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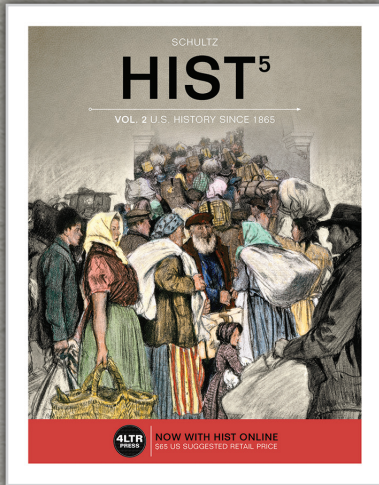
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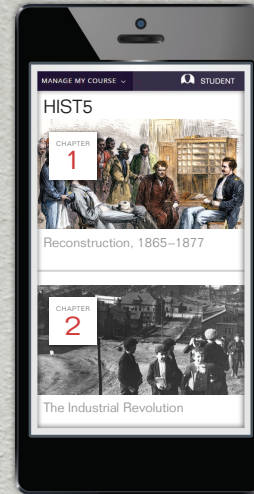
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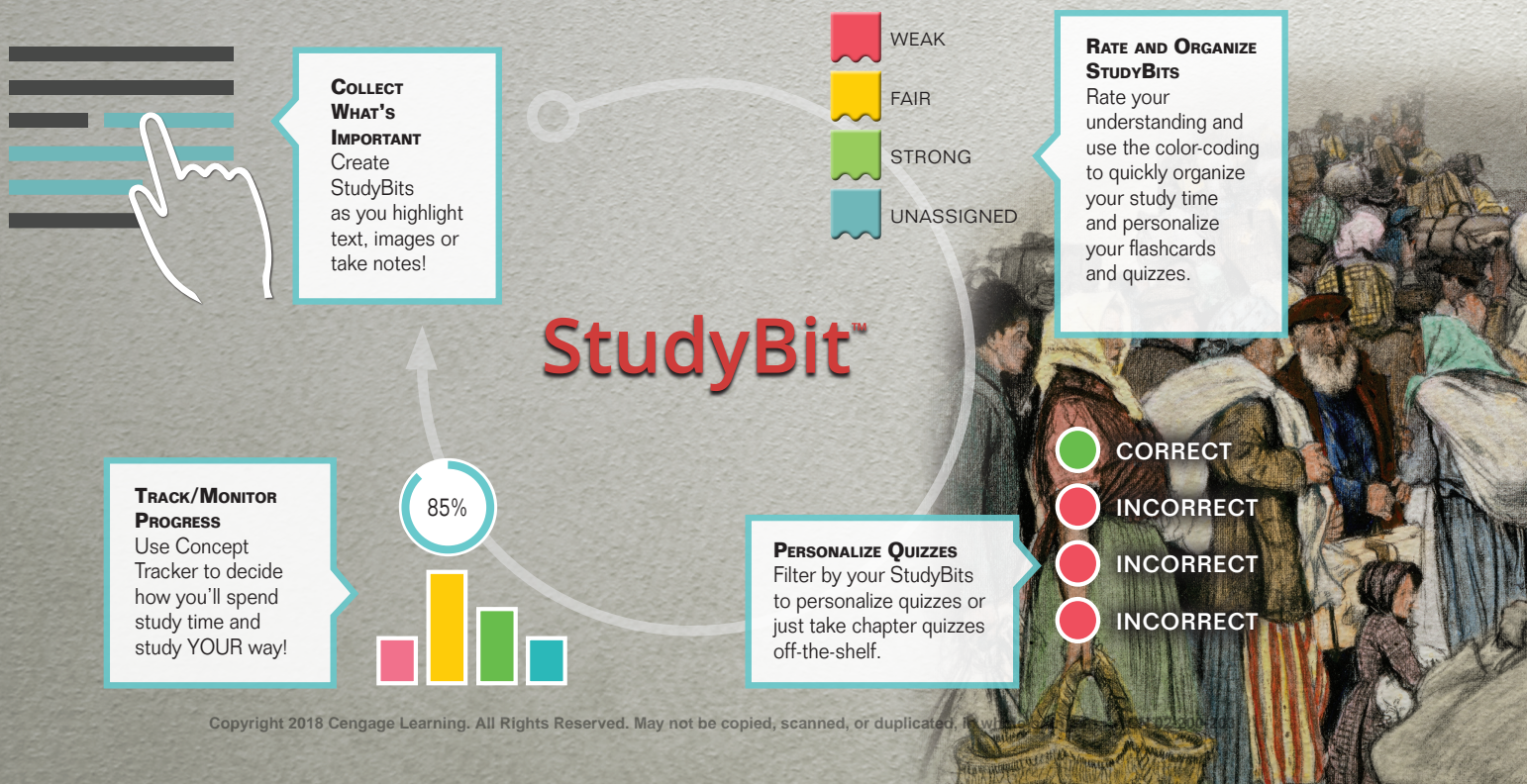
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Naval Parade, held in honor of commander George Dewey (1837–1917), 1898 (oil on canvas), Pansing, Fred (1854–1912)/© Museum of the City of New York, USA/Bridgeman Art Library

