

1) The End of the Civil War, 1865

Grade Level



The Civil War significantly affected the United States, and especially the states of the South. Cities, towns, properties, and transportation routes across the South were destroyed during the war.

The work of enslaved people had made the South incredibly wealthy. After emancipation, Southern planters could no longer depend on enslaved labor. As a result, the Southern economy experienced a severe decrease in activity known as an economic depression.

The United States government was faced with many pressing questions after the Civil War ended. How would the U.S. government address the many challenges facing the South? Additionally, how would the U.S. government bring the Southern

states back into the Union? Should there be consequences for their rebellion? Finally, what would become of the four million newly freed Black Southerners?

President Abraham Lincoln had led the country through four of the bloodiest years in U.S. history. As the Civil War was ending, he began working on how to address the challenge of reuniting the country and moving forward.

We will never know how Reconstruction might have occurred under President Abraham Lincoln. On April 9, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union forces in Virginia. Less than a week later, on April 15, President Lincoln was assassinated in Washington D.C.

2) Presidential Reconstruction, 1865 - 1867

Grade Level



When Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, his Vice President, Andrew Johnson, became President of the United States. Johnson was a Southerner who had strongly opposed secession. Johnson had remained loyal to the Union, despite his strong ties to the South.

Under Andrew Johnson's Reconstruction policy, ex-Confederates faced few consequences for their role in the rebellion. Ex-Confederates who took a loyalty oath to the U.S. were pardoned. Southern states were required to write new constitutions and ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which officially abolished slavery. Johnson took no other measures to provide services or ensure rights for the newly freed people.

Ex-Confederates quickly returned to power in Southern states under Johnson's Reconstruction

plan. Southern states elected pro-secessionist leaders and passed "Black Codes," which were laws restricting the rights of Black Southerners. Additionally, with the emancipation of the slaves, the Black Southern population could now be fully counted toward representation in Congress. This all meant that Southern states were rejoining the Union with ex-Confederates in charge, and now, with more power in Congress.

Northern Republicans in Congress strongly opposed Johnson's lenient Reconstruction plan. They wanted stricter consequences for the Southern states who had rebelled. Congress impeached Johnson in 1868 and took control of Reconstructing the South.

3) Presidential Reconstruction in Texas, 1865 - 1867

Grade Level



Under President Johnson's plan of Reconstruction from 1865 to 1867, Texas was required to write a new state constitution. Delegates to the Texas Constitutional Convention of 1866 declared the secession ordinance void. They also "recognized" the Thirteenth Amendment, though they did not officially ratify it.

Ex-Confederates were elected to positions of power in the new government of Texas, and they began trying to regain control over the political and social system of the state. The Texas legislature passed a series of laws known as the "Black Codes," which were laws that restricted the rights of Black Texans. Under the "Black Codes, Black Texans could not serve on juries, testify in court against white people, vote or hold public office, attend public schools, or marry white people.

The legislature also passed a series of "Vagrancy Laws," which allowed employers to deduct wages from Black workers for disobedience, wasting time, or leaving work without permission. These laws also allowed authorities to fine and arrest Black Texans for being "idle," and then to hire them out as forced laborers to pay the fine.

When Texas elected two well-known ex-Confederates to the United States Congress, Congress refused to allow the men to take their positions. As states across the South were taking similar measures to return ex-Confederates to power, Congress impeached President Johnson and began establishing much stricter requirements for Reconstruction in the South.

4) Congressional "Radical" Reconstruction, 1868 - 1873

Grade Level



President Johnson was impeached but not convicted. As a result, he remained in office, though he held little political power in the federal government. This allowed Northern Republicans in Congress to take control of Reconstructing the South.

Under Congressional Reconstruction, Congress required Southern states to write new state constitutions. The "Black Codes" that had been enacted to restrict the rights of Black Southerners were ended. Southern states were required to ratify not only the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing slavery, but now also the Fourteenth Amendment granting citizenship to the freed

people, and the Fifteenth Amendment granting Black men the right to vote.

Under Congressional Reconstruction, Southerners were required to swear a loyalty oath in order to vote and hold office. Finally, to enforce these requirements, Congress divided the South into five military districts, each placed under martial law. This meant that the U.S. military was now in charge of running the governments of Southern states.

Congress also sent government officials to run an organization established at the end of the Civil War called the Freedmen's Bureau. The Freedmen's Bureau provided services to the Freed People like legal support, education, and medical assistance.

5) Congressional Reconstruction in Texas, 1868 - 1873

Grade Level



The effects of Congressional Reconstruction were significant in every state across the South, including Texas. Before Congressional Reconstruction, most of the political power in Texas was held at the local level in towns, cities, and counties. This meant that local communities had a great deal of control over their own governments, police forces, and courts.

Under Congressional Reconstruction, the power in each state was removed from the local level and centralized instead at the state level. During this time, the first railroads were built in Texas, and public education was expanded. New schools were established across the state, including the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College, or Texas A&M. Many schools for Black students also opened

across the state. Black Texan men participated in politics, voting in their first elections and running for and holding office in the state legislature.

Not everyone supported these significant changes. Violence broke out throughout the state and across the South as groups like the Ku Klux Klan attacked Union troops, Black Texans, and anyone who supported Congressional Reconstruction in the state. To try to stop the violence, the Republican-led government created a militia, established more courts, and appointed more judges, all under state control. The state government passed high taxes on Texans during this time to pay for these services. The increase in taxes angered people across Texas, many of whom were struggling financially after the war.

6) The Redeemers & the End of Reconstruction, 1873 - 1876

Grade Level



By 1873, many ex-Confederates and Southern Democrats were beginning to return to power in the Texas government by swearing loyalty oaths to the U.S. government. The ex-Confederates believed that the Texas government under Congressional control had caused a lot of problems, and they wanted to redeem, or save, Texas from federal control. These ex-Confederates were often known as “Redeemers.”

The “Redeemers” began reversing many of the policies that had been established by the Texas government under Congressional and military control. They reduced the power of the state government, returning power instead to the local governments. They repealed the state police, limited the size of the state militia, and reduced the

number of courts. They decentralized education, placing the responsibility of education in the hands of local governments. They also reduced taxes and placed a limit on future taxes for education.

The “Redeemers” elected an ex-Confederate named Richard Coke governor of Texas in 1873. In 1875, the state held a new constitutional convention to write a new state constitution. The Constitution of 1876 reduced the powers of the Texas state government even more, placing more political power in the hands of local governments. In 1876, the U.S. government removed its federal troops from Southern states. Reconstruction was over, but its legacy would shape Texas and the rest of the South for decades to come.