1 Presidential Reconstruction

SECTION PREVIEW

Objectives

1. Describe the condition of the South in the aftermath of the Civil War.
2. Compare the Reconstruction plans of Lincoln and Johnson.
3. Explain how newly freed slaves began to rebuild their lives and how the federal government helped them.
4. *Key Terms* Define: Reconstruction; pardon.

Main Idea

During the Reconstruction era, the federal government put forth plans to allow southern states to resume participation in the Union.

Reading Strategy

Organizing Information As you read, list the main headings of the section in a chart. Beneath each heading, list at least two key facts.

The South was the main battleground of the Civil War and its largest casualty. Hardly a farm or family remained unscarred by the time soldiers began straggling home. A northern journalist described the once-gracious city of Charleston, South Carolina: "A city of ruins, of desolation, of vacant houses, of widowed women, of rotting wharves, of deserted warehouses, of weed-wild gardens, of grass-grown streets."

The federal government's controversial effort to repair the damage to the South and to restore southern states to the Union is known as **Reconstruction.** The Reconstruction program was carried out from 1865 to 1877 and involved four American Presidents.

The War's Aftermath

At the start of Reconstruction, it was clear that the nation—especially the South—had been changed forever by the war. The changes reached into families and farms.

The Physical Toll War had destroyed two thirds of southern shipping and 9,000 miles of railroads. It had devoured farmland, farm buildings, and farm machinery; work animals and one third of all livestock; bridges, canals, and levees; and thousands of miles of roads. Factories, ports, and cities lay smoldering. The value of southern farm property had plunged 70 percent.

The Human Toll The Civil War destroyed a generation of young, healthy men—fathers, brothers, and husbands. The North lost 364,000 soldiers, including more than 38,000 African Americans. The South lost 260,000 soldiers, one fifth of its adult white men. One out of three southern men were killed or wounded. Many of the survivors were permanently scarred in mind or body.

In addition, the North's decision to destroy southern homes and property resulted in countless civilian deaths. Children were made orphans; brides became widows.

Southerners' Hardships The postwar South was made up of three major groups of people. Each group faced its own hardships and fears.

(1) *Black southerners.* Some 4 million freed people were starting their new lives in a poor region with slow economic activity. As slaves, they had received food and shelter, however

VIEWING HISTORY

In the final days of the Civil War, Lincoln visited Richmond, Virginia, the captured Confederate capital. In this painting he is shown being greeted by war-weary residents of the city.
Economics ***How does the painting show the damage that Richmond suffered during the war?***

inadequate. Now, after a lifetime of forced labor, many found themselves homeless, jobless, and hungry.

(2) *Plantation owners.* Planters lost slave labor worth about $3 billion. In addition the Captured and Abandoned Property Act of 1863 allowed the federal government to seize $100 million in southern plantations and cotton. With worthless Confederate money, some farmers couldn't afford to hire workers. Others had to sell their property to cover debts.

Main Idea CONNECTIONS

What temporary and permanent changes did the Civil War bring to southern life?

(3) *Poor white southerners.* Many white laborers could not find work any more because of the new job competition from freedmen. Poor white families began migrating to frontier lands such as Mississippi and Texas to find new opportunities.

The Changing Plantation The history of one southern plantation illustrates the complex issues brought about by the war and its aftermath. In 1824, Richard Arnold bought a rice plantation near Savannah, Georgia, which he called White Hall. The Arnolds were among 360,000 white northerners who lived and worked in the South in 1860.

Richard opposed secession. He sold the plantation to his son Thomas, a Confederate supporter, so the Confederacy would not seize it. At the war's end, Richard's northern connections saved White Hall from being seized by the federal government. In 1865 Richard bought White Hall back from Thomas and put him in charge of the rebuilding effort.

The White Hall plantation had suffered considerable damage. But more shocking to Thomas was the attitude of the plantation's freed slaves. They were unreliable, he reported; they refused even to speak to him. Thomas brought in a Union colonel to tell the freedmen that they would be wise to trust Arnold and agree to work for pay. But, Thomas said, one slave spoke up and "said they had made up their minds never to work for me again."

Yet throughout the South, some freed slaves chose to continue working for their former masters. Amos Morel and his wife, Cretia, did stay on to help rebuild the plantation. By the early 1870s, White Hall was one of the largest rice plantations in the South.

Two Reconstruction Plans

Most southerners accepted the war's outcome and focused on rebuilding their lives. In Washington, however, peacetime launched new battles so fierce that some historians call Reconstruction an extension of the Civil War.

The fall of the Confederacy and the end of slavery raised tough questions. How and when should southern states be allowed to resume their role in the Union? Should the South be punished for its actions, or be forgiven and allowed to recover quickly? Now that black southerners were free, would the races have equal rights? If so, how might those rights be protected? Did the Civil War itself point out a need for a stronger federal government?

