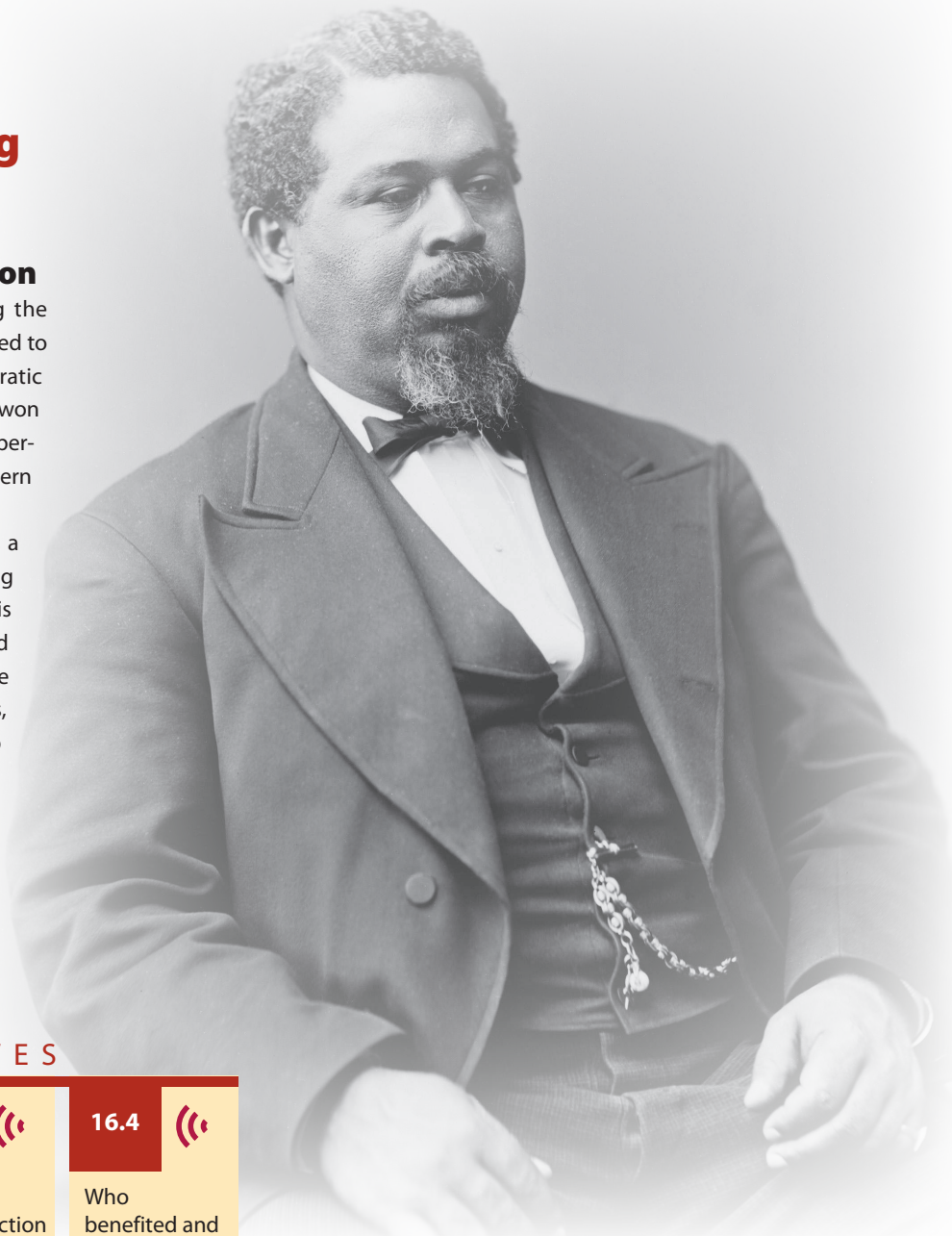


# 16 The Agony of Reconstruction 1865–1877

## Robert Smalls and Black Politicians During Reconstruction

**D**uring the Reconstruction period immediately following the Civil War, African Americans struggled to become equal citizens of a democratic republic. Remarkable black leaders won public office. Robert Smalls of South Carolina was perhaps the most famous and widely respected southern black leader of the era.

Born a slave in 1839, Smalls was allowed as a young man to live and work independently, hiring his own time from a master who may have been his half brother. Smalls worked as a sailor and trained himself to be a pilot in Charleston Harbor. When the Union navy blockaded Charleston in 1862, Smalls, who was working on a Confederate steamship called the *Planter*, saw a chance to win his freedom. At three o'clock in the morning on May 13, 1862, when the white officers were ashore, he took command of the vessel and its slave crew, sailed it out of the fortified harbor, and surrendered it to the Union navy. Smalls immediately became a hero to antislavery northerners



### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

16.1



What conflicts arose consecutively involving President Lincoln and then President Johnson and Congress during Reconstruction? p. 355

16.2



What problems did southern society face during Reconstruction? p. 363

16.3



Why did Reconstruction end? p. 369

16.4



Who benefited and who suffered from the reconciliation of the North and South? p. 372

**ROBERT SMALLS** With the help of several black crewmen, Robert Smalls—then twenty-three years old—commandeered the *Planter*, a Confederate steamship used to transport guns and ammunition, and surrendered it to the Union vessel, USS *Onward*. Smalls provided distinguished service to the Union during the Civil War and after the war went on to become a successful politician and businessman.



Listen to Chapter 16 on MyHistoryLab

16.1

## Watch the Video Series on MyHistoryLab

Learn about some key topics related to this chapter with the *MyHistoryLab Video Series: Key Topics in U.S. History*.

16.2

16.3

16.4

1

### **Reconstruction and Its Missed Opportunities: 1865–1877**

This video introduces critical issues that arose during the post-Civil War period known as Reconstruction, when the former Confederacy was reincorporated into the United States and the freed slaves received their first taste of U.S. citizenship. The video examines the conflicts between Congress and Presidents Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and Ulysses S. Grant over the goals of Reconstruction, especially the passage of constitutional amendments to protect the rights of freedmen and the expansion of federal government institutions to rebuild the South and integrate it into the nation.



 Watch on MyHistoryLab

**The Amendments of Freedom** In the years after the Civil War, Congress passed the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments to the Constitution, ending slavery, guaranteeing citizenship, and extending voting rights. This video reveals how these constitutional changes were enacted to protect the citizenship and rights of African Americans. Despite the efforts of Radical Republicans, however, southern states passed the Black Codes and engaged in other repressive measures that lasted generations.

2

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3

**Presidential Reconstruction** This video explains the way Abraham Lincoln approached Presidential Reconstruction as the reincorporation of armed rebels into the Union, rather than as the aftermath of a civil war. This allowed him to use broad war powers as commander-in-chief to control the definition and progress of Reconstruction. Radical Republicans in Congress hoped to extend federal power even more broadly to remake Southern society, empowering the former slaves, but Lincoln's successor, Andrew Johnson, by contrast, sought to pardon former Confederate planters as quickly as possible and readmit the southern states to the Union with few conditions. The clash between Johnson and Congress led to his impeachment.

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**The Compromise of 1877** Reconstruction came to an end in the South with the Compromise of 1877, a political deal in which Republican Rutherford B. Hayes was awarded electoral victory over Democrat Samuel Tilden in the contested Presidential election of 1876, on the understanding that Hayes would withdraw the remaining federal troops from the states of the former confederacy. This video examines the Compromise of 1877, sometimes known as "The Great Betrayal," because it closed off the possibilities for the freed slaves to achieve full citizenship for another hundred years.

4

Watch on MyHistoryLab 

who were seeking evidence that the slaves were willing and able to serve the Union. The *Planter* became a Union army transport, and Smalls was made its captain after being commissioned as an officer. During the remainder of the war, he rendered conspicuous and gallant service as captain and pilot of Union vessels off the coast of South Carolina.

Like other African Americans who fought for the Union, Smalls had a distinguished political career during Reconstruction, serving in the South Carolina constitutional convention, the state legislature, and the U.S. Congress. He was also a shrewd businessman and owned extensive properties in Beaufort, South Carolina, and its vicinity. The electoral organization Smalls established was so effective that he controlled local government and was elected to Congress even after the

election of 1876 had placed the state under the control of white conservatives bent on depriving blacks of political power. Organized mob violence defeated him in 1878, but he bounced back to win a contested congressional election in 1880. He did not leave the House of Representatives for good until 1886, when he lost another contested election.

