



A NATION DIVIDED

The American Civil War

REUNITING A NATION
North, South faced enormous social, political challenges during Reconstruction

By Jason Navarro, Educator, Wheaton High School, Wheaton, Mo.

The surrender at Appomattox in the spring of 1865 ended the Civil War, but it did not end America's troubles. With the war over, attention turned to **Reconstruction**, the process of repairing the broken nation and reshaping postwar society. Physically, the South was in ruins and needed to rebuild. Politically, many questioned the fate of high ranking members of the former Confederacy. Should they ever again be allowed to vote or hold public office? Should they be **executed for treason**? Finally, what would become of the **freedman**? With slavery abolished, blacks had to be **integrated** into a society that was still **hostile** towards their progress.

One of the first issues involving Reconstruction was the question of who should lead it. President Abraham Lincoln began the process as the war neared its end, favoring **lenient** terms that would bring the South back into the nation quickly. Sadly, Lincoln was **assassinated** by angry southern sympathizer John Wilkes Booth as he watched a play at Ford's Theater on April 14, 1865. Lincoln's Reconstruction plans died with him and the work was left to Vice President Andrew Johnson, a southerner from Tennessee who had remained loyal to the Union.

Power struggle

Like Lincoln, President Johnson's Reconstruction plans were very

lenient, which brought him into conflict with the **Radical** Republicans who controlled Congress. The Radicals watched angrily as Southerners took advantage of Johnson's plan and began rebuilding their governments as they had existed before the war. Southerners elected many high-ranking former Confederates to office and passed Black Codes. These were laws that restricted the rights of the freedman by denying them basic **civil rights** in a system which closely resembled slavery.

Fearing that the Civil War had been fought for nothing, the Radical Republicans in Congress pushed to see the South punished and pressed for social changes that would bring justice for blacks. Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, a law which gave blacks the basic rights of citizenship. But President Johnson **vetoed** the bill, arguing that blacks did not deserve equality with whites. Congress, however, voted to override Johnson's veto, passing the law which later became the basis for the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

Congress also voted to give more power to the Freedman's Bureau, an organization that helped former slaves start new lives and defend their rights. With Johnson firmly against these laws, the stage was set for a showdown between Congress and the President. Congress **impeached** Johnson, and although they failed to convict him,

he ended his interference as Congress began Radical Reconstruction.

Military backing

Under Radical Reconstruction, the South was divided into five military districts with troops used to enforce United States law. Blacks were given the right to vote by the 15th Amendment, allowing them to gain election to the new Southern governments as well as a variety of national offices. Many southern whites, known as **scalawags**, also sided with the Republicans. Some Northerners, known as **carpetbaggers**, came south to participate in the new governments. These new Southern governments pledged their loyalties to the United States and contributed to black progress. Former Confederates were unable to stop these changes because many were **disenfranchised** by the Radicals.

Still, white southerners who resented the changes brought by Reconstruction found ways to resist. Hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan formed to **intimidate** blacks by violence and to prevent them from voting. In addition to the use of mob violence, many whites stood together politically to strengthen the Democratic Party and challenge Reconstruction while maintaining white **supremacy**. New President Ulysses S. Grant fought to destroy the Ku Klux Klan and prevent such violence, but by the mid 1870s, most



The scars of war are clearly visible in the bleak, barren cityscape of Richmond, Va., which burned on April 2, 1865, as the Confederates abandoned their capital. It would take decades to restore and rebuild the South's devastated cities. Photo National Archives

of the nation was tired of the long expensive process of Reconstruction. Progress had been made, but it was **fragile**.

Radical Reconstruction ends

The Presidential election of 1876 sealed the fate of Radical Reconstruction. The Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes, while the Democrats countered with Samuel Tilden. The election was too close to call, as several states had **disputed** results and **allegations** of voter fraud emerged.

The standoff ended with a bargain. Hayes and the Republicans were allowed the presidency, but in exchange, they removed the military from the South and ended Reconstruction. The Reconstruction governments collapsed and white southern Democrats, by now calling

themselves "Redeemers," regained control of their states. Blacks lost most of their rights and a system of **segregation**, the separation of the races, became the standard.

Radical Reconstruction failed to produce lasting social changes, leaving the problems of race to be addressed by the Civil Rights Movement of the mid-20th Century.

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1854

The Kansas-Nebraska Act leads to the "Bleeding Kansas" border war and the formation of the Republican Party.

1859

John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry increases tensions between the North and the South.

1860

Abraham Lincoln is elected President. South Carolina secedes from the Union.

1861

The Confederate States of America is formed. Fort Sumter is captured and the Civil War begins.

1862

Missouri is successfully defended by the Union at Pea

Ridge, Ark. Union victory at Antietam leads Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

1863

Victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg turn the war in favor of the Union.

1865

Lee surrenders at Appomattox. Lincoln is assassinated at Ford's Theater.

1867

Radical Reconstruction begins in the South.

1877

The Compromise of 1877 ends Reconstruction. Without military support, Reconstruction governments collapse in the South.



TIMELINE OF EVENTS

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