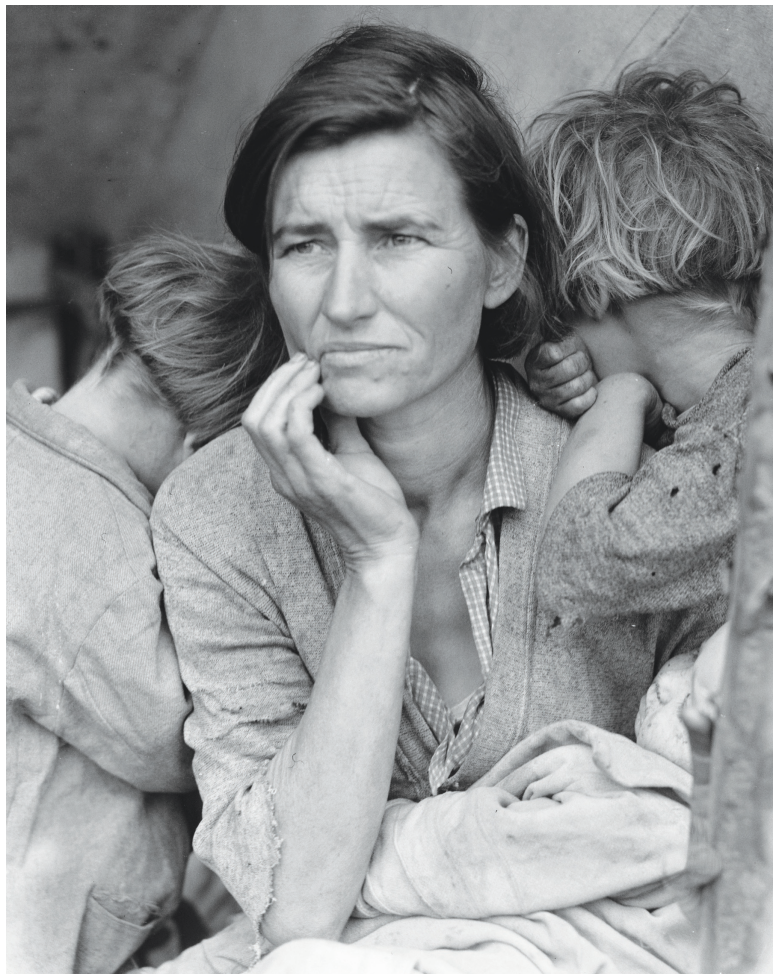


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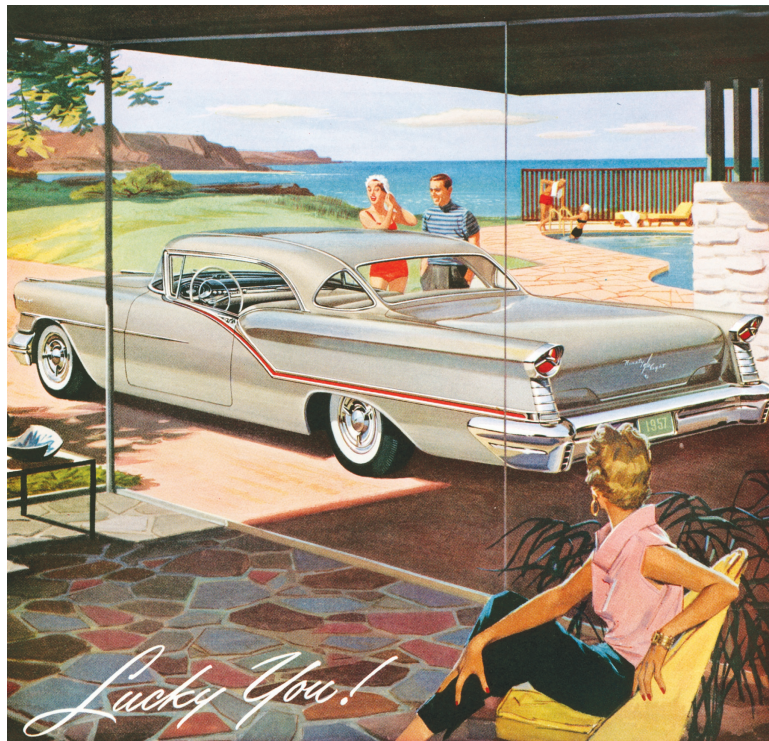


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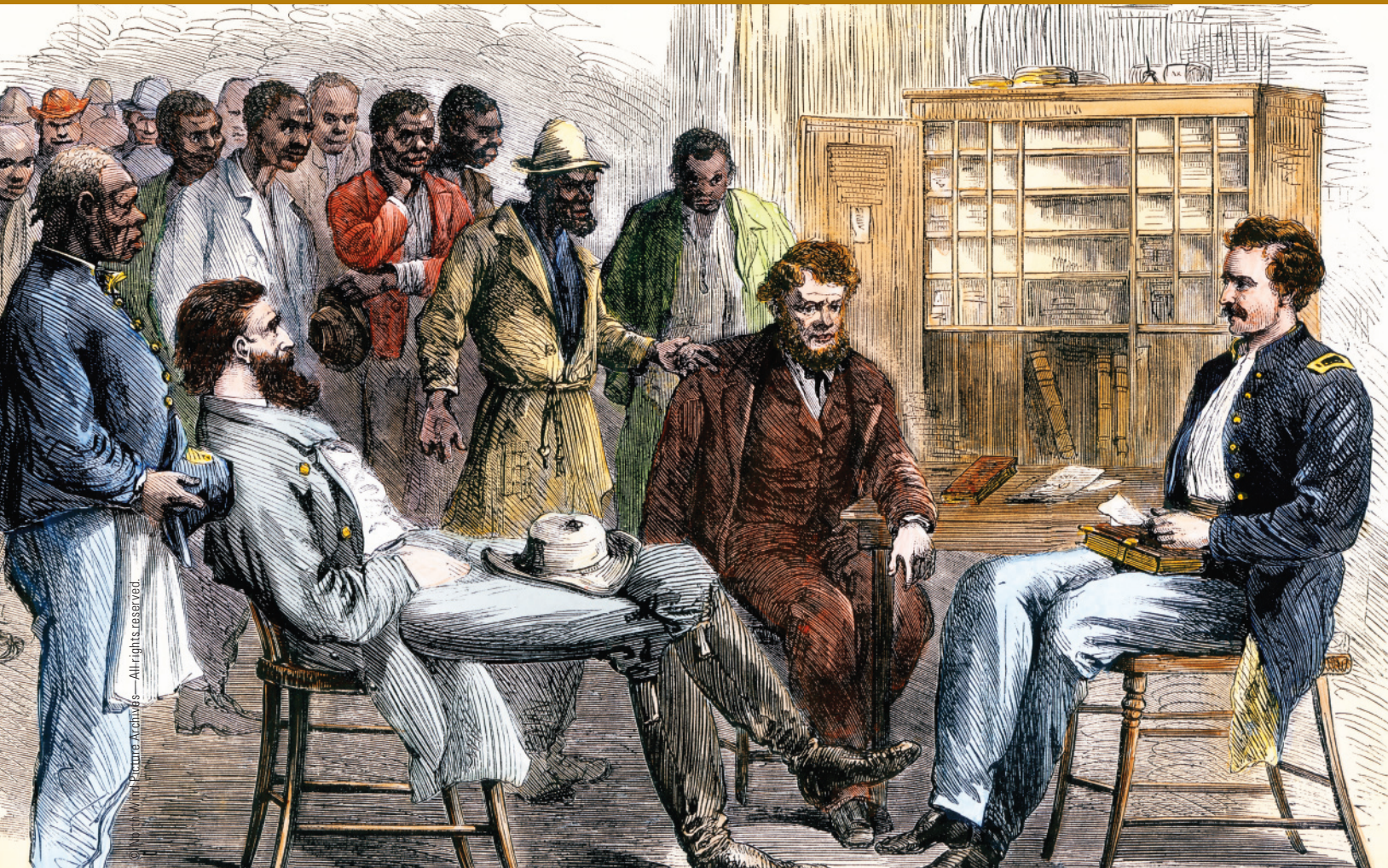


## About the Author

Kevin M. Schultz is an award-winning historian and bestselling author. He is currently a Professor of History at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), where he has won several awards for his teaching and writing. He is the author of two other books: *Buckley and Mailer: The Difficult Friendship that Shaped the Sixties* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), which was an Amazon #1 New Release in American History; and *Tri-Faith America: How Postwar Catholics and Jews Helped America Realize Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford University Press, 2011), which is used in both graduate and undergraduate classes across the country. He has published widely for popular audiences, too, including having had a journal article appear immediately before one written by the Pope. He received his BA from Vanderbilt University and his PhD from UC Berkeley.



# 16 | Reconstruction, 1865–1877



## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to do the following:

- 16-1 Describe the changed world of ex-slaves after the Civil War.
- 16-2 Outline the different phases of Reconstruction, beginning with Lincoln's plan and moving through presidential Reconstruction to Congressional Reconstruction.
- 16-3 Explain how Reconstruction evolved at the individual states' level.
- 16-4 Evaluate and understand the relative success and failures of Reconstruction.