To defeat him, Smalls's white opponents charged that he had a hand in the corruption that was allegedly rampant in South Carolina during Reconstruction. But careful historical investigation shows that he was, by the standards of the time, an honest and responsible public servant. In the South Carolina convention of 1868 and in the state legislature, he championed free and compulsory public education. In Congress, he fought for federal civil rights laws. Not especially radical on social questions, he sometimes bent over backward to accommodate what he regarded as the legitimate interests and sensibilities of South Carolina whites. Like other middle-class black political leaders in Reconstruction-era South Carolina, he can perhaps be faulted for not doing more to help poor blacks gain access to land of their own. But in 1875, he sponsored congressional legislation that opened for purchase at low prices the land in his own district that the federal government had confiscated during the war. As a result, blacks soon owned three-fourths of the land in the Beaufort area.

Robert Smalls spent the later years of his life as U.S. collector of customs for the port of Beaufort, a beneficiary of the patronage that the Republican Party continued to provide for a few loyal southern blacks. But the loss of real political clout for Smalls and men like him was a tragic consequence of the fall of Reconstruction.

**For a few years**, black politicians such as Robert Smalls exercised more power in the South than they would for another century. But political developments on the national and regional stage made Reconstruction “an unfinished revolution,” promising but not delivering true equality for newly freed African Americans. National party politics; shifting priorities among northern Republicans; white southerners’ commitment to white supremacy, which was backed by legal restrictions and massive extralegal violence against blacks, all combined to stifle the promise of Reconstruction.

Yet during the Reconstruction era, American society was transformed—new ways of organizing labor and family life, new institutions within and outside the government, and new ideologies about the role of institutions and government in social and economic life. Many of the changes begun during Reconstruction would revolutionize American life.

## The President versus Congress

### 16.1

What conflicts arose consecutively involving President Lincoln and then President Johnson and Congress during Reconstruction?

**R**econstructing the Union after the South’s defeat was one of the most difficult challenges American policymakers ever faced. The Constitution provided no firm guidelines, for the Framers had not anticipated that the country would divide into warring sections. After emancipation became a northern war aim, a new issue compounded the problem: How far should the federal government go to secure freedom and civil rights for 4 million former slaves?

The debate led to a major political crisis. Advocates of a minimal Reconstruction policy favored quickly restoring the Union with no protection for the freed slaves except prohibiting slavery. Proponents of a more radical policy demanded guarantees that “loyal” men would displace the Confederate elite in power and that blacks would acquire basic rights of American citizenship as preconditions for readmitting the southern states. The White House favored the minimal approach. Congress came to endorse the more radical and thoroughgoing form of Reconstruction. The resulting struggle between Congress and the chief executive was the most serious clash between two branches of government in the nation’s history.

### Wartime Reconstruction

Tension between the president and Congress over how to reconstruct the Union began during the war. Preoccupied with achieving victory, Lincoln never set forth a final and

**16.2** **Ten Percent Plan** Reconstruction plan proposed by President Abraham Lincoln as a quick way to readmit the former Confederate States. It called for pardon of all southerners except Confederate leaders, and readmission to the Union for any state after 10 percent of its voters signed a loyalty oath and the state abolished slavery.

**16.3**

**16.4**

### Radical Republicans

Congressional Republicans who insisted on black suffrage and federal protection of civil rights of African Americans.

**Wade-Davis Bill** In 1864, Congress passed the Wade-Davis bill to counter Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan for Reconstruction. The bill required that a majority of a former Confederate state's white male population take a loyalty oath and guarantee equality for African Americans. President Lincoln pocket-vetoed the bill.

### Quick Check

In what ways did Congress thwart Presidential Reconstruction?

comprehensive plan to bring rebellious states back into the fold. But he favored a lenient and conciliatory policy toward southerners who would give up the struggle and repudiate slavery. In December 1863, he issued a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, which offered a full pardon to all southerners (except certain Confederate leaders) who would take an oath of allegiance to the Union and accept emancipation. This **Ten Percent Plan** provided that once ten percent or more of the voting population of any occupied state had taken the oath, they could set up a loyal government. By 1864, Louisiana and Arkansas, states that Union troops occupied, had established Unionist governments. Lincoln's policy was meant to shorten the war. He hoped to weaken the southern cause by making it easy for disillusioned or lukewarm Confederates to switch sides and support emancipation by insisting that the new governments abolish slavery.

Congress was unhappy with Lincoln's Reconstruction experiments and in 1864 refused to seat the Unionists that Louisiana and Arkansas elected to the House and Senate. A minority of congressional Republicans—the strongly antislavery **Radical Republicans**—favored protection for black rights (especially black male suffrage) as a precondition for readmitting southern states. But a larger group of congressional moderates opposed Lincoln's plan because they did not trust the repentant Confederates who would play a major role in the new governments. Congress also believed the president was exceeding his authority by using executive powers to restore the Union. Lincoln operated on the theory that secession, being illegal, did not place the Confederate states outside the Union in a constitutional sense. Since individuals and not states had defied federal authority, the president could use his pardoning power to certify a loyal electorate, which could then function as the legitimate state government.

After refusing to recognize Lincoln's ten percent governments, Congress passed a Reconstruction bill of its own in July 1864. Known as the **Wade-Davis Bill**, it required that 50 percent of the voters take a loyalty oath before the restoration process could begin. Once this had occurred, those who could swear they had never willingly supported the Confederacy could vote in an election for delegates to a constitutional convention. The bill did not require black suffrage, but it gave federal courts the power to enforce emancipation. Faced with this attempt to nullify his own program, Lincoln exercised a pocket veto by refusing to sign the bill before Congress adjourned. He said that he did not want to be committed to any single Reconstruction plan. The bill's sponsors responded angrily, and Lincoln's relations with Congress reached their low point.

Congress and the president remained stalemated on the Reconstruction issue for the rest of the war. During his last months in office, however, Lincoln showed a willingness to compromise. He tried to obtain recognition for the governments he had nurtured in Louisiana and Arkansas but seemed receptive to setting other conditions—perhaps including black suffrage—for readmitting those states in which wartime conditions had prevented execution of his plan. However, he was assassinated before he made his intentions clear, leaving historians to speculate whether his quarrel with Congress would have been resolved. Given Lincoln's record of flexibility, the best bet is that he would have come to terms with the majority of his party.

## Andrew Johnson at the Helm

Andrew Johnson, the man an assassin's bullet suddenly made president, attempted to put the Union back together on his own authority in 1865. But his policies set him at odds with Congress and the Republican Party and provoked the most serious crisis in the history of relations between the executive and legislative branches of the federal government.

Johnson's background shaped his approach to Reconstruction. Born in poverty in North Carolina, he migrated to eastern Tennessee, where he worked as a tailor. Lacking formal schooling, he was illiterate until adult life. Entering politics as a Jacksonian Democrat, his railing against the planter aristocracy made him the spokesman for Tennessee's non-slaveholding whites and the most successful politician in the state. He advanced from state legislator to congressman to governor and then the U.S. Senate in 1857.

In 1861, Johnson was the only senator from a Confederate state who remained loyal to the Union and continued to serve in Washington. But his Unionism and



# Explore Reconstruction on MyHistoryLab

## HOW DID RECONSTRUCTION AFFECT AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE SOUTH?

In 1865, at the end of the Civil War, the United States was at a crossroads. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution had freed the slaves of the rebellious eleven states, but questions remained on how to implement the rights of the newly liberated African Americans. Further, leaders were divided on how to reintegrate the war-torn southern states back into the Union. Many white Southerners tried to continue their ways of life while freed African Americans struggled in a society built on segregation. Though the subsequent Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments theoretically extended the realm of equality for blacks, in the end, whites in the North and South saw to it that the promises of Reconstruction for African Americans went unfulfilled.



Much hope was placed in the policies of Reconstruction as this allegorical lithograph shows. The reconciliation between the North and South, however, would have a mixed legacy, especially for African Americans.

### RECONSTRUCTION AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

Amendment	Summary	Date
Thirteenth	Abolishes slavery	December 6, 1865
Fourteenth	Ensures equal rights and protections to every person born or naturalized in the United States	July 9, 1868
Fifteenth	Prohibits the denial of the right of vote based on race	February 3, 1870

SOURCE: United States Constitution; Amendments 13 and 14 and 15

### KEY QUESTIONS

Use **MyHistoryLab Explorer** to answer these questions:



**Analysis** >>> *How did voting patterns for Republicans evolve during the Reconstruction period?*

Chart voting patterns to understand reasons behind voting trends.

