Chapter 16: Reconstruction, 1865-1877

Overview
Reconstructing the Union and the nation’s political economy presented many questions and few answers. What labor system would replace slavery? How would states be readmitted to the Union? What civil and political rights would freed men and women have? Because there was no plan in place at the end of the war, many options were tried. With Lincoln’s assassination, Vice President Andrew Johnson became president. A man who possessed neither flexibility nor good humor, Jackson was committed to limited government and resisted Republican plans to use federal power to help freed people. He also had no sympathy for African Americans. His reconstruction plans failed miserably. The result of the election of 1866 marked the end of Presidential Reconstruction. Congressional Reconstruction prevailed and this time an even more Radical Congress took power. The Republicans backed away from Radical Reconstruction in part because voters seemed to be tiring of the topic. The Republicans portrayed themselves as the party of moderation especially when compared to the Democrats who, according to the Republicans, represented extremism and continued disruption. Reconstruction politics affected Northerners in ways that were not predicted. White feminists asked why they were denied the right to vote while black male freed slaves were guaranteed the same right. The alliance between abolitionists and feminists in the North was disrupted. Northern workers also protested. Reconstruction came to an end because voters reacted to political corruption in both regions of the country. Equally influential, however, was an economic depression and a new round of electoral violence. The Republicans rallied around a political bargain instead of around a determination to enforce Reconstruction.

Key Topics The information in chapter 16 introduces your students to the following key topics:

- Wartime approaches to Reconstruction
- The failure of President Johnson’s plan for Reconstruction
- The transformation of the southern labor system
- The nature of Congressional Reconstruction
- Declining national interest in Reconstruction

Chapter Outline
John Richard Dennett

Wartime Reconstruction
- Experiments with Free Labor
  - Lincoln's Ten Percent Plan versus the Wade Davis Bill
  - The Freed People's Dream of Owning Land

Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-67
- The Political Economy of Contract Labor
- Resistance to Presidential Reconstruction
- Congress Clashes with the President
- Origins of the Fourteenth Amendment
- Race Riots and the Election of 1866

Congressional Reconstruction
- Origins of the Black Vote
- Radical Reconstruction in the South
- Achievements and Failures of Radical Government
- The Political Economy of Sharecropping

The Retreat from Republican Radicalism
- The Impeachment and Trial of Andrew Johnson

Feature: The President On Trial
- Republicans become the Party of Moderation
- The Grant Administration and Moderate Republicanism

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Reconstruction in the North
  The Fifteenth Amendment and Nationwide Black suffrage
  Women and Suffrage
  The Rise and Fall of the National Labor Union

The End of Reconstruction
  Corruption as a National Problem
  Liberal Republicans Revolt
  A Depression and a Deal “Redeem” the South

Conclusion

Annotated chapter outline with review questions

John Richard Dennett: John Dennett, a reporter for The Nation, toured parts of the South following the Civil War. In Liberty, Virginia, he spent the day with an agent of the Freedmen’s Bureau as he tried to mediate labor disputes between white land owners and newly freed black men. His observations that day illustrated the obstacles the nation faced as it tried to reconstruct itself.

War Time Reconstruction: Reconstructing the Union and the nation’s political economy presented many questions and few answers. What labor system would replace slavery? How would states be readmitted to the Union? What civil and political rights would freed men and women have? Because there was no plan in place at the end of the war, many options were tried.

• Three notable experiments were tried. The Davis Bend experiment had free blacks own and manage their own cotton farms. As they controlled their own actions they controlled their destiny and produced cotton for sale. Freed men and women on the Sea Islands off of the coast of South Carolina chose subsistence agriculture instead. Neither extreme became the model. Instead, an authoritarian system developed in Louisiana became the model. Designed around harsh labor regulations and with little individual freedom, this system replaced one form of slavery with another. The Banks Plan, as it was called, was replicated over much of the lower South. It also preserved much of the pre-war labor system.

• Reconstructing the Union would prove to be a very difficult accomplishment. President Lincoln’s Ten Percent Plan was very lenient and made a state’s readmission contingent on recognizing the abolition of slavery but not guaranteeing blacks the right to vote. Opposition to the plan was immediate. Republicans in Congress and across the South denounced the Ten Percent Plan. They favored plans for redistributing land as well as a federal guarantee of civil rights to freed slaves. The Radical Republicans, as they were known, won over moderate Republicans and when Congress took control of Reconstruction in 1866, the process became known as Radical Reconstruction. Congress incorporated most of the radicals’ beliefs in the Wade Davis bill but President Lincoln pocket-vetoed it. By the spring of 1865, Lincoln had moved to the radicals’ position and he, too, called for some limited voting rights for former slaves. What all factions came to understand, was that any plan that did not consider the wishes of southern blacks was doomed to failure.