AFTER FINISHING  
THIS CHAPTER  
GO TO PAGE 306  
FOR STUDY TOOLS



Confederate soldiers returned home to a devastated South in 1865. While northern trains and cities began to hum with activity, the South's farms and factories, its railroads and bridges—almost its entire infrastructure—had been destroyed by war. Nearly 23 percent of the South's fighting-age men had died in the war. Thousands more bore the physical scars of battle. The physical rebuilding of the region began quickly and progressed rapidly, but reconstructing southern society was a much more difficult process, especially considering (1) the political questions about how to integrate rebel states back into the nation and (2) the social questions about how to integrate 4 million newly freed slaves.

The North was also vastly changed, albeit in another way. Northern politicians seized the opportunity to pass many of the laws that southerners in Congress had long resisted. During and shortly after the war, Congress passed laws supporting internal improvements, outlawing slavery, and expanding the developments of the Market Revolution. Indeed, some historians argue that the Civil War was crucial in turning the Market Revolution of the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s into the Industrial Revolution of the second half of the nineteenth century. Regardless of the term you use, the North after the Civil War was beginning to resemble what we think of today as a modern industrial society.

But, first, to the era of **Reconstruction**, defined as the country's various attempts to resolve the issues that remained after the Civil War, including: how free could former slaves be in the ex-Confederacy; how could the country re-incorporate the states that had voted to leave; and would the country undertake the dramatic transformations necessary to overturn two hundred years of slavery?

## 16-1 FREEDMEN, FREEDWOMEN

After the Civil War, black Americans encountered a new world of opportunities. After years of enslavement, or at least the perpetual threat of enslavement if they had been already freed, African Americans confronted a new question: what does it mean to be free? After the passage in 1865 of the Thirteenth Amendment outlawing

slavery throughout the land forever, black Americans had to wonder: what does one do after the bonds of slavery have been broken?

The first thing many freed people did was move. They often left the plantations upon which they had labored as slaves, typically to put some distance between them and their former owners. They also moved in search of long-lost family members who had perhaps been sold to another owner during an era when the stability of slave families was always secondary to profits. The freedom of movement was the key.

This new mobility meant that black family life began to stabilize throughout the South. Men and women now had more control over their lives and their familial roles. Reflecting the priorities of nineteenth-century American society, ex-slaves often removed women from the fields so that they could occupy a "women's sphere of domesticity." Most black women still had to work for financial reasons, but they often began working as indoor domestics rather than field hands.

Meanwhile, freed families often desperately sought to purchase land in order to continue the planting life they knew best, sometimes by simply purchasing a piece of the land on which they had labored before the Civil War. In their new communities, African Americans also expressed their religious independence by expanding the independent network of black churches that had been established since the Revolution. During Reconstruction, the number of black churches grew exponentially.

The newly freed people also sought the education that had been denied them during slavery. Schools for African Americans opened all over the South, for parents and for children. Learning to read meant learning to understand contracts, engage in political battles, and monitor wages, new experiences for those who had only recently been deemed chattel.

Politically, African Americans sought to vote. They marched in demand of it. They paraded to advocate bills

**Reconstruction** The federal government's attempts to resolve the issues resulting from the end of the Civil War in order to reconstitute the nation

◀◀ The process of reconstructing the nation after four years of civil war was long and exhausting, so long in fact that it may have even allowed the South to lose the war but win the peace. Here, new laws are explained at the office of the Freedman's Bureau in Memphis, Tennessee.



endorsing it. They lionized black Revolutionary heroes in order to establish their credentials as vote-casting Americans. And they held mock elections to show their capacity and desire to participate in the American political process. Life for the newly freed was tumultuous but exciting, filled with possibilities.

### 16-1a **The Freedmen's Bureau**

While ex-slaves explored a life based on the free-labor vision, members of the defeated Confederacy sought to maintain as much of the old order as possible. To this end, they worked to prevent ex-slaves from acquiring economic autonomy or political rights. Although they had lost the war, ex-Confederates feared a complete turnover from the lives they had led before it. Indeed, one of the first organizations created after the war in the South was the **Ku Klux Klan**, founded in 1865 by six white Confederate soldiers concerned about the racial implications of black freedom. The Klan and other similar organizations, such as the Southern Cross and the Knights of White Camellia, served as quasi-military forces serving the interests of those who desired the restoration of white supremacy. Nathan Bedford Forrest, a Confederate general, was the Klan's first national leader.

To help mitigate this resistance, in 1865, Congress established the **Freedmen's Bureau**, a government agency designed to create a new social order by government mandate. Under the management of northerner O.O. Howard (after whom Howard



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>> **What it means to be free** | After the Civil War, freedom was an expansive concept for African Americans in the South. They demonstrated this new freedom in numerous ways, large and small: many bought dogs and married, some purchased firearms, and several held mass meetings without white supervision. These were all actions often denied them under slavery. Pictured here is a group of “freedmen” in Richmond, Virginia circa 1865.

University is named), Congress designed the Freedmen's Bureau to build and manage new schools, provide food and medical care to needy southern black and white people, and ensure equal access to the judicial system for southerners both black and white. It had some success with this Herculean task: the Freedmen's Bureau built 3,000 schools and expanded medical care throughout much of the South, paying particular attention to the freed slaves and the areas where they had settled.

Its task of redesigning economic relations would prove more challenging. Lincoln's Republicans in Congress succeeded in putting into the bureau's charter a provision that plantations be divided into 40-acre plots and sold to former slaves, thus the origin of the phrase “40-acres-and-a-mule” signifying promises (often broken) made to African Americans. However, that plan was upended by politicians intending to enforce their own plans for reconstructing the South. Because politics were vitally important in determining how Reconstruction would unfold—would wealthy southerners simply get their land back?—it is to politics we must turn.

**Ku Klux Klan** A quasi-military force formed immediately after the Civil War by former Confederate soldiers in order to resist racial integration and preserve white supremacy; after a temporary decline, the group reformed in 1915 and sporadically returned to prominence throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

**Freedmen's Bureau** Government agency designed to create a new social order by government mandate; this bureau provided freedmen with education, food, medical care, and access to the justice system





>> “The Secretary of War may direct such issues of provisions, clothing, and fuel, as he may deem needful for the immediate and temporary shelter and supply of destitute and suffering refugees and freedmen and their wives and children, under such rules and regulations as he may direct.”—Freedmen’s Bureau Bill, 1865. The image shows the old and sick being issued rations at the Freedmen’s Bureau.

16-2

## POLITICAL PLANS FOR RECONSTRUCTION

Even before the war was over, President Lincoln had pondered what it would take to bring the South back into the nation. Unfortunately for him, many in Congress were more interested in punishment than in reconciliation.

### 16-2a Lincoln’s Plan for Reconstruction and His Assassination

In 1863, while battle was still raging, Lincoln issued his **Ten-Percent Plan**, which offered amnesty to any southerner who proclaimed (1) loyalty to the Union and (2) support of the emancipation of slaves. When 10 percent of a state’s voters in the election of 1860 had taken the oath to the United States, they could develop a new state government, which would be required to abolish slavery. Then that state could reenter the Union with full privileges, including the crucial apportionment to the House of Representatives and Senate. Although requiring just 10 percent of the population to declare loyalty to the Union, and sidestepping the issue of preserving rights for the millions of ex-slaves,

it is important to remember that the war was still being fought. Lincoln was simply attempting to drain support from the Confederacy and shorten the war by making appeasement look easy.