**Comparison** >>> *How did literacy rates differ between African Americans and Euro-Americans in the South?*

Theorize how this might affect black disenfranchisement.

**Response** >>> *What was the landholding situation for African Americans at the end of the nineteenth century?*

Map land tenure to see discrepancies with whites.

defense of the common people did not include antislavery sentiments. Nor was he friendly to blacks. In Tennessee, he had objected only to the fact that slaveholding was the privilege of a wealthy minority. He wished that “every head of family in the United States had one slave to take the drudgery and menial service off his family.”

During the war, while acting as military governor of Tennessee, Johnson endorsed Lincoln’s emancipation policy to destroy the power of the hated planter class rather than as recognition of black humanity. He was chosen as Lincoln’s running mate in 1864 because a pro-administration Democrat, who was a southern Unionist in the bargain, would strengthen the ticket. No one expected this fervent white supremacist to become president. Radical Republicans initially welcomed Johnson’s ascent to the nation’s highest office. Their hopes made sense given Johnson’s fierce loyalty to the Union and his apparent agreement with the Radicals that ex-Confederates should be severely treated. Unlike Lincoln, who had spoken of “malice toward none and charity for all,” Johnson seemed likely to punish southern “traitors” and prevent them from regaining political influence. Only gradually did the deep disagreement between the president and the Republican congressional majority become evident.

The Reconstruction policy that Johnson initiated on May 29, 1865, created uneasiness among the Radicals, but most Republicans were willing to give it a chance. Johnson placed North Carolina, and eventually other states, under appointed provisional governors chosen mostly from among prominent southern politicians who had opposed the secession movement and had rendered no conspicuous service to the Confederacy. The governors were responsible for calling constitutional conventions and ensuring that only “loyal” whites could vote for delegates. Participation required taking the oath of allegiance that Lincoln had prescribed earlier. Confederate leaders and officeholders had to apply for individual presidential pardons to regain their political and property rights. Johnson made one significant addition to the list of the excluded: all those possessing taxable property exceeding \$20,000 in value. He thus sought to prevent his longtime adversaries—the wealthy planters—from participating in the Reconstruction of southern state governments.

Johnson urged the convention delegates to declare the ordinances of secession illegal, repudiate the Confederate debt, and ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment** abolishing slavery. After governments had been reestablished under constitutions meeting these conditions, the president assumed that the Reconstruction process would be complete and that the ex-Confederate states could regain their full rights under the Constitution.

The results of the conventions, which prewar Unionists and backcountry yeoman farmers dominated, were satisfactory to the president but troubling to many congressional Republicans. Delegates in several states approved Johnson’s recommendations only grudgingly or with qualifications. Furthermore, all the constitutions limited suffrage to whites, disappointing the many northerners who hoped, as Lincoln had, that at least some African Americans—perhaps those who were educated or had served in the Union army—would be given the vote. Republican uneasiness turned to anger when the new state legislatures passed **Black Codes** restricting the freedom of former slaves. Especially troubling were vagrancy and apprenticeship laws that forced African Americans to work and denied them a free choice of employers. Blacks in some states could not testify in court on the same basis as whites and were subject to a separate penal code. The Black Codes looked like slavery under a new guise. More upsetting to northern public opinion in general was the election of prominent ex-Confederates to Congress in 1865.

Johnson himself was partly responsible for these events. Despite his lifelong feud with the planter class, he was generous in granting pardons to members of the old elite who came to him, hat in hand, and asked for them. When former Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens and other proscribed ex-rebels were elected to Congress even though they had not been pardoned, Johnson granted them special amnesty so they could serve.

The growing rift between the president and Congress came into the open in December, when the House and Senate refused to seat the recently elected southern delegations. Instead of recognizing the state governments Johnson had called into

**Thirteenth Amendment** Ratified in 1865, it prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude.

**Black Code** Laws passed by southern states immediately after the Civil War to maintain white supremacy by restricting the rights of the newly freed slaves.



**THE AFTERMATH OF EMANCIPATION** “Slavery Is Dead?” asks this 1866 cartoon by Thomas Nast. To the cartoonist, the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the North’s victory in the Civil War meant little difference to the treatment of the freed slaves in the South. Freed slaves convicted of crimes often endured the same punishments as had slaves—sale, as depicted in the left panel of the cartoon, or beatings, as shown on the right.

being, Congress established a joint committee to review Reconstruction policy and set further conditions for readmitting the seceded states.

## Congress Takes the Initiative

The struggle over how to reconstruct the Union ended with Congress setting policy all over again. The clash between Johnson and Congress was a matter of principle and could not be reconciled. Johnson, an heir of the Democratic states’ rights tradition, wanted to restore the prewar federal system as quickly as possible and without change except that states would not have the right to legalize slavery or to secede.

Most Republicans wanted guarantees that the old southern ruling class would not regain regional power and national influence by devising new ways to subjugate blacks. They favored a Reconstruction policy that would give the federal government authority to limit the political role of ex-Confederates and protect black citizenship.

Republican leaders—except for a few extreme Radicals such as Charles Sumner—lacked any firm conviction that blacks were inherently equal to whites. They did believe, however, that in a modern democratic state, all citizens must have the same basic rights and opportunities, regardless of natural abilities. Principle coincided with political expediency; southern blacks, whatever their alleged shortcomings, were likely to be loyal to the Republican party that had emancipated them and thus increase that party’s power in the South.

### Quick Check

Why did Northerners and Republicans grow uneasy and disillusioned with Johnson’s approach to reconstruction?

**Freedmen's Bureau** Agency established by Congress in March 1865 to provide freedmen with shelter, food, and medical aid and to help them establish schools and find employment. The Bureau was dissolved in 1872.

**Fourteenth Amendment** Ratified in 1868, it provided citizenship to ex-slaves after the Civil War and constitutionally protected equal rights under the law for all citizens. Radical Republicans used it to enact a congressional Reconstruction policy in the former Confederate states.

The disagreement between the president and Congress became irreconcilable in early 1866, when Johnson vetoed two bills that had passed with overwhelming Republican support. The first extended the life of the **Freedmen's Bureau**—a temporary agency set up to provide relief, education, legal help, and assistance in obtaining land or work to former slaves. The second was a civil rights bill to nullify the Black Codes and guarantee to freedmen “full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property as is enjoyed by white citizens.”

Johnson's vetoes shocked moderate Republicans. He succeeded in blocking the Freedmen's Bureau bill, although a modified version later passed. But his veto of the Civil Rights Act was overridden, signifying that the president was now hopelessly at odds with most of the legislators from what was supposed to be his own party. Congress had not overridden a presidential veto since Franklin Pierce was president in the early 1850s.

Johnson soon revealed that he intended to place himself at the head of a new conservative party uniting the few Republicans who supported him with a reviving Democratic party that was rallying behind his Reconstruction policy. In preparation for the elections of 1866, Johnson helped found the National Union movement to promote his plan to readmit the southern states to the Union without further qualifications. A National Union convention in Philadelphia called for electing men to Congress who endorsed the presidential plan for Reconstruction.

Meanwhile, the Republican majority on Capitol Hill, fearing that Johnson would not enforce civil rights legislation or that the courts would declare such laws unconstitutional, passed the **Fourteenth Amendment**. This, perhaps the most important of all the constitutional amendments, gave the federal government responsibility for guaranteeing equal rights under the law to all Americans. Section 1 defined national citizenship for the first time as extending to “all persons born or naturalized in the United States.” The states were prohibited from abridging the rights of American citizens and could not “deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person ... equal protection of the laws.” The amendment was sent to the states with the understanding that southerners would have no chance of being readmitted to Congress unless their states ratified it. (see Table 16.1).

The congressional elections of 1866 served as a referendum on the Fourteenth Amendment. Johnson opposed the amendment on the grounds that it created a “centralized” government and denied states the right to manage their own affairs; he also counseled southern state legislatures to reject it, and all except Tennessee followed his advice. But bloody race riots in New Orleans and Memphis weakened the president's case for state autonomy. These and other atrocities against blacks made it clear that the southern state governments were failing abysmally to protect the “life, liberty, or property” of the ex-slaves.