At stake were basic issues concerning the nation's political system. Yet it was not even clear which branch of government had the authority to decide these matters.

On these key questions, the Constitution was silent. The Framers had made no provisions for solving the problems raised by the Civil War.

Lincoln's Plan With no road map for the future, Lincoln had begun postwar planning as early as December 1863, when he proposed a Ten Percent Plan for Reconstruction. The plan was forgiving to the South:

(1) It offered a **pardon,** an official forgiveness of a crime, to any Confederate who would take an oath of allegiance to the Union and accept federal policy on slavery.

(2) It denied pardons to all Confederate military and government officials and to southerners who had killed African American war prisoners.

(3) It permitted each state to hold a constitutional convention only after 10 percent of voters in the state had sworn allegiance to the Union.

(4) States could then hold elections and resume full participation in the Union.

Lincoln's plan did not require the new constitutions to give voting rights to black Americans. Nor did it "readmit" southern states to the Union, since in Lincoln's view, their secession had not been constitutional.

Lincoln set a tone of forgiveness for the postwar era in his Second Inaugural Address:

KEY DOCUMENTS

"With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds . . . to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

—Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, March 1865

Congress, however, saw Lincoln's Reconstruction plan as a threat to congressional authority. The Republican leadership warned that Lincoln "should confine himself to his executive duties—to obey and execute, not make the laws . . . and leave political reorganization to Congress."

Much of Lincoln's opposition came from a group of congressmen from his own party. The group, known as the Radical Republicans, believed that the Civil War had been fought over the moral issue of slavery. Therefore the Radicals insisted that the main goal of Reconstruction should be a total restructuring of society to guarantee black people true equality.

The Radical Republicans viewed Lincoln's plan as too lenient. In July 1864 Congress passed its own, stricter Reconstruction plan, the Wade-Davis Act. Among its provisions, it required ex-Confederate men to take an oath of past and future loyalty and to swear that they had never willingly borne arms against the United States. Lincoln let the bill die in a pocket veto.

Lincoln's hopes came to a violent end less than a month after his second inauguration. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lincoln was murdered on April 14, 1865, by John Wilkes Booth. The assassination plunged the nation into grief and its politics into chaos.

Johnson's Plan With Lincoln's death, Reconstruction was now in the hands of a one-time slave owner from the South: the former Vice President, Andrew Johnson. Born poor in North Carolina, Johnson grew up to become a tailor. He learned to read and write with the help of his wife and later entered politics in Tennessee as a Democrat.

Johnson had a profound hatred of rich planters and found strong voter support among poor white southerners. He served Tennessee first as governor, then in Congress. Johnson was the only southern senator to remain in Congress after secession. Hoping to attract Democratic voters, the Republican party chose Johnson as Lincoln's running mate in 1864.

When Johnson took office in April 1865, Congress was in recess until December.† During those eight months, Johnson pursued his own plan for the South. His plan, known as Presidential Reconstruction, included these provisions:

(1) It pardoned southerners who swore allegiance to the Union.

(2) It permitted each state to hold a constitutional convention (without Lincoln's 10 percent allegiance requirement).

(3) States were required to void secession, abolish slavery, and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment.

(4) States could then hold elections and resume participation in the Union.

Presidential Reconstruction reflected the spirit of Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan but was more generous to the South. Although officially it denied pardons to all Confederate leaders, in reality Johnson often issued pardons to those who asked him personally. In 1865 alone, he pardoned 13,000 southerners.

Main Idea CONNECTIONS

How did Johnson's Reconstruction plan differ from Lincoln's?

† Until the mid-1900s, a typical session of the United States Congress lasted only four or five months. Today, Congress remains in session throughout most of the year.

VIEWING HISTORY

Freedom opened new opportunities for African Americans, such as forming choirs (top left), preaching (above), and getting an education (right). ***Culture*** ***Why do you think northerners volunteered to teach at freedmen's schools?***

The Taste of Freedom

As politicians debated, African Americans celebrated their new freedom. No longer were they mere property, subject to the whims of white slave owners.

The feeling was overwhelming. "Everybody went wild," said Charles Ames, a Georgia freedman. "We all felt like horses. . . . We was free. Just like that, we was free."

Booker T. Washington, a future leader in black education, was nine years old when the news came: "[W]e were told that we were all free and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks."

Freedom of Movement During the war, enslaved people had simply walked away from the plantations upon hearing that a northern army approached. "Right off colored folks started on the move," said James, a freed cowhand from Texas. "They seemed to want to get closer to freedom, so they'd know what it was like—like it was a place or a city."

Many freed people took to the roads looking for family members who had been torn from them by slavery. Not all were successful in finding loved ones, but many joyful reunions did occur. In addition, many couples who had been forbidden to marry under slavery now found each other and got legally married.

Freedom to Own Land Black leaders knew that emancipation—physical freedom—was only a start. True freedom would come only with economic independence, the ability to get ahead through hard work.