### CONGRESS BRISTLES

Republicans in Congress, more interested in punishing the South than Lincoln was, bristled at Lincoln’s leniency. In opposition to Lincoln’s plan, they passed the **Wade-Davis Bill**, which would have allowed a southern state back into the Union only after 50 percent of the population had taken the loyalty oath. Furthermore, to earn the right to vote or to serve in a constitutional convention, southerners would have to take a second oath, called the **iron-clad oath**, that testified that they had never voluntarily aided or abetted the rebellion. The iron-clad oath was designed to ensure that only staunch Unionists in the South could hold political power. Lincoln vetoed the bill, thinking it too harsh, and the battle about Reconstruction continued.

### LINCOLN’S ASSASSINATION

As the battle wore on between Congress and the president, the hostilities of the American Civil War finally ended. Although the South had lost the war, a few disgruntled southerners would attempt to get revenge. Three days after Appomattox, John Wilkes Booth, a local actor and Confederate sympathizer, shot and killed Lincoln during a play at Ford’s Theater in Washington, D.C. Eleven days later, a Union soldier shot and killed Booth as he tried to escape from a burning barn. In the coming political showdown, Lincoln’s deep empathy and political acumen would be missed, as the battle to reconstruct the nation now took place between defiant congressional Republicans and the insecure man who had stumbled into the presidency—Andrew Johnson.

**Ten-Percent Plan** Plan issued by Lincoln in 1863 that offered amnesty to any southerner who proclaimed loyalty to the Union and support of the emancipation of slaves; once 10 percent of a state’s voters in the election of 1860 signed the oath, it could create a new state government and reenter the Union

**Wade-Davis Bill** Bill that would have allowed a southern state back into the Union only after 50 percent of the population had taken the loyalty oath

**iron-clad oath** Oath to be taken by southerners to testify that they had never voluntarily aided or abetted the rebellion



>> Shown here, in an act of retribution, actor John Wilkes Booth shoots Lincoln in the head just three days after the Civil War had ended.

## 16-2b Andrew Johnson and Presidential Reconstruction

Upon Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson became president. Johnson was a native southerner, born poor to functionally illiterate parents in North Carolina, before the family moved to Tennessee. He didn't master reading and writing until he was in his twenties, and was trained to be a tailor. It was his wife who pushed him into politics and throughout the war Johnson proved a loyal Unionist. He served as Tennessee's military governor after the state was taken over by the Union Army. And, despite Johnson being a Democrat, in 1864 Lincoln selected Johnson as his running mate because Lincoln hoped to quiet dissent by running with a non-northerner and a non-Republican. While it may have helped him win the election, Lincoln's plan would ultimately backfire.

### PRESIDENTIAL RECONSTRUCTION, 1865–1867

Johnson was a lonely man who had a tough time handling criticism. Since his youth, he had looked up to the South's planter aristocracy and constantly sought

**black codes** Post–Civil War laws specifically written to govern the behavior of African Americans; modeled on the slave codes that existed before the Civil War

Even Robert E. Lee applied to be pardoned.

state constitutions and elect their own governors, state legislatures, and federal representatives. Johnson's plan showed no concern for the future of black people in America.

Southern states made the most of the leeway Johnson afforded them. Even Robert E. Lee applied to be pardoned (although his pardon was never granted

during his lifetime). A line of southern planters literally appeared at the White House to ask Johnson's personal forgiveness; doing so allowed the southern elite to return to its former privileged status.

In the end, Johnson granted amnesty to more than 13,000 Confederates, many of whom had been combative leaders in the Confederacy. Once Johnson had granted these pardons, he ensured that there would be no social revolution in the South. With pardons in hand, wealthy southerners would not lose their land or their social control of the South.

### BLACK CODES

Most of the new southern state governments returned Confederate leaders to political power. These leaders then created **black codes** modeled on the slave codes that existed before the Civil War. Although the codes legalized black marriages and allowed African Americans to hold and sell property, freed slaves were prohibited from serving on juries or testifying against white



people in court. Inter-marriage between black and white Americans was also strictly forbidden. Some states even had special rules that limited the economic freedoms of their black populations. Mississippi, for example, barred African Americans from purchasing or renting farmland. Most states created laws that allowed police officials to round up black vagrants and hire them out as laborers to white landowners.

In the end, these new laws hardened the separation of black Americans from white Americans, ending the intermingling and interaction that had been more common during slavery. With the rise of post-Civil War black codes, black and white southerners began a long process of physical separation that was not present before the war and that would last for at least a century. These black codes would also begin the process whereby black southerners after the Civil War were left with, in the words of one historian, nothing but freedom.

## 16-2c Congressional Reconstruction

Johnson did nothing to prevent the South from re-imposing these conditions on the black population. In Johnson's eyes, reconstruction of the Union would be finished as soon as southern states returned to the Union without slavery. Conservative members of Congress agreed. However, a group that would come to be called the **Radical Republicans** heartily disagreed.

### THE RADICAL REPUBLICANS

The Republican Party had never been squarely behind Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction, and in fact the Radical Republicans, defined as the wing of the party most hostile to slavery, had opposed Lincoln's plans fiercely. Radicals in Congress, including Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, Charles Sumner of Massachusetts (of "Bleeding Sumner" fame), and Benjamin Wade of Ohio, had pushed for emancipation long before Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and they considered Lincoln's lenient Reconstruction program



>> This print shows a campaign banner for 1864 Republican presidential candidate Abraham Lincoln and running mate Andrew Johnson. An insecure man who had stumbled into the presidency, Johnson found it difficult to reunite the nation.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division  
[LC-DIG-ppmsca-17562]

outrageous. As they looked toward the end of the war, Radicals hoped to use the Confederacy's defeat as an opportunity to overhaul southern society. At the very

least, they hoped to strip the southern planter class of its power and ensure that freed slaves would acquire basic rights.

### THE RADICALS VERSUS JOHNSON

As we have seen, Johnson, considering himself somewhat of a moderate, took office intending to wrap up the process of Reconstruction quickly. Granting amnesty to former Confederate leaders and other wealthy southerners demonstrated as much. Radicals in Congress, however, continued to devise measures for protecting the interests of the newly freed black population. With no southerners yet in Congress, the Radical Republicans wielded considerable power.

Their first moves were (1) to expand the role of the Freedmen's Bureau, creating a stronger organization with greater enforcement powers and a bigger budget, and (2) to pass the important **Civil Rights Act**, which was designed to counteract the South's new black codes by allowing all citizens, black or white, the protection of the law, the right to enforce contracts, to sue and be sued, give evidence in court, and hold property. Johnson

**Radical Republicans** Wing of the Republican Party most hostile to slavery

**Civil Rights Act** Bill that granted all citizens mandatory rights, regardless of racial considerations; designed to counteract the South's new black codes

vetoed both bills, but Congress overrode the veto on the Civil Rights Act, making them the first laws ever passed over presidential veto. Their willingness to override a presidential veto suggests the importance that Radical Republicans placed on a meaningful reconstruction effort. It was the first of many vetoes the Radical Republicans would override.