TABLE 16.1 RECONSTRUCTION AMENDMENTS, 1865–1870

Amendment	Main Provisions	Congressional Passage (2/3 majority in each house required)	Ratification Process (3/4 of all states required, including ex-Confederate states)
13	Slavery prohibited in United States	January 1865	December 1865 (27 states, including 8 southern states)
14	National citizenship; state representation in Congress reduced proportionally to number of voters disfranchised; former Confederates denied right to hold office; Confederate debt repudiated	June 1866	Rejected by 12 southern and border states, February 1867; Radicals make readmission of southern states hinge on ratification; ratified July 1868
15	Denial of franchise because of race, color, or past servitude explicitly prohibited	February 1869	Ratification required for re-admission of Virginia, Texas, Mississippi, Georgia; ratified March 1870



Johnson further hurt his cause by taking the stump on behalf of candidates who supported his policies. In his notorious “swing around the circle,” he toured the nation, slandering his opponents in crude language and engaging in undignified exchanges with hecklers. Enraged by southern inflexibility and the antics of a president who acted as if he were still campaigning in the backwoods of Tennessee, northern voters repudiated the administration. The Republican majority in Congress increased to a solid two-thirds in both houses, and the Radical wing of the party gained strength at the expense of moderates and conservatives.

## Congressional Reconstruction Plan Enacted

Congress now implemented its own plan of Reconstruction. In 1867 and 1868, it nullified the president’s initiatives and reorganized the South. Generally referred to as **Radical Reconstruction**, the measures actually represented a compromise between genuine Radicals and more moderate Republicans.

Radicals such as Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts and Congressmen Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and George Julian of Indiana wanted to reshape southern society before readmitting ex-Confederates to the Union. Their program of “regeneration before Reconstruction” required an extended period of military rule, confiscation and redistribution of large landholdings among the freedmen, and federal aid for schools to educate blacks and whites for citizenship. But most Republican congressmen found such a program unacceptable because it broke too sharply with American traditions of federalism and regard for property rights, and might take decades.

The First Reconstruction Act, passed over Johnson’s veto on March 2, 1867, reorganized the South into five military districts. (see Map 16.1). But military rule would last for only a short time. Subsequent acts allowed for quickly readmitting any state that framed and ratified a new constitution providing for black suffrage. Ex-Confederates disqualified from holding federal office under the Fourteenth Amendment were

### Quick Check

What events caused Congress to take the initiative in passing the Fourteenth Amendment?

16.2

16.3

16.4

**Radical Reconstruction** The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 divided the South into five military districts. They required the states to guarantee black male suffrage and to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment as a condition of their readmission to the Union.



**MAP 16.1 RECONSTRUCTION** During the Reconstruction era, the southern state governments passed through three phases: control by white ex-Confederates; domination by Republican legislators, both white and black; and, finally, the regaining of control by conservative white Democrats.

**Quick Check**

What was "Radical Reconstruction", and how did it differ from previous plans?

prohibited from voting for delegates to the constitutional conventions or in the elections to ratify the conventions' work. Since blacks could participate in this process, Republicans thought they had ensured that "loyal" men would dominate the new governments. Radical Reconstruction was based on the dubious assumption that once blacks had the vote, they would be able to protect themselves against white supremacists' efforts to deny them their rights. The Reconstruction Acts thus signaled a retreat from the true Radical position that sustained federal authority was needed to complete the transition from slavery to freedom and prevent the resurgence of the South's old ruling class. Most Republicans were unwilling to embrace centralized government and an extended period of military rule over civilians. Yet a genuine spirit of democratic idealism did give legitimacy and fervor to the cause of black male suffrage. Enabling people who were so poor and downtrodden to have access to the ballot box was a bold and innovative application of the principle of government by the consent of the governed. The problem was enforcing equal suffrage under conditions then existing in the postwar South.

## The Impeachment Crisis

The first obstacle to enforcing Congressional Reconstruction was resistance from the White House. Johnson sought to thwart the will of Congress by obstructing the plan. He dismissed officeholders who sympathized with Radical Reconstruction and



**IMPEACHED** Andrew Johnson's successful defense against conviction in his impeachment case centered on his invocation of the Constitution to defend his presidential rights and powers. Impeached in 1868, Johnson escaped conviction by a single vote.

countermanded the orders of generals in charge of southern military districts who zealously enforced the new legislation. Conservative Democrats replaced Radical generals. Congress then passed laws to limit presidential authority over Reconstruction. The Tenure of Office Act required Senate approval for the removal of officials whose appointment had needed the consent of the Senate. Another measure limited Johnson's authority to issue orders to military commanders.

Johnson objected that the restrictions violated the constitutional doctrine of the separation of powers. When it became clear that the president was resolute in fighting for his powers and using them to resist establishing Radical regimes in the southern states, congressmen began to call for his impeachment. A preliminary effort foundered in 1867, but when Johnson tried to discharge Secretary of War Edwin Stanton—the only Radical in the cabinet—and persisted in his efforts despite the disapproval of the Senate, the pro-impeachment forces gained in strength.

In January 1868, Johnson ordered General Grant, who already commanded the army, to replace Stanton as head of the War Department. But Grant had his eye on the Republican presidential nomination and refused to defy Congress. General Lorenzo Thomas then agreed to serve. Faced with this violation of the Tenure of Office Act, the House impeached the president on February 24, and he went on trial before the Senate.

Because seven Republican senators broke with the party leadership and voted for acquittal, the effort to convict Johnson and remove him from office fell one vote short of the necessary two-thirds. This outcome resulted in part from a skillful defense. Attorneys for the president argued that the constitutional provision that a president could be impeached only for “high crimes and misdemeanors” referred only to indictable offenses and that the Tenure of Office Act did not apply to Stanton because Lincoln, not Johnson, had appointed him.

The core of the prosecution case was that Johnson had abused the powers of his office to sabotage congressional Reconstruction. Obstructing the will of the legislative branch, they claimed, was grounds for conviction even if no crime had been committed. The Republicans voting for acquittal could not endorse such a broad view of the impeachment power. They feared that removing a president for essentially political reasons would threaten the constitutional balance of powers and allow legislative supremacy over the executive.

Failure to remove Johnson from office embarrassed Republicans, but the episode did ensure that Reconstruction in the South would proceed as the majority in Congress intended. Johnson influenced the verdict by pledging to enforce the Reconstruction Acts, and he held to this promise during his remaining months in office. Unable to depose the president, the Radicals had at least neutralized his opposition to their program.

#### Quick Check

What Prompted Congress to initiate impeachment against Johnson, and what was the outcome of that action?

## Reconstructing Southern Society

### 16.2 What problems did southern society face during Reconstruction?

The Civil War left the South devastated, demoralized, and destitute. Slavery was dead, but what this meant for future relationships between whites and blacks was unclear. Most southern whites wanted to keep blacks adrift between slavery and freedom—without rights, like the “free Negroes” of the Old South. Blacks sought to be independent of their former masters and viewed acquiring land, education, and the vote as the best means of achieving this goal. Thousands of northerners who went south after the war for materialistic or humanitarian reasons hoped to extend Yankee “civilization” to what they considered an unenlightened and barbarous region. For most of them, this meant aiding the freed slaves.

The struggle between these groups bred chaos, violence, and instability. This was scarcely an ideal setting for an experiment in interracial democracy, but one was

attempted nonetheless. Its success depended on massive and sustained federal support. To the extent that this was forthcoming, progressive reform could be achieved. When it faltered, the forces of reaction and white supremacy were unleashed.

## Reorganizing Land and Labor

The Civil War scarred the southern landscape and wrecked its economy. One devastated area—central South Carolina—looked to an 1865 observer “like a broad black streak of ruin and desolation.” Atlanta, Columbia, and Richmond were gutted by fire. Factories were dismantled or destroyed. Railroads were torn up.

Investment capital for rebuilding was inadequate. The wealth represented by Confederate currency and bonds had melted away, and emancipation had divested the propertied classes of their most valuable and productive assets—the slaves. According to some estimates, the South’s per capita wealth in 1865 was only about half what it had been in 1860.

Recovery could not begin until a new labor system replaced slavery. Most northerners and southerners assumed that southern prosperity still depended on cotton and that the plantation was the most efficient unit for producing the crop. Hindering efforts to rebuild the plantation economy were lack of capital, the conviction of southern whites that blacks would work only under compulsion, and the freedmen’s resistance to labor conditions that recalled slavery.

