonomy and economic welfare than bondage had. It was limited freedom, to be sure, but it was not slavery.

The Civil War and emancipation set in motion the most profound upheaval in the nation’s history. War destroyed the largest slave society in the New World and gave birth to a modern nation-state. The world of masters and slaves gave way to that of landlords and sharecroppers. Washington increased its role in national affairs, and the victorious North set the nation’s compass toward the expansion of industrial capitalism and the final conquest of the West.

Despite massive changes, however, the Civil War remained only a “half accomplished” revolution. By not fulfilling the promises the nation seemed to hold out to black Americans at war’s end, Reconstruction represents a tragedy of enormous proportions. The failure to protect blacks and guarantee their rights had enduring consequences. It was the failure of the first reconstruction that made the modern civil rights movement necessary.
Chapter Review

KEY TERMS
Freedmen’s Bureau (p. 405) carpetbagger (p. 414)
black codes (p. 407) scalawag (p. 414)
Civil Rights Act of 1866 (p. 409) Ku Klux Klan (p. 415)
Fourteenth Amendment (p. 409) sharecropping (p. 417)
Military Reconstruction Act (p. 411) Redeemers (p. 421)
Fifteenth Amendment (p. 413) Compromise of 1877 (p. 424)

REVIEW QUESTIONS
1. To what extent did Lincoln’s wartime plan for reconstruction reflect the concerns of newly freed slaves? (pp. 403–6)
2. When the southern states passed the black codes, how did the U.S. Congress respond? (pp. 406–9)
3. Why did Congress impeach President Andrew Johnson? (pp. 409–13)
4. How did politics and economic concerns shape reconstruction in the South? (pp. 414–18)
5. Why did northern support for reconstruction collapse? (pp. 419–24)

MAKING CONNECTIONS
1. Why and how did the federal government retreat from defending African Americans’ civil rights in the 1870s?
2. Why was distributing plantation land to former slaves such a controversial policy? Why did Congress reject redistribution as a general policy?
3. After emancipation, how did ex-slaves exercise their new freedoms, and how did white Southerners attempt to limit them?
4. How did the identification of the Republican Party with reconstruction policy affect the party’s political fortunes in the 1870s?

LINKING TO THE PAST
1. In what ways did the attitudes and actions of President Johnson increase northern resolve to reconstruct the South and the South’s resolve to resist reconstruction?
2. White women, abolitionists, and blacks all had hopes for a brighter future that were in some ways dashed during the turmoil of reconstruction. What specific goals of these groups slipped away? What political allies abandoned their causes, and why?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>1863</td>
<td>Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction pardons most rebels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>Lincoln refuses to sign Wade-Davis bill.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 1865 | Freedmen’s Bureau established.  
|      | Lincoln assassinated; Andrew Johnson becomes president.  
|      | First black codes enacted.  
|      | Thirteenth Amendment becomes part of Constitution. |
| 1866 | Congress approves Fourteenth Amendment.  
|      | Civil Rights Act passes.  
|      | American Equal Rights Association founded.  
|      | Ku Klux Klan founded. |
| 1867 | Military Reconstruction Act passes.  
|      | Tenure of Office Act passes. |
| 1868 | Impeachment trial of President Johnson held.  
|      | Ulysses S. Grant elected president. |
| 1869 | Congress approves Fifteenth Amendment. |
| 1871 | Ku Klux Klan Act passes. |
| 1872 | Liberal Party formed.  
|      | President Grant reelected. |
| 1873 | Economic depression sets in.  
|      | Slaughterhouse cases decided.  
|      | Colfax massacre kills more than eighty blacks. |
| 1874 | Democrats win majority in House of Representatives. |
| 1875 | Civil Rights Act passes. |
| 1876 | United States v. Cruikshank decided. |
| 1877 | Rutherford B. Hayes becomes president; Reconstruction era ends. |