## THE FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT

Congress's success in circumventing Johnson's veto began a new phase of Reconstruction known as **Congressional Reconstruction** in which Congress wielded more power than the president. Congress introduced a constitutional amendment in 1866 that (1) barred Confederate leaders from ever holding public office in the United States, government (2) gave Congress the right to reduce the representation of any state that did not give black people the right to vote, and (3) declared that any person born or naturalized in the United States was, by that very act, an American citizen deserving of "equal protection of the law." This, in essence, granted full citizenship to all black people; by the power of the constitution, states were prohibited from restricting the rights and privileges of any citizen.

To the frustration of Radicals like Thaddeus Stevens and Charles Sumner, the amendment, which became the **Fourteenth Amendment** to the U.S. Constitution, did not also protect the voting rights of African Americans. Nevertheless, Congress passed the amendment and it went to the states for ratification. Tennessee approved it and, in 1866, was invited by Congress to reenter the Union. Every other state of the

There was nothing worse than being part of a nation and having no say in how that nation was governed.

former Confederacy rejected the amendment, suggesting that the Radicals' hopes for restructuring the South would not be realized easily.

## CONGRESSIONAL RECONSTRUCTION, 1867–1877

Despite the strenuous labors of Andrew Johnson, the midterm elections of 1866 gave the Radical Republicans a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress, and they began to push their program of Reconstruction more vigorously. The election was vicious, as Johnson and his supporters went around the country on what was called the "swing around the circle" to castigate and even threaten the execution of several Radical Republicans.

Despite Andrew Johnson's claim that Reconstruction was over, the Radical-led Congress easily passed (again over Johnson's veto) the **Military Reconstruction Act** in March 1867. This act divided the former rebel states, with the exception of Tennessee, into five military districts. In each district, a military commander took control of the state governments, and

federal soldiers enforced the law and kept order (see Map 16.1).

Congress also made requirements for readmission to the Union more stringent. Each state was instructed to register voters and hold elections for a state constitutional convention. In enrolling voters, southern officials were required to include black people and exclude any white people who had held leadership positions in the Confederacy, although this provision proved easy to ignore. Once the conventions were organized, the delegates then needed to (1) create constitutions that protected black voting rights and (2) agree to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Only then would Congress ratify the new state constitutions and accept southern state representatives back into the national Congress. Holding a fair state election and agreeing to the Fourteenth Amendment became the litmus tests for reentry to the nation. Without doing so and thereby becoming full-fledged members of the Union again, the southern states would remain without congressional apportionment and under military control.

## THE SECOND RECONSTRUCTION ACT

At first, these provisions proved to be both too harsh and too lenient. The Military Reconstruction Act so outraged southerners that they refused to enroll the voters needed

**Congressional Reconstruction** Phase of Reconstruction during which Radical Republicans wielded more power than the president, allowing for the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and the Military Reconstruction Act

**Fourteenth Amendment** Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed in 1868 that extended the guarantees of the Constitution and Bill of Rights to all persons born in the United States, including African Americans and former slaves; it promised that all citizens would receive the "due process of law" before having any of their constitutional rights breached

**Military Reconstruction Act** Act that divided the former rebel states, with the exception of Tennessee, into five military districts; a military commander took control of the state governments and federal soldiers enforced the law and kept order





## Map 16.1 Reconstruction in the South

>> Reconstruction in the South required continued military involvement, even after the end of formal hostilities. This map shows the five military districts created by the US government in order to keep the southern states in line with the demands of the United States.

to put Reconstruction into motion. But southerners also preferred military rule to civilian control by those hostile to the South. In response to these various objections (and to the South's subsequent foot-dragging), Congress passed the Second Reconstruction Act, authorizing the Union military commanders to register southern voters and assemble the constitutional conventions (since southerners were not eager to do this themselves). The southern states continued to stall, so, in the summer of 1867, Congress passed two more acts designed to force southerners to proceed with Reconstruction, including requiring universal manhood suffrage. President Johnson vetoed all these measures, but his vetoes were all overridden by Radical Republicans in Congress. He was helpless to stop Congress's actions.

Eventually, the southern states had no choice but to follow the Military Reconstruction Act's instructions. There was nothing worse than being part of a nation and having no say in how it was governed.

Southerners wanted congressional representation back, and, in order to get it, they had to acquiesce to Congress's demands. In June 1868, Congress readmitted representatives and senators from six states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Florida, Alabama, Arkansas, and Louisiana. By 1870, the remaining four southern states—Virginia, Mississippi, Georgia, and Texas—had also agreed to the required provisions and they too received permission to send congressmen to Washington. As more and more Confederate states came back into the Union, the Fourteenth Amendment became the law of the land in 1868.

### FRUSTRATIONS

Although the Radical Republicans in Congress had considerable successes, in many important ways they did not produce the social revolution they had envisioned: (1) they did not redistribute land to freed slaves; (2) they did not provide black people with guaranteed access to



education; (3) they did not forbid racial segregation; and (4) they did not call for absolute racial equality for black and white people. President Johnson's leniency at the outset of Reconstruction, allowing wealthy southerners to retain their land and possessions, had denied Republicans the ability to radically reform the social structure of the South.

## 16-2d Johnson's Impeachment

Still stung by Johnson's initial act of granting pardons to the southern aristocracy, Radicals were equally stymied by his constant string of vetoes. Frustrated by all this, Congress took steps to limit the president's authority.

### THE TENURE OF OFFICE ACT

In 1867 Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act, which required the president to obtain the consent of the Senate before removing certain government officials from office. In essence, the law declared that Johnson could not fire anyone who had earned congressional approvals, especially Republicans who had been appointed by Lincoln. Johnson of course vetoed the act, but Congress once again overrode his veto.

### THE IMPEACHMENT

A showdown over the new law occurred in August 1867, when Johnson wanted to remove from office Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Stanton sympathized with the

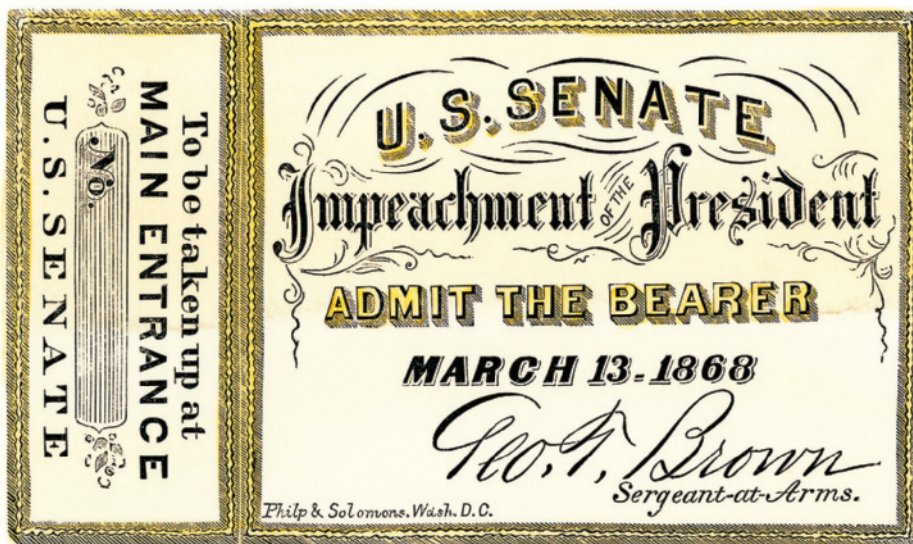
Radicals and had fallen out of favor with Johnson, so Johnson ordered his dismissal. The Senate, however, refused to authorize the firing. Undeterred, Johnson ordered Stanton to resign. When Republicans in the House of Representatives learned that Johnson had defied the Senate's Tenure of Office Act, they drafted a resolution to impeach Johnson. This could be the chance they had sought to eliminate a major obstacle to Congressional Reconstruction. The House made eleven charges against Johnson, stemming mostly from his refusal to heed the Tenure of Office Act, and a majority of the representatives voted in favor of putting him on trial. This made Andrew Johnson the first president in the nation's history to be impeached.