Blacks preferred to determine their own economic relationships, and for a time they had reason to hope the federal government would support their ambitions. The freed slaves were, in effect, fighting a two-front war. Although they were grateful for federal aid in ending slavery, freed slaves’ ideas about freedom often contradicted the plans of their northern allies. Many ex-slaves wanted to hold on to the family-based communal work methods that they used during slavery. Freed slaves in South Carolina, for example, attempted to maintain the family task system rather than adopt the individual piecework system northern capitalists pushed. Many ex-slaves opposed plans to turn them into wage laborers who produced exclusively for a market. Finally, freed slaves often wanted to stay on the land their families had spent generations farming rather than move elsewhere to occupy land as individual farmers.

While not guaranteeing all of the freed slaves’ hopes for economic self-determination, the northern military attempted to establish a new economic base for them. General Sherman, hampered by the many black fugitives that followed his army on its famous march, issued an order in January 1865 that set aside the islands and coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina for exclusive black occupancy on 40-acre plots. Furthermore, the Freedmen’s Bureau was given control of hundreds of thousands of acres of abandoned or confiscated land and was authorized to make 40-acre grants to black settlers for three-year periods, after which they could buy at low prices. By June 1865, 40,000 black farmers were working on 300,000 acres of what they thought would be their own land.

But for most of them, the dream of “40 acres and a mule,” or some other arrangement that would give them control of their land and labor, was not to be realized. President Johnson pardoned the owners of most of the land Sherman and the Freedmen’s Bureau consigned to the ex-slaves, and Congress rejected proposals for an effective program of land confiscation and redistribution. Among the considerations prompting congressional opposition to land reform were a tenderness for property rights, fear of sapping the freedmen’s initiative by giving them something they allegedly had not earned, and the desire to restore cotton production as quickly as possible to increase agricultural exports and stabilize the economy. Consequently, most blacks in physical possession of small farms failed to acquire title, and the mass of freedmen did not become landowners. As an ex-slave later wrote, “they were set free without a dollar, without a foot of land, and without the wherewithal to get the next meal even.”

Despite their poverty and landlessness, ex-slaves were reluctant to settle down and commit themselves to wage labor for their former masters. Many took to the road,

hoping to find something better. Some were still expecting land, but others were simply trying to increase their bargaining power. One freedman recalled that an important part of being free was that “we could move around [and] change bosses.” By the end of 1865, many freedmen had still not signed up for the coming season; anxious planters feared that blacks were plotting to seize land by force. Within weeks, however, most holdouts signed for the best terms they could get.

One common form of agricultural employment in 1866 was a contract labor system. Under this system, workers committed themselves for a year in return for fixed wages, much of which was withheld until after the harvest. Since many planters drove hard bargains, abused their workers, or cheated them at the end of the year, the Freedmen’s Bureau reviewed and enforced the contracts. But bureau officials had differing notions of what it meant to protect African Americans from exploitation. Some stood up for the rights of the freedmen; others served as allies of the planters.

An alternative capital–labor relationship—**sharecropping**—eventually replaced the contract system. First in small groups known as “squads” and later as individual families, black sharecroppers worked a piece of land for a fixed share of the crop, usually one-half. Credit-starved landlords liked this arrangement because it did not require much expenditure before the harvest, and the tenant shared the risks of crop failure or a fall in cotton prices.

African Americans initially viewed sharecropping as a step toward landownership. But during the 1870s, it evolved into a new kind of servitude. Croppers had to live on credit until their cotton was sold, and planters or merchants “provisioned” them at high prices and exorbitant interest. Creditors deducted what was owed to them out of the tenant’s share of the crop. This left most sharecroppers with no net profit at the end of the year—and often with a debt they had to work off in subsequent years.

**sharecropping** After the Civil War, the southern states adopted a sharecropping system as a compromise between former slaves who wanted land of their own and former slave owners who needed labor. The landowners provided land, tools, and seed to a farming family, who in turn provided labor. The resulting crop was divided between them, with the farmers receiving a “share” of one-third to one-half of the crop.

#### Quick Check

What were the conflicting visions of the planters, the Freedmen’s Bureau agents, and the freed slaves with regard to what a new labor system should look like?



**Read the Document** Jourdan Anderson, Letter to His Former Master (1865)



**SHARECROPPERS** The Civil War brought emancipation to slaves, but the sharecropping system kept many of them economically bound to their employers. At the end of a year, the sharecropper tenants might owe most—or all—of what they had made to their landlord.

## Black Codes: A New Name for Slavery?

While landless rural blacks were being reduced to economic dependence, those in towns and cities were living in an increasingly segregated society. The Black Codes of 1865 attempted to require separation of the races in public places and facilities; when federal authorities overturned most of the codes as violations of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, private initiative and community pressure often achieved the same end. In some cities, blacks resisted being consigned to separate streetcars by appealing to the military when it still exercised authority or by organizing boycotts. But they found it almost impossible to gain admittance to most hotels, restaurants, and other private establishments catering to whites. Although separate black, or “Jim Crow,” cars were not yet the rule on railroads, African Americans were often denied first-class accommodations. After 1868, black-supported Republican governments required equal access to public facilities, but made little effort to enforce the legislation.

The Black Codes had other onerous provisions to control African Americans and return them to quasi-slavery. Most codes made black unemployment a crime, which meant blacks had to make long-term contracts with white employers or be arrested for vagrancy. Others limited the rights of African Americans to own property or engage in occupations other than those of servant or laborer. Congress, the military, and the Freedmen’s Bureau set the codes aside, but vagrancy laws remained in force across the South.

Furthermore, private violence and discrimination against blacks continued on a massive scale, unchecked by state authorities. Whites murdered hundreds, perhaps thousands, of blacks during 1865–1866, and few perpetrators were brought to justice. Military rule was designed to protect former slaves from such violence and intimidation, but the task was beyond the capacity of the few thousand troops stationed in the South. When new constitutions were approved and states readmitted to the Union under the congressional plan in 1868, the problem became more severe. White opponents of Radical Reconstruction adopted systematic terrorism and mob violence to keep blacks from the polls.

The freed slaves, in the face of opposition from both their Democratic enemies and some Republican allies, tried to defend themselves by organizing their own militia groups and to assert their political rights. However, the militias were too weak to overcome the anti-Republican forces. And as the military presence was reduced, the new Republican regimes fought a losing battle against armed white supremacists.

### Quick Check

What were the Black Codes, and how did they compare to the conditions of slavery?

## Republican Rule in the South

Hastily organized in 1867, the southern Republican Party dominated the constitution-making of 1868 and the regimes it produced. The party was an attempted coalition of three social groups (which varied in their relative strength from state to state). One was the same class that was becoming the backbone of the Republican Party in the North—businessmen who wanted government aid for private enterprise. Many Republicans of this stripe were recent arrivals from the North—the so-called carpetbaggers—but some were scalawags, former Whig planters or merchants who were born in the South or had immigrated there before the war and now saw a chance to realize their dreams for commercial and industrial development.

Poor white farmers, especially those from upland areas where Unionist sentiment had been strong during the Civil War, were a second element in the original coalition. These owners of small farms expected the party to favor their interests at the expense of the wealthy landowners and pass special legislation when—as often happened in this period of economic upheaval—creditors attempted to seize their homesteads. Newly enfranchised blacks were the third group to which the Republicans appealed. Blacks formed most of the Republican rank and file in most states and were concerned mainly with education, civil rights, and landownership.

Under the best conditions, these coalitions would have been fragile. Each group had its own goals and did not fully support those of the others. White yeomen, for

example, had a deep resistance to black equality. And for how long would essentially conservative businessmen support costly measures to elevate or relieve the lower classes of either race? In some states, astute Democrats exploited these divisions by appealing to disaffected white Republicans.

But during the relatively brief period when they were in power in the South—from one to nine years depending on the state—the Republicans chalked up notable achievements. They established (on paper at least) the South's first adequate systems of public education, democratized state and local government, and expanded public services and responsibilities.

As important as these social and political reforms were, they took second place to the Republicans' major effort—fostering economic development and restoring prosperity by subsidizing the construction of railroads and other internal improvements. But the policy of aiding railroads turned out to be disastrous, even though it addressed the region's real economic needs and was initially popular. Extravagance, corruption, and routes laid out in response to political pressure rather than on sound economic grounds increased public debt and taxation.

The policy did not produce the promised payoff of efficient, cheap transportation. Subsidized railroads went bankrupt, leaving the taxpayers holding the bag. When the Panic of 1873 brought many southern state governments to the verge of bankruptcy, and railroad building ended, it was clear the Republicans' "gospel of prosperity" through state aid to private enterprise had failed. Their political opponents, many of whom had favored such policies, now took advantage of the situation, charging that Republicans had ruined the southern economy.