• Freedom meant many things to those who had never enjoyed it. Three areas emerged as the most precious: churches, schools, and the ownership of land. Of the three, land was by far the most important. During the final stages of the war, land captured by the Union was given to former slaves. After the war, Congress created the Freedmen’s Bureau and it quickly became involved in the politics of land redistribution. Lincoln and the freed slaves believed their work over two and one half centuries had more than paid for the land but many in the Freedmen’s Bureau saw it as futile.

Why was the “Banks Plan” in Louisiana so controversial? What was the fate of the various efforts to redistribute southern land among freed people?

Presidential Reconstruction, 1865-1867: With Lincoln’s assassination, Vice President Andrew Johnson became president. A man who possessed neither flexibility nor good humor, Johnson was committed to limited government and resisted Republican plans to use federal power to help freed people. He also had no sympathy for African-Americans. His reconstruction plans failed miserably.

• President Johnson’s reconstruction plan offered amnesty and the restoration of property to southerners who swore an oath of loyalty to the Union. States were readmitted under equally lenient terms which
included ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment. Johnson’s plan encouraged a defiant attitude in the South while it angered the Congress. Johnson issued thousands of pardons and those who held elected office or other such positions before the war resumed their power and their property. Freed men and women who had been given land were evicted. State legislatures enacted “black codes” which regulated the behavior of freed men and women and owners forced blacks to sign labor contracts which basically enslaved them once again.

• When Congress went into session in December, 1865, moderate Republicans were suspicious of Johnson’s Plan and Radical Republicans were furious. News of widespread white intimidation and violence against blacks confirmed a belief that white southerners were replicating a pre-emancipation way of life. Republicans concluded that the only solution was to grant freed men the right to vote.

• Congress challenged the presidential plan. It created the Joint Committee on Reconstruction. It voted to extend the life of the Freedman’s Bureau and empowered it to establish its own courts which would supersede local jurisdictions. Johnson vetoed the bill and Congress could not get enough votes to override the veto. Johnson publicly attacked the Congress and questioned the legitimacy of the Committee.

• Congress passed a landmark Civil Rights bill in March, 1866. It was the first time the federal government intervened in the states to guarantee due process of the law and basic civil rights. Johnson vetoed the bill. This time, however, the Congress overrode Johnson’s veto and when he vetoed another Freedmen’s Bureau bill, they overrode it, too. The Congress refused to recognize states re-admitted under Johnson’s plan and instead authorized the Freedmen’s Bureau to create a military justice system to supersede local courts. The Congress also made ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment a requirement for states seeking reunion. Johnson went on a rampage. The election of 1866 became a popular referendum on Presidential Reconstruction. Johnson campaigned against the Congress and blamed it for murderous riots in Memphis and New Orleans. Johnson’s supporters lost and the Congress gained a veto proof hold on Congress. Moderate Republicans and Radical Republicans joined together in their opposition to the Republican president.

Congressional Reconstruction: The result of the election of 1866 marked the end of Presidential Reconstruction. Congressional Reconstruction prevailed and this time an even more Radical Congress had taken power.

• Along with Radical Republicans and black leaders, moderate Republicans came to believe that southern blacks should have the right to vote. They believed political power in the hands of all male freedmen was the only way to avoid a lengthy military occupation. The reconstruction plan was implemented in two pieces of legislation and the legislation was based on the right of freedmen to vote. Johnson vetoed both bills but the vetoes were overridden. Radical Reconstruction was in.

• Southern state constitutions were completely rewritten, thousands of black men began to vote, and hundreds assumed office. State delegations in the South drew up some of the most progressive state constitutions in America. They guaranteed universal manhood suffrage, mandated public school systems, and established progressive tax structures. The Republican state governments were made up of a coalition of Northern whites and Southern whites, and new black Republicans. The Republican party benefited from the coalition but it was unable to keep the coalition from splitting along class and race lines. But for a time, these states were more democratic and inter-racial than most nineteenth century legislatures.

• Southern Republicans failed to work out a program around which both black and white voters could gather. Initially, the “Gospel of Prosperity” promised to bring the benefits of economic development to ordinary white southerners