Radical Republicans in the House of Representatives (especially Thaddeus Stevens) powered the vote for impeachment, but the Constitution dictates that impeachment trials must take place in the Senate and must be judged by the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. Moderate Republicans and Democrats in the Senate refused to join the House Radicals in condemning Johnson, and, by one vote, the Senate lacked the two-thirds majority needed to convict the president and remove him from office.

## 16-2e The Fifteenth Amendment

In 1868, there was no way the Republicans were going to allow Johnson to run for reelection. Instead, they nominated the war hero Ulysses S. Grant for president,

hoping that Grant's tremendous popularity in the North would help them control the White House and propel their Reconstruction plans through the federal government. The Democrats nominated Horatio Seymour, the governor of New York. To the shock of the Republicans, the race between Grant and Seymour was relatively close. Although Grant obtained a majority in the Electoral College, he won the popular vote by only 300,000 ballots. Since an estimated 450,000 black people had voted for Grant, it was clear that a narrow majority of white Americans had cast their ballots for Seymour.



North Wind Picture Archives

>> Johnson was the first president ever to face an impeachment trial, and he held onto his job by only one vote in the Senate. Tickets, like the one pictured here, were sold at the trial.



Recognizing the importance of their newest support base—and aware that their time in power might be limited—Republicans in Congress moved quickly to create a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the suffrage rights of black males. It became the **Fifteenth Amendment**, which was ratified and adopted in 1870. The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited any state from denying citizens the right to vote on the grounds of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

## 16-2f Women's Rights

The Fourteenth Amendment introduced the word *male* into the Constitution for the first time, and the Fifteenth Amendment ratified the notion that voting rights were solely intended for men. Many women, who had often supported the fight for black civil rights, fought back. Historically, advocates for the rights of women have often first fought for the rights of racial minorities, especially black people. This was the case in the 1830s and 1840s, and again in the 1860s and 1870s. Viewing the overhauling of the U.S. Constitution as a moment ripe for extending various freedoms to women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Olympia Brown, veterans of the struggle to expand women's rights, pushed for a constitutional guarantee of women's suffrage. Using new journals such as *The Agitator* and *The Revolution*, women also pushed for a reform of marriage laws, changes in inheritance laws, and, as always, the vote.

But they were frustrated at almost every turn. Even Republicans declared that Reconstruction was designed solely for black men. Women were torn about whether or not to support the Reconstruction amendments, even if they excluded provisions for women's rights. These bitter differences led to divisions within the women's suffrage movement that would last until the 1890s.

## 16-3 GRASSROOTS RECONSTRUCTION

With all the political jockeying within the federal government, Reconstruction at the state level was even more rancorous. At the state level, freed slaves exercised more muscle, ensuring that Republicans



The Granger Collection, NYC

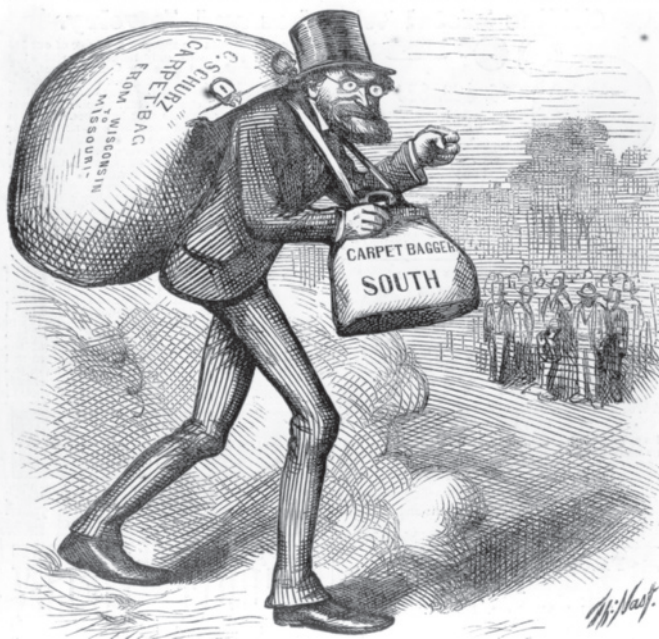
>> During Reconstruction, Hiram Revels of Mississippi (on the left in this image of seven African American congressmen) became the nation's first African American senator, while several other southern states voted African Americans to the House.

dominated all of the new state governments in the South. Newly freed slaves steadfastly cast their ballots for the party that had given them their freedom. To support this voter bloc, Republican politicians—from the North and the South—sought dramatic Reconstruction efforts. But at every turn they encountered strong opposition. Before long, it became evident that the process of reconstructing the South would be a process of two steps forward, one step back. And the most substantive change that could have happened—land and economic redistribution to the ex-slaves—remained perpetually frustrated.

## 16-3a Black Officeholders

Even with the admission of black voters, the proportion of government positions held by black Americans was still smaller than their proportion in the population. They were rarely elected to high positions, and until

**Fifteenth Amendment** Amendment that extended voting rights to all male citizens regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude



>> The Man with the (Carpet) Bags by Thomas Nast, 1872, Harper's Weekly. This political cartoon of Carl Schurz depicted as a carpetbagger, reflected Southern attitudes toward Northerners during Reconstruction. Many Southerners saw carpetbaggers as corrupt and lowly, although many came South with the intention of improving the life of America's black people.

1990 no black person was ever elected or nominated to serve as governor of a southern state. South Carolina was the only state where a black judge served in the state supreme court, and, because the state was 60 percent African American, only in South Carolina did African Americans form a plurality of the legislature. Nevertheless, more than 2,000 black citizens gained political office in the Reconstruction South. Some were policemen, some were sheriffs, some were tax assessors. Their roles were important because they ensured that fairness would be enforced and that the rule of law would be upheld.

### 16-3b Carpetbaggers and Scalawags

Yet white men held most of the offices in the new state governments, and many were Republicans supportive of

**carpetbagger** Northern-born white who moved south after the Confederacy's defeat

**scalawag** Southern-born white Republican; many had been nonslaveholding poor farmers

protecting black rights. Some of these new officials were northern-born white men who moved south after the Confederacy's defeat. Southerners called these men **carpetbaggers** because they supposedly journeyed to the South with nothing more than what they could carry in a ratty old carpetbag. The carpetbag was meant to symbolize corruption and lowliness, as supposedly poor and pretentious northerners headed south seeking to capitalize on the region's fall from grace. Not all the so-called carpetbaggers were corrupt, of course. Many of them came to the South with a desire to improve the lot of America's black people.

