

THE RECONSTRUCTION

1865-1877

Major question facing both N & S after the Civil War was this: How to politically reconstruct the nation? How do we put the pieces back together again – how does one bring 11 states back into the Union?

Long before War ended, Lincoln had already thought of this question.

Dec. of 1863 – Lincoln announced his plan for Reconstruction – **10% Plan**.

1. Any S. state would be given full membership into Union once 10% of all voting males pledged allegiance to the Union and a presidential pardon.
2. Citizens must accept Emancipation as final – No Debate!
3. Any U.S. gov. officials who had resigned and went to the S. before the War (including S. generals and officers) would receive no pardon and not allowed into politics.

* Once 10% of each state agreed to these conditions, they would be allowed to full membership in the Union (courts, congress, etc...)

Critics in Congress said –

1. Way too lenient after all this destruction and death.
2. Congress should decide, not the President on a reconstruction policy. These men were called Congressional Radicals, and wanted to severely punish the S. before full membership back in the Union.

Wade-Davis Bill (1864) the Congressional (Radical) plan for Reconstruction

1. Each S. state will get a military gov. and will be under military law.
2. Each state must have 50% of voting males swear allegiance (and they same 50% must swear they did not support the secession.)
3. States also had to admit secession was illegal, and that Emancipation was final.

* Once these goals had been met by a state, they would be given full membership back into the Union, and the military law would be removed.

Wade-Davis bill is passed, and Lincoln promptly vetoes it with the pocket veto. Even though it didn't pass, it was an indication reconstruction wouldn't be easy.

April 14th, 1865 – President Lincoln assassinated while watching the play “Our American Cousin” by John Wilkes Booth, an actor (not in the play that evening) and a Southern Sympathizer. Lincoln died the next morning; 5 days after the Lee had surrendered.

Andrew Johnson is now the 17th President. Johnson brought quite a few negative qualities with him to the Presidency.

1. Had a thin skin – didn't take criticism well.
2. Very insecure in himself.
3. Wasn't good at compromising.
4. Was a *strong believer in States rights*. Though he loved the Union, he thought the Federal Gov. had very limited powers.

5. He was a Democrat.
6. Not elected pres, but made president by accident.

Johnson preferred Lincoln's 10% plan, but also used portions of the Wade-Davis bill. Congressmen such as Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner (yup, same one) argued for neither plan, wanting Congress to deal with the S. as they choose (they were the Radicals).

Summer of 1865 – Congress went into recess for about 6 months (took awhile to get home and back). They won't reconvene until Jan. of 1866. Pres. Johnson was given free reign to do what he wanted on Reconstruction, Congress can't stop him if not in session, and so Johnson:

1. Pardons a large number of Southerners.
2. Allowed S. states to hold conventions to write Constitutions
3. Allowed S. states to elect congressmen to state legislatures and to Congress.

When Congress reconvenes in late 1865, early 1866, they are not happy with President Johnson. They refuse to seat these newly elected Congressmen.

Question – Why was there so much criticism of Andrew Johnson?

1. Newspapers reported atrocities in the S. aimed at former black slaves, which upset the N. when nothing was done about them.
2. Mississippi and VA were reorganizing their state militias. N. had just disarmed them, and now they were rearming themselves. Didn't make N. happy (what if other S. states follow suit?)
3. Mississippi refused to ratify the 13th Amendment. This was not up for debate, you had to ratify it. (Mississippi finally ratified the 13th Amendment in March of 1895 – not a typo)
4. During 6 month period, almost every state passed "black codes" which described what former slaves could and couldn't do. In essence, it was another form of slavery. N. heard about it they went ballistic.

* Pres. Johnson didn't really do anything to stop any of this, thus criticism of him grew.

Reconstruction Acts of 1867 – this is what the S. must do to re-enter the Union.

Also known as Radical Reconstruction

1. Former confederate states have no legal governments (abolished anything Johnson set up.)
2. Congress divided S. into 5 military districts, under military law (except Ten. which was allowed back into Union right away for its support of the 13th Amendment.)
3. Army given control of all courts in S. districts.
4. Voter registers must do background checks, not just take the loyalty oath as truth.
5. Require each state to write a new constitution which listed protections for freedmen.
6. Military commanders given practically unlimited power over their districts.

* By 1871, all the S. states were back in the Union.

Tragedy – no sooner had S. been readmitted than the N. began to lose interest in reconstruction. New interests were expanding the west and promoting industrialization. The N. grew weary of the "southern problem", and by 1871 felt they had done enough for Southern blacks.

*By 1877, all S. states were once again controlled politically by the same men who had lead them before and during the civil war.

Success of Reconstruction

1. Passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments (Reconstruction Amendments).
 - 13 – Abolished slavery
 - 14 – Provided definition of citizenship and civil rights
 - 15 – Voting rights (specifically black suffrage)
2. Success of Freedman's Bureau
3. Establishment in S. of schools for black children

Failures of Reconstruction

1. Failure to distribute land to ex-slaves – had to depend on white men for a living still.
2. Unwillingness of N. to follow through on Reconstruction – abandoned African Am's.
3. Left too many problems for future generations to deal with.

Observations on Reconstruction

1. Did not last very long
2. A tremendous lack of vindictiveness on part of the N. Only 1 man was brought to trial and executed for Civil War, Jefferson Davis spent 2 years in prison; No S. military officer spent time in a N. prison, though he could have been tried for treason.
3. By 1872, all ex-confederate soldiers had been pardoned and were able to vote and hold office.

If one compares the treatment of the South after the Civil War to that of Germany after WWI or WWII, you can clearly see that the South got off very, very easily.

A Few Reconstruction Vocab words

Freedman's Bureau: A bureau set up in the S. to help the freed slaves, such as setting up schools, and looking after all blacks.

Sharecropping: Each family was responsible for its own piece of land which they rented from white landlords, paying either a fixed rent, or a more often a share of their crop.

Black Codes: Laws for blacks which said that they could or could not do. Really upset the North, as it was just another form of slavery.

Radicals: Congressmen like Stevens and Sumner who wanted to punish the S. through reconstruction and opposed Pres. Johnson

Reconstruction Amendments: 13th, 14th, 15th Amendments passed during the period of Reconstruction.

Carpetbaggers: Northerners or elite African American's who moved to the S. to serve as Republican leaders in the S., and to help with the Reconstruction process.

Scalawags: S. born white Republicans, looked down upon by S. whites.

Ku Klux Klan (KKK): Group of white men who used terror against blacks and republicans to cause reluctance in republican efforts in the S.