Freed people urged the federal government to redistribute southern land. They argued that they were entitled to the land that slaves had cleared and farmed for generations.

A Virginia freedman put it this way: "We have a right to the land where we are located. For why? I tell you. Our wives, our children, our husbands, have been sold over and over again to purchase the lands we now locate upon; for that reason we have a divine right to the land."

Proposals to give white-owned land to freedmen got little political support.† Instead, small-scale, unofficial land redistribution took place. For example, in 1871 Amos Morel, the freedman who stayed on at the White Hall plantation, used his wages to buy more than 400 acres of land. He sold pieces to other freedmen and later bought land for his daughter.

† In 1865, Union general William Tecumseh Sherman had set up a land-distribution experiment in South Carolina. He divided confiscated coastal lands into 40-acre plots and gave them to black families. Soon the South buzzed with rumors that the government was going to give all freedmen "forty acres and a mule." Sherman's project was highly successful. However, President Johnson eventually returned much of the land to its original owners, forcing the freedmen out.

Freedom to Worship In their struggle to survive, African Americans looked to each other for help. New black organizations arose throughout the South. The most visible were churches. African Americans throughout the South withdrew from racially mixed congregations to form their own churches. They also started thousands of voluntary groups, including mutual aid societies, debating clubs, drama societies, and trade associations.

Freedom to Learn Historians estimate that in 1860, 90 percent of black adults were illiterate, partly because many southern states had banned the educating of slaves.

One supporter of black education was Charlotte Forten, a wealthy black woman from Philadelphia. In 1862, after Union troops occupied Port Royal, South Carolina, Forten went there to teach. She observed:

AMERICAN VOICES

"I never before saw children so eager to learn. Coming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them. . . . Many of the grown people [also] are desirous of learning to read. It is wonderful how a people who have been so long crushed to the earth . . . can have so great a desire for knowledge, and such a capability for attaining it."

—Charlotte Forten

Help came from several directions. White teachers, often young women, went south to start schools. Some freed people taught themselves and one another. Between 1865 and 1870, black educators founded thirty African American colleges.

Near the White Hall plantation, two former slaves purchased property in 1870. There they created a center of education and vocational training for African Americans.

The Freedmen's Bureau

To help black southerners adjust to freedom, Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau in March 1865, just prior to Lincoln's death. It was the first major federal relief agency in United States history.

The Freedmen's Bureau lacked strong support in Congress, and the agency was largely dismantled in 1869. Yet in its short existence the bureau gave out clothing, medical supplies, and millions of meals to both black and white war refugees. More than 250,000 African American students received their first formal education in bureau schools.

For a time, the bureau also distributed confiscated Confederate land to farmers. However, when President Johnson returned these properties to their white owners, black farmers again found themselves landless.

This child proudly displays clothes and a book furnished by the Freedmen's Bureau.

SECTION 1 REVIEW

Comprehension

1. ***Key Terms*** Define: (a) Reconstruction; (b) pardon.
2. ***Summarizing the Main Idea*** How did Johnson's Reconstruction plan differ from Lincoln's?
3. ***Organizing Information*** Create a chart that describes the challenges faced by three different groups of southerners after the Civil War.

Critical Thinking

4. ***Analyzing Time Lines*** Review the time line at the start of the section. Which event on that time line, in your opinion, had the greatest long-term importance? Explain your reasoning.
5. ***Determining Relevance*** Why was it more difficult for freedmen to exercise their freedom to own land than it was for them to exercise their freedoms to worship or to become educated?

Writing Activity

6. ***Writing a Persuasive Essay*** Should the federal government have taken land from white southerners and given it to former slaves? Write an essay in support of or in opposition to this idea.

How Maps Show Change over Time

An important task of historians is identifying change over time. One far-reaching change that took place in American life after the Civil War was the breakup of plantations. Maps can show important evidence of such a development.

The historical maps below show the changes to 2,000 acres of land in the post–Civil War South. Use the following steps to identify the changes for which the maps provide evidence.

1. ***Identify the location, time period, and subject matter covered by the maps.*** (a) What specific area of land do the maps show, and where is it located? (b) What dates are given on the maps? (c) What physical features do the maps show?

2. ***Analyze the key to determine the type of data that it provides.*** Map keys use symbols and colors to illustrate specific data. (a) What do the black squares represent in the map on the left? (b) What do the blue squares represent in the map on the right? (c) How is the symbol for a church distinguishable from the symbol for a schoolhouse?

3. ***Analyze the data in the maps.*** Now compare these maps to draw conclusions about the change over time that they indicate. (a) Over what period of time has the change taken place? (b) How has the location of dwellings on the plantation changed during this period? (c) What new buildings have been added? (d) What historical events and trends helped to produce the changes that these maps illustrate?

TEST FOR SUCCESS

If the years of the maps were not labeled, would you be able to tell which map showed the plantation in 1860 and which showed the land in 1881? Explain your answer.