Southern-born, white Republicans were given the name **scalawag**, originally a term used by cattle drivers to describe livestock that was too filthy for consumption, even by dogs. Although southern Democrats insisted that only the "dirtiest" citizens became scalawags, in reality, many elite southerners joined the Republican Party, including Confederate generals Pierre Beauregard and James Longstreet. Most of the scalawags, however, had been nonslaveholding poor white farmers who worked and lived in the hill country. Many of these scalawags believed that participating in the Republicans'

plan was the fastest way to return their region to peaceful and prosperous conditions.

### SOUTHERN REPUBLICAN SUCCESSES

Although they faced considerable opposition from the old antebellum elite, southern Republicans managed to (1) construct the South's first public school system, (2) develop a system of antidiscrimination measures, (3) strengthen the rights and privileges of agricultural workers, and (4) begin efforts at internal improvements in the various states. Under the leadership of southern Republicans, for example, every state in the South financed a system of railroads and attempted to lure northern industries to the South. They met with mixed results, but they showed a newfound commitment to greater equality and to bringing the gains of the Market Revolution southward.

### 16-3c Sharecropping

Despite the new opportunities put forward by southern Republicans, freed slaves had to struggle hard to enjoy their new liberty. There was no serious land



reform and the Market and Industrial Revolutions were slow to move southward, so most black southerners had no choice but to accept work as agricultural wage laborers for white landholders, many of whom had been slaveholders before the war.

### THE BATTLE OF LABOR

Many of these landowners attempted to recreate as much of the slave system as they could, closely overseeing their workers, forcing them to work in gangs, and even trying to use the whip to maintain discipline. The freedmen, however, refused to be reduced to slavery again. They insisted on working shorter hours, and they often refused to work in gangs. To limit the amount of surveillance, freedmen often built their own log cabins far away from the houses of their employers. Unless they were willing to go beyond the rule of law, most landowners could do nothing to stop them.

### THE SHARECROPPING SYSTEM

The power struggle between southern whites and the freedmen led former slaveholders to establish and develop the **sharecropping** system. As sharecroppers, families farmed a plot of land owned by someone else and shared the crop yield with the owner of the property. Typically, the farmer and the owner split the yield in half, but the owner often claimed an even larger share if he supplied the seeds or tools necessary for cultivating the crop or if he provided housing and food. Although black farmers had earned the right to work in a familial setting, as opposed to the gang labor system of the slave era, landowners had managed to curtail black freedom by preventing many of them from owning property.

Despite sharecropping's prominent place in southern black history, there were more white sharecroppers in the South than black. It was a sign of the South's poverty after the war. The sharecropping system offered little hope for economic or social advancement. Sharecroppers could rarely earn enough money to buy land, and they were constantly in debt to their landlords. The landlord was always paid first when crops were sold at market, so if crop prices were lower than expected, sharecroppers were left with little or no income. Although sharecropping was not slavery, it was still a harsh and limited form of economic existence that permeated the South after the Civil War. By 1900, 50 percent of southern whites and 75 percent of southern blacks lived in sharecropping families.

### CONVICT LEASING

Southern landowners and politicians also began the practice of convict leasing during these years, whereby the

state leased out prisoners to private companies or landowners looking for workers after the demise of slavery. Convicts usually were not paid for their labor and were often treated harshly. But the system was good for the state, which earned income from the practice, and the lessees, who exploited the labor of the prisoners. Convicts were used in railroad, mining, and logging operations, as well as on farms. And, although convicts of all colors were exploited by the system, African Americans were particularly targeted. During the three decades after the Civil War, the number of men in prison increased in nearly every state of the South, and the percentage of those prisoners who were black ballooned. Many were convicted on questionable charges, and more than one dirty judge was exposed for fraudulently convicting an innocent black man who would be destined to work as the leased property of the state. Some historians see convict leasing as just an extension of slavery, with only a different name.

## 16-4 THE COLLAPSE OF RECONSTRUCTION

Despite the obvious setbacks, the reconstruction of the South did have some significant achievements, including two new constitutional amendments, the passage of the nation's first civil rights law, and the abolition of slavery. These positive achievements could have continued to accumulate, but they did not, for two reasons: (1) growing northern disinterest in the plight of America's southern black population and (2) increasingly violent resistance to Reconstruction from white southerners.

### 16-4a In the North

On the whole, the eight years of Grant's presidency (1869–1877) were not marked by great strides for African American civil rights. Instead, Grant's term became infamous for economic chicanery and corruption. The president's personal secretary was caught embezzling federal whiskey revenues in the so-called Whiskey Ring, while Grant's own family was implicated in a plot to corner the gold market. Charges of corruption even led to a split in the Republican Party, further draining support for Reconstruction efforts. As more upstanding

**sharecropping** System in which a family farmed a plot of land owned by someone else and shared the crop yield with the owner



>> African American sharecroppers picking cotton during Reconstruction.

political leaders became preoccupied with efforts to clean up the government and institute civil service reform, securing equal rights for black people in the South ceased to be the most pressing issue. Other things seemed to matter more. And, as Reconstruction moved into the background, northerners' racism—always just under the surface—became more visible.

Despite charges of corruption, Grant was reelected to the presidency in 1872, and during his second term, only one major piece of Reconstruction legislation was passed. Even that had key limitations. The **Civil Rights Act of 1875** forbade racial discrimination in all public facilities, transportation lines, places of amusement, and juries. Segregation in public schools, however, was not prohibited. Moreover, there was no effort whatsoever to legislate against racial discrimination by individuals or corporations, so discrimination in the workplace remained legal.

**Civil Rights Act of 1875** Act that forbade racial discrimination in all public facilities, transportation lines, places of amusement, and juries; it proved largely ineffective

**Civil Rights Cases** Cases in which, in 1883, the Supreme Court declared all of the provisions of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional, except for the prohibition of discrimination on juries

**Panic of 1873** Financial crisis provoked when overspeculation, high postwar inflation, and disruptions from Europe emptied the financial reserves in America's banks; many banks simply closed their doors; this emergency focused northern attention on the economy rather than on civil rights

In addition to these flaws, the Civil Rights Act of 1875 proved ineffective anyway. The federal government did not enforce the law vigorously, so the southern states ignored it. And in 1883, in what would come to be called the **Civil Rights Cases**, the Supreme Court delivered a final blow to this last act of Reconstruction by declaring all of its provisions unconstitutional, except for the prohibition of discrimination on juries. In 1890, Henry Cabot Lodge, a Republican from Massachusetts, led the House of Representatives in passing a Federal Elections Bill that would have revived protection of voting rights for African Americans, but a Senate filibuster prevented the piece of legislation from becoming law. It would be nearly seven decades before another civil rights bill made its way through Congress.

The failure of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 reflected a larger northern disinterest in Reconstruction. For many northerners, support for black rights had been an outgrowth of their animosity toward the South. In 1865, such feelings burned hotly, and northerners were willing to support federal efforts to guarantee the liberties of former slaves. As the bitterness of war faded, northerners were tired of the antagonism between North and South, so their interest in civil rights faded, too.