In general, the Radical regimes failed to conduct public business honestly and efficiently. Embezzlement of public funds and bribery of state lawmakers or officials were common. State debts and tax burdens rose enormously, mainly because governments had undertaken heavy new responsibilities, but also because of waste and graft. The situation varied from state to state: Ruling cliques in Louisiana and South Carolina were guilty of much wrongdoing; Mississippi had a relatively honest and frugal regime.

Furthermore, southern corruption was not exceptional, nor was it a result of extending suffrage to uneducated African Americans, as critics of Radical Reconstruction have claimed. It was part of a national pattern during an era when private interests considered buying government favors as part of the cost of doing business, and politicians expected to profit by obliging them.

Many Reconstruction-era scandals started at the top. President Grant's first-term vice president, Schuyler Colfax of Indiana, was directly involved in the notorious Credit Mobilier scandal. Credit Mobilier was a construction company that actually served as a fraudulent device for siphoning off profits that should have gone to the stockholders of the Union Pacific Railroad, which had received massive federal land grants. Credit Mobilier distributed stock to influential congressmen, including Colfax before he became vice president, in order to keep Congress from inquiring into this shady arrangement. In 1875, during President Grant's second administration, his private secretary was indicted in a conspiracy to defraud the government of millions of dollars in liquor taxes, and his secretary of war was impeached for taking bribes. While there is no evidence that Grant profited personally from these misdeeds, he failed to take firm action against the wrongdoers and participated in covering up their crimes.

The new African American public officials were only minor participants in this rampant corruption. Although 16 blacks served in Congress—two in the Senate—between 1869 and 1880, only in South Carolina were blacks a majority of even one house of the legislature. Furthermore, no black governors were elected during Reconstruction (although Pinckney B. S. Pinchback was acting governor of Louisiana during 1872–1873). The biggest grafters were opportunistic whites. Businessmen offering bribes included members of the prewar gentry who were staunch opponents of Radical programs. Some black legislators went with the tide and accepted "loans" from railroad lobbyists who would pay most for their votes, but the same men would usually vote the will of their constituents on civil rights or education.

**Quick Check**

What were the three social groups that made up the southern Republican party?

Blacks served or supported corrupt and wasteful regimes because the alternative was dire. Although the Democrats, or Conservatives as they called themselves in some states, made sporadic efforts to attract African American voters, it was clear that if they won control, they would strip blacks of their civil and political rights. But opponents of Radical Reconstruction capitalized on racial prejudice and persuaded many Americans that “good government” was synonymous with white supremacy.

Contrary to myth, the few African Americans elected to state or national office during Reconstruction demonstrated on the average more integrity and competence than their white counterparts. Most were fairly well educated, having been free or unusually privileged slaves before the war. Among the most capable were Robert Smalls (whose career was described earlier); Blanche K. Bruce of Mississippi, elected to the U.S. Senate in 1874 after rising to prominence in the Republican party of his home state; Congressman Robert Brown Elliott of South Carolina, an adroit politician who was also a consistent champion of civil rights; and Congressman James T. Rapier of Alabama, who stirred the nation in 1873 with his appeals for federal aid to southern education and new laws to enforce equal rights for African Americans.

## Claiming Public and Private Rights

The ways that freed slaves claimed rights for themselves were as important as party politics to the changing political culture of the Reconstruction South. Ex-slaves fought for their rights not only in negotiations with employers and in public meetings and convention halls, but also through the institutions they created and, perhaps most important, the households they formed.

Some ex-slaves used institutions formerly closed to them, like the courts, to assert rights they considered part of citizenship. Many ex-slaves rushed to formalize their



**Watch the Video** The Schools that the Civil War and Reconstruction Created



**FREEDMEN'S SCHOOLS** A Freedmen's school, one of the more successful endeavors the Freedmen's Bureau supported. The bureau, working with teachers from northern abolitionist and missionary societies, founded thousands of schools for freed slaves and poor whites.



marriages before the law, and they used their new status to fight for custody of children who had been taken from them under the apprenticeship provisions of the Black Codes. Ex-slaves sued white people and other blacks over domestic violence, child support, assault, and debt. Freed women sued their husbands for desertion and alimony and enlisted the Freedmen's Bureau to help them claim property from men. Immediately after the war, freed people created institutions that had been denied to them under slavery: churches, fraternal and benevolent associations, political organizations, and schools. Many joined all-black denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, which provided freedom from white dominance and more congenial worship. Black women formed all-black chapters of organizations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and created their own women's clubs to oppose lynching and promote "uplift" in the black community.

A top priority for most ex-slaves was education for their children; the first schools for freed people were all-black institutions the Freedmen's Bureau and northern missionary societies established. Having been denied education during the antebellum period, most blacks viewed separate schooling as an opportunity rather than as a form of discrimination. However, these schools were precursors to the segregated public school systems first instituted by Republican governments. Only at city schools in New Orleans and the University of South Carolina were serious attempts made during Reconstruction to bring white and black students together in the same classrooms.

In many ways, African American men and women during Reconstruction asserted freedom in the "private" realm and the public sphere by claiming rights to their own families and building their own institutions. They did so despite the efforts of their former masters and the new government agencies to control their private lives and shape their new identities as husbands, wives, and citizens.

#### Quick Check

What new rights and institutions did free blacks create and use following emancipation?

## Retreat from Reconstruction

### 16.3 Why did Reconstruction end?

The era of Reconstruction began to end almost before it got started. Although it was only three years after the end of the Civil War, the impeachment crisis of 1868 was the high point of popular interest in Reconstruction. That year, Ulysses S. Grant, a popular general, was elected president. Many historians blame Grant for the corruption of his administration and for the inconsistency and failure of his southern policy. He had neither the vision nor the sense of duty to tackle the difficult challenges the nation faced. From 1868 on, political issues other than southern Reconstruction moved to the forefront of national politics, and the plight of African Americans in the South receded in white consciousness.

### Final Efforts of Reconstruction

The Republican effort to make equal rights for blacks the law of the land culminated in the **Fifteenth Amendment**. Passed by Congress in 1869 and ratified by the states in 1870, it prohibited any state from denying a male citizen the right to vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. A more radical version, requiring universal manhood suffrage, was rejected partly because it departed too sharply from traditional federal-state relations. States therefore could still limit the suffrage by imposing literacy tests, property qualifications, or poll taxes allegedly applying to all racial groups; such devices would eventually be used to strip southern blacks of the right to vote. But the authors of the amendment did not foresee this. They believed it would prevent future Congresses or southern constitutional conventions from repealing or nullifying the provisions for black male suffrage included in the Reconstruction

**Fifteenth Amendment** Ratified in 1870, it prohibits the denial or abridgment of the right to vote by the federal or state governments on the basis of race, color, or prior condition as a slave. It was intended to guarantee African Americans the right to vote in the South.



**AFRICAN AMERICAN VOTING** *The First Vote*, drawn by A. H. Ward for *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1867.

Acts. A secondary aim was to enfranchise African Americans in northern states that still denied them the vote.

Many feminists were bitter that the amendment did not extend the vote to women. A militant wing of the women's rights movement, led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, was so angered that the Constitution was being amended to, in effect, make gender a qualification for voting that they campaigned against ratification of the amendment. Other feminists led by Lucy Stone supported the amendment, saying this was "the Negro's hour" and that women could afford to wait a few years for the vote. This disagreement divided the woman suffrage movement for a generation.

The Grant administration was charged with enforcing the amendment and protecting black men's voting rights in the reconstructed states. Since survival of the Republican regimes depended on African American support, political partisanship dictated federal action, even though the North's emotional and ideological commitment to black citizenship was waning.

#### Quick Check

What did the Fifteenth Amendment provide, and who was left out of its protections?

**Ku Klux Klan** A secret terrorist society first organized in Tennessee in 1866. The original Klan's goals were to disfranchise African Americans, stop Reconstruction, and restore the prewar social order of the South. The Ku Klux Klan re-formed in the twentieth century to promote white supremacy and combat aliens, Catholics, and Jews.

## A Reign of Terror Against Blacks

Between 1868 and 1872, the **Ku Klux Klan** and other secret societies bent on restoring white supremacy by intimidating blacks who sought to exercise their political rights and were the main threat to Republican regimes. Founded in Tennessee in 1866, the Klan spread rapidly, adopting lawless and brutal tactics. A grassroots vigilante movement, not a centralized conspiracy, the Klan thrived on local initiative and support from whites of all social classes. Its secrecy, decentralization, popular support, and ruthlessness made it difficult to suppress. As soon as blacks had been granted the right to vote, hooded "night riders" began to visit the cabins of active Republicans. Some victims were only threatened. Others were whipped or murdered.