Instead, northerners became consumed with economic matters, especially after the United States entered a deep recession in 1873. The **Panic of 1873** erupted when overspeculation, high postwar inflation, and disruptions from Europe, emptied the financial reserves in America's banks. Rather than honor their loans, many banks simply closed their doors, which led to a panic on Wall Street. Although Grant acted quickly to end the immediate panic, many businesses were forced to shut down. The Panic lasted six years and left 3 million Americans unemployed. In the years after 1873, Americans became concerned more with jump-starting the economy than with forging new laws to protect the needs and interests of black citizens.

The Republicans, meanwhile, took the blame for the nation's economic troubles, so, in the congressional elections of 1874, they lost seventy-seven seats, thus losing control of the House. The party that had spearheaded civil rights legislation in America was no longer in a position to control federal policy. Instead, the Democrats were back.



## 16-4b In the South

The decline of northern support for Reconstruction emboldened southern Democrats, who worked to reclaim political control of their region. In order to create white solidarity against Republican rule in the South, the Democrats shamelessly asserted white superiority.

Racism proved to be a powerful incentive for the Democratic Party, especially to attract poor southerners worried about their economic fortunes. Keeping black people as an underclass in southern society was important to poor white people's sense of self-worth (and economic well-being), and Democrats promised to protect the racial hierarchy as it had been before the Civil War. Democrats earned the backing of the vast majority of white southerners—mostly by championing continued white supremacy.

### INTIMIDATION OF BLACK AND REPUBLICAN VOTERS

To control black votes, white Democrats often used economic intimidation. Throughout the nineteenth century, voting was not done by secret ballot, so it was easy to know how every individual cast his ballot. Democratic landowners fired tenant farmers who voted Republican and publicized their names in local newspapers to prevent other landowners from hiring them too. The threat of starvation and poverty thus kept many black citizens from voting for the Republican Party.

More than economic intimidation, however, southern Democrats used violence to control southern politics. A number of paramilitary groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, provided the ground troops. They harassed black and white Republicans, disrupted Republican Party meetings, and physically blocked black southerners from casting ballots in elections. They even assassinated Republican Party leaders and organizers. Their goal was to erode the base of Republican support in the South and to ensure election victories for the Democratic Party. For instance, prior to the presidential election of 1868, 2,000 people were killed or injured in Louisiana alone. In Texas, the federal military commander said murders were so common he could not keep track of them.

### TERROR IN THE HEART OF FREEDOM

In addition to these more purely political forms of repression, southern white males also used rape and sexual violence against African American women as a form of political terror. Because black women now had the right to accuse white men of sexual crimes, historians have been able to determine that white men often staged elaborate attacks meant to reenact the antebellum

racial hierarchy, when southern white men were firmly in control. African Americans of course fought back, but as Democrats grew increasingly powerful in the region, the claims made by southern black women often went unheard. Most damningly, these crimes indicated how limited black freedom had become in the decade after the Civil War. Not only were African Americans losing their political and social rights, they were also losing the right to basic safeties, the right to organize their life as they saw fit, and the right to live comfortably in a democratic nation.

### GRANT'S RESPONSE

Although not known for its civil rights activism, the Grant administration did respond to the upsurge in southern violence by pushing two important measures through Congress: (1) the Force Act of 1870 and (2) the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871. The new laws



The Granger Collection, NYC

>> The White League and other similar organizations were founded to use violence and intimidation to keep African American voters from the polls throughout the South. This cartoon from a Northern American newspaper of 1874 depicts the efforts of White League member in Louisiana attempting to intimidate and disenfranchise black voters.

declared that interfering with the right to vote was a felony; they also authorized the federal government to use the army and suspend the writ of habeas corpus in order to end Klan violence. Grant proceeded to suspend the writ in nine South Carolina counties and to arrest hundreds of suspected Klan members. These efforts crushed the Klan in 1871 (although it would resurge in the 1910s and 1920s).

## THE MISSISSIPPI PLAN

Southern Democrats, however, did not relent. In 1875, Democrats in Mississippi initiated a policy called the **Mississippi Plan**, which called for using as much violence as necessary to put the state back under Democratic control. Democratic clubs began to function much as the Klan had, terrorizing Republican Party leaders and the black and white citizens who supported them. This time, the Grant administration refused to step in to stop the violence. Most northerners no longer seemed willing to support federal intervention into southern strife.

In 1876, the Mississippi Plan formally succeeded. By keeping tens of thousands of Republicans from casting ballots, the Democrats took charge of the state government. In the vocabulary of the time, Mississippi had been “redeemed” from Republican rule. In fact, it had been tortured into submission; official reports proclaiming as much were generally ignored.

## “REDEEMERS” WIN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1876

The presidential election of 1876 put the final nail in Reconstruction’s coffin. Through violence and intimidation, the Democrats had already succeeded in winning control

of all the southern states except Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. Now they intended to use the Mississippi Plan to “redeem” those three states and win the presidency as well. Perversely using the Christian language of redemption, the leaders of these efforts were widely called **Redeemers**.

The presidential campaign pitted Ohio Republican Rutherford B. Hayes against New York Democrat Samuel Tilden, who had a reputation as a reformer and a fighter against political corruption. The election was a mess. Violence prevented as many as 250,000 southerners from voting Republican, and, as southern Democrats had hoped, Democratic governors triumphed in Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina. The Democrats in those states reported that the majority of voters favored Tilden for the presidency. Republicans were suspicious, however, and did a canvass of their own. They claimed that the Democrats had used violence to fix the results. Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, the Republicans argued, should have gone to Hayes. These disputed states carried enough Electoral College votes to swing the entire election one way or the other.

Reconstruction was  
America’s unfinished  
revolution, and a  
great chance to  
correct the colossal  
wrong that was  
slavery.

## THE COMPROMISE OF 1877

After receiving two versions of the final tallies, Congress needed help deciding what to do. It created a 15-member electoral commission, with 5 members from the Senate, 5 from the House, and 5 from the Supreme Court. The commission was composed of 8 Republicans and 7 Democrats, and, by a purely partisan vote of 8 to 7, the commission gave the disputed states of Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina to Hayes, the Republican. The Democratic Party leaders were furious, but, in order to prevent further violence, Republican leaders proposed a compromise that became known as the **Compromise of 1877** (see Map 16.2).

In the compromise, Republicans promised (1) not to dispute the Democratic gubernatorial victories in the South and (2) to withdraw federal troops from the region. The white redeemers would thus be in control throughout the entire South. In return, the Republicans asked the Democrats to (1) accept Hayes’s presidential victory and (2) respect the rights of its black citizens. The Democrats accepted these terms, and, with that, Hayes withdrew the federal military from the South. Of course, without a federal military to protect black Americans, Reconstruction was over, and the South

**Mississippi Plan** 1875 Democratic plan that called for using as much violence as necessary to put Mississippi back under Democratic control

**Redeemers** A collection of southern Democrats and their supporters who used violence, intimidation, and the law to win political and social control away from those promoting greater racial equality in the region

**Compromise of 1877** Compromise in which Republicans promised not to dispute the Democratic gubernatorial victories in the South and to withdraw federal troops from the region, if southern Democrats accepted Hayes’s presidential victory and respected the rights of black citizens