Such methods were first used effectively in the presidential election of 1868. Grant lost in Louisiana and Georgia mainly because the Klan—or the Knights of the White Camellia, as the Louisiana variant was called—launched a reign of terror to prevent blacks from voting. In Louisiana, political violence claimed more than 1000 lives. In Arkansas, which Grant did carry, more than 200 Republicans, including a congressman, were killed.

Thereafter, Klan terrorism was directed mainly at Republican state governments. Virtual insurrections broke out in Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina, and parts of South Carolina. Republican governors called out the state militia to fight the Klan, but only the Arkansas militia brought it to heel. In Tennessee, North Carolina, and Georgia, Klan activities enabled Democrats to come to power by 1870.

During 1870–1871, Congress provided federal protection for black suffrage and authorized using the army against the Klan. The **Force Acts**, also known as the Ku Klux Klan acts, made interference with voting rights a federal crime and provided for federal supervision of elections. The legislation also empowered the president to call out troops and suspend the writ of habeas corpus to quell insurrection. During 1871–1872, the military or U.S. marshals arrested thousands of suspected Klansmen, and the writ was

**Force Acts** Designed to protect black voters in the South from the Ku Klux Klan in 1870–1871, these laws placed state elections under federal jurisdiction and imposed fines and punished those guilty of interfering with any citizen exercising his right to vote.



Read the Document

Albion W. Tourgee, Letter on Ku Klux Klan Activities (1870)



**KU KLUX KLAN** This 1868 photograph shows typical regalia of members of the Ku Klux Klan, a secret white supremacist organization. Before elections, hooded Klansmen terrorized African Americans to discourage them from voting.

suspended in nine counties of South Carolina that the Klan had virtually taken over. Although most of the accused Klansmen were never tried, were acquitted, or received suspended sentences, the enforcement effort did put a damper on hooded terrorism and ensure relatively fair and peaceful elections in 1872.

A heavy black turnout in these elections enabled the Republicans to hold on to power in most of the Deep South, despite Democratic-Conservative efforts to cut into the Republican vote by taking moderate positions on racial and economic issues. This setback prompted the Democratic-Conservatives to change their strategy and ideology. They stopped trying to take votes away from the Republicans by proclaiming support for black suffrage and government aid to business. Instead they began to appeal openly to white supremacy and the traditional Democratic and agrarian hostility to government promotion of economic development. They were thus able to attract part of the white Republican electorate, mostly small farmers.

This new strategy dovetailed with a resurgence of violence to reduce Republican, especially black Republican, voting. Its agents no longer wore masks but acted openly. They were effective because the northern public was increasingly disenchanted with federal intervention to prop up what were widely viewed as corrupt and tottering Republican regimes. Grant used force in the South for the last time in 1874 when an overt paramilitary organization in Louisiana, known as the White League, tried to overthrow a Republican government accused of stealing an election. When another unofficial militia in Mississippi instigated bloody race riots before the state elections of 1875, Grant refused the governor's request for federal troops. As a result, black voters were intimidated—one county registered only seven Republican votes where there had been a black majority of 2000—and Mississippi fell to the Democratic-Conservatives.

By 1876, partly because of Grant's hesitant and inconsistent use of presidential power, but mainly because the northern electorate would no longer tolerate military action to sustain Republican governments and black voting rights, Radical Reconstruction was collapsing.

#### Quick Check

How important was the Ku Klux Klan in influencing elections and policies in the South?

## Reunion and The New South

### 16.4 Who benefited and who suffered from the reconciliation of the North and South?

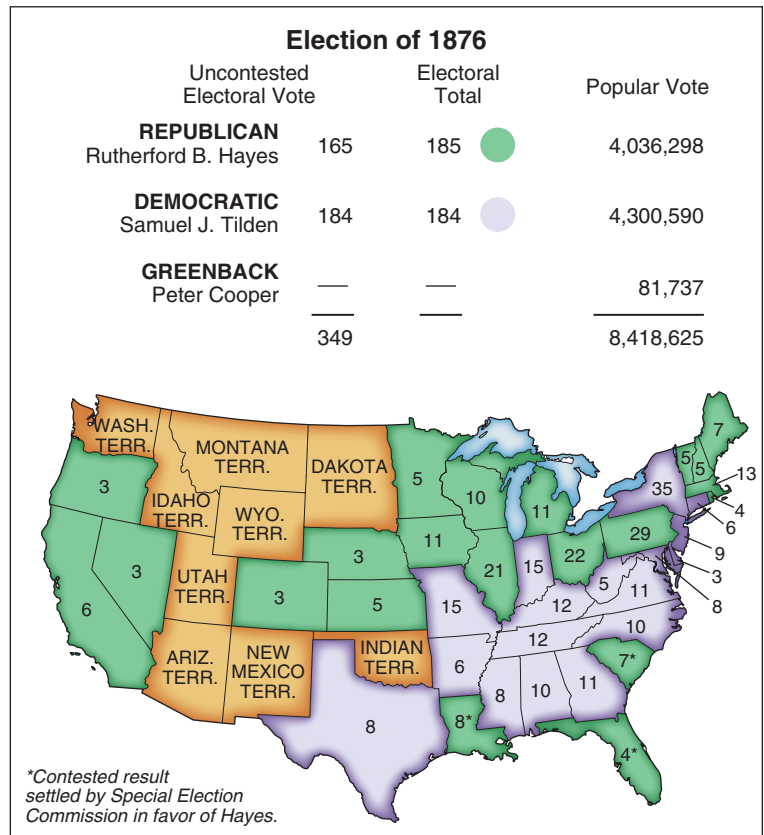
**T**he end of Radical Reconstruction in 1877 opened the way to a reconciliation of North and South. But the costs of reunion were high for less-privileged groups in the South. The civil and political rights of African Americans, left unprotected, were relentlessly stripped away by white supremacist regimes. Lower-class whites saw their interests sacrificed to those of capitalists and landlords. Despite the rhetoric hailing a prosperous “New South,” the region remained poor and open to exploitation by northern business interests.

### The Compromise of 1877

The election of 1876 pitted Rutherford B. Hayes of Ohio, a Republican governor untainted by the scandals of the Grant era, against Governor Samuel J. Tilden of New York, a Democratic reformer who had fought corruption in New York City. Honest government was apparently the electorate's highest priority. When the returns came in, Tilden had won the popular vote and seemed likely to win a narrow victory in the electoral college. But the returns from the three southern states the Republicans still controlled—South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana—were contested. If Hayes were awarded these three states, plus one contested electoral vote in Oregon, Republican strategists realized, he would triumph in the electoral college by a single vote. (see Map 16.2).

The election remained undecided for months, plunging the nation into a political crisis. To resolve the impasse, Congress appointed a 15-member commission to

determine who would receive the votes of the disputed states. Originally composed of seven Democrats, seven Republicans, and an independent, the commission fell under Republican control when the independent member resigned to run for the Senate and a Republican replaced him. The commission split along party lines and voted eight to seven to award Hayes all the disputed votes. But both houses of Congress still had to ratify the decision, and in the House, there was strong Democratic opposition. To ensure Hayes's election, Republican leaders struck an informal bargain with conservative southern Democrats that historians have dubbed the **Compromise of 1877**. What precisely was agreed to and by whom remains in dispute, but both sides understood that Hayes would be president and that southern blacks would be abandoned to their fate. President Hayes immediately ordered the army not to resist a Democratic takeover of state governments in South Carolina and Louisiana. Thus fell the last of the Radical governments. White Democrats firmly controlled the entire South. The trauma of the war and Reconstruction had destroyed the chances for renewing two-party competition among white southerners.



MAP 16.2 ELECTION OF 1876

## “Redeeming” a New South

The men who took power after Radical Reconstruction fell in one southern state after another are usually referred to as the **Redeemers**. Their backgrounds and previous loyalties differed. Some were members of the Old South's ruling planter class who had supported secession and now sought to reestablish the old order with as few changes as possible. Others, of middle-class origin or outlook, favored commercial and industrial interests over agrarian groups and called for a New South committed to diversified economic development. A third group consisted of professional politicians bending with the prevailing winds.

The Redeemers subscribed to no single coherent ideology but are best characterized as power brokers mediating among the dominant interest groups of the South to serve their own political advantage. The “rings” that they established on the state and county levels were analogous to the political machines developing at the same time in northern cities.

Redeemers did, however, endorse two basic principles: laissez-faire and white supremacy. Laissez-faire could unite planters, frustrated at seeing direct state support going to businessmen, and capitalist promoters, who realized that low taxes and freedom from government regulation were even more advantageous than state subsidies. The Redeemers responded only to privileged and entrenched interest groups, especially landlords, merchants, and industrialists, and offered little or nothing to tenants, small farmers, and working people. As industrialization gathered steam in the 1880s, Democratic regimes became increasingly accommodating to manufacturing interests and hospitable to agents of northern capital who were gaining control of the South's transportation system and its extractive industries.

White supremacy was the rallying cry that brought the Redeemers to power. Once in office, they stayed there by charging that opponents of ruling Democratic cliques were trying to divide “the white man's party” and open the way for a return to “black domination.” Appeals to racism also deflected attention from the economic grievances of groups without political clout.

The new governments were more economical than those of Reconstruction, mainly because they drastically cut appropriations for schools and other public services. But they were scarcely more honest—embezzlement and bribery remained rife.

### Compromise of 1877

Compromise struck during the contested presidential election of 1876, in which Democrats accepted the election of Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican) in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from the South and the end of Reconstruction.

**Redeemers** A loose coalition of prewar Democrats, Confederate veterans, and Whigs who took over southern state governments in the 1870s, supposedly “redeeming” them from the corruption of Reconstruction. They shared a commitment to white supremacy and laissez-faire economics.

16.1

16.2

16.3

16.4

**Quick Check**

Which principles divided, and which united, the new “Redeemer” governments?

**Jim Crow laws** Segregation laws enacted by southern states after Reconstruction.

The Redeemer regimes of the late 1870s and 1880s neglected small white farmers. Whites, as well as blacks, were suffering from the notorious crop lien system, which gave local merchants who advanced credit at high interest during the growing season the right to take possession of the harvested crop on terms that buried farmers deeper and deeper in debt. As a result, many whites lost title to their homesteads and were reduced to tenancy. When a depression of world cotton prices added to the burden of a ruinous credit system, agrarian protesters began to challenge the ruling elite, first through the Southern Farmers’ Alliance of the late 1880s and then by supporting its political descendant—the Populist party of the 1890s (see Chapter 20).

## The Rise of Jim Crow

The new order imposed the greatest hardships on African Americans. The dark night of racism fell on the South. From 1876 to 1910, southern states imposed restrictions on black civil rights known as **Jim Crow laws**. The term “Jim Crow” came from an antebellum minstrel show figure first popularized by Thomas “Daddy” Rice, who blackened his face and sang a song called “Jump Jim Crow.” By the 1850s, Jim Crow was a familiar figure in minstrel shows, and had become a synonym for a black person in popular white speech. It was a short step to referring to segregated railroad cars for black people as Jim Crow cars. While segregation and disfranchisement began as informal arrangements in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, they culminated in a legal regime of separation and exclusion that took firm hold in the 1890s. (see Chapter 19).

The rise of Jim Crow in the political arena was especially bitter for southern blacks who realized that only political power could ensure other rights. The Redeemers promised, as part of the understanding that led to the end of federal intervention in 1877, that they would respect the rights of blacks as set forth in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Governor Wade Hampton of South Carolina pledged that the new regimes would not reduce African Americans to second-class citizenship. But when blacks tried to vote Republican in the “redeemed” states, they encountered violence and intimidation. “Bulldozing” African American voters remained common in state elections during the late 1870s and early 1880s; those blacks who withstood the threat of losing their jobs or being evicted from tenant farms if they voted for the party of Lincoln were visited at night and literally whipped into line. The message was clear: Vote Democratic, or vote not at all.

Furthermore, white Democrats now controlled the electoral machinery and manipulated the black vote by stuffing ballot boxes, discarding unwanted votes, or reporting fraudulent totals. Some states imposed complicated voting requirements to discourage black participation. Full-scale disfranchisement did not occur until literacy tests and other legalized obstacles to voting were imposed from 1890 to 1910, but by then, less formal and comprehensive methods had already made a mockery of the Fifteenth Amendment.

Nevertheless, blacks continued to vote freely in some localities until the 1890s; a few districts, like the one Robert Smalls represented, even elected black Republicans to Congress during the immediate post-Reconstruction period. The last of these, Representative George H. White of North Carolina, served until 1901. His farewell address eloquently conveyed the agony of southern blacks in the era of Jim Crow (strict segregation):

These parting words are in behalf of an outraged, heart-broken, bruised, and bleeding but God-fearing people, faithful, industrious, loyal people—rising people, full of potential force. . . . The only apology that I have to make for the earnestness with which I have spoken is that I am pleading for the life, the liberty, the future happiness, and manhood suffrage of one-eighth of the entire population of the United States.

**Quick Check**

What aspects of southern society did the Jim Crow Laws regulate?

## Conclusion: Henry McNeal Turner and The “Unfinished Revolution”

The career of Henry McNeal Turner sums up the bitter side of the black experience in the South during and after Reconstruction. Born free in South Carolina in 1834, Turner became a minister of the AME Church just before the Civil War. During the war, he



**HENRY MCNEAL TURNER** Turner, who was born in freedom, became a bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church and was elected to the Georgia legislature.

recruited African Americans for the Union army and served as chaplain for black troops. After the war, he went to Georgia to work for the Freedmen's Bureau but encountered racial discrimination from white officers and left government service for church work and Reconstruction politics. Elected to the 1867 Georgia constitutional convention and to the state legislature in 1868, he was one of many black clergymen who became leaders among the freedmen. But whites won control of the Georgia legislature and expelled all the black members. As the inhabitant of a state in which blacks never gained the power that they achieved in other parts of the South, Turner was one of the first black leaders to see the failure of Reconstruction as the betrayal of African American hopes for citizenship.

Becoming a bishop of the AME Church in 1880, Turner emerged as the era's leading proponent of black emigration to Africa. Because he believed that white Americans would never grant blacks equal rights, Turner became an early advocate of black nationalism and a total separation of the races. Emigration became popular among southern blacks, who were especially hard hit by terror and oppression just after the end of Reconstruction. Still, most blacks in the nation as a whole and even in Turner's own church refused to give up the hope of eventual equality on American soil. But Bishop Turner's anger and despair were the understandable responses of a proud man to how he and his fellow African Americans had been treated in the post-Civil War period.

By the late 1880s, the wounds of the Civil War were healing, and white Americans were seized by the spirit of sectional reconciliation and their common Americanism. But whites could reunite only because northerners had tacitly agreed to give southerners a free hand to reduce blacks to servitude. The "outraged, heart-broken, bruised, and bleeding" African Americans of the South paid the heaviest price for sectional reunion.

## Chapter Review

### The President Versus Congress

**16.1** What conflicts arose consecutively involving President Lincoln and then President Johnson and Congress during Reconstruction? p. 355

Both Lincoln and Johnson had their own notions of how Reconstruction should be governed. Radical Republicans who sought more protection for black rights challenged Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan. Later, when Johnson hesitated to renew the Freedmen's Bureau and fight the Black Codes, Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment to ensure equal rights to all Americans.

### Reconstructing Southern Society

**16.2** What problems did southern society face during Reconstruction? p. 363

The immediate problems facing the South were economic and physical devastation, and providing for the mass of freed slaves. While former slaveholders hoped to reduce ex-slaves to conditions not unlike slavery, northern Republicans wanted to reorganize southern land and labor on a northern free-labor model. Freedmen's Bureau agents emphasized that ex-slaves had to sign contracts and work for wages. The freed slaves hoped instead to own land. Sharecropping was a compromise.

### Retreat from Reconstruction

**16.3** Why did Reconstruction end? p. 369

Although intended to protect civil rights, the Fifteenth Amendment allowed states to limit local suffrage through difficult voting prerequisites. Further, the Ku Klux Klan intimidated black voters and representation. By 1876, these tactics had defeated the Republicans in most southern states and Reconstruction was nearly dead.

### Reunion and the New South

**16.4** Who benefited and who suffered from the reconciliation of the North and South? p. 372

Reunion came at the expense of African Americans. The Compromise of 1877 restored autonomous government in the South to resolve the 1876 election. The North would no longer enforce unpopular civil rights, allowing the Redeemers to bring back laissez-faire economics and restore white supremacy through the Jim Crow laws.

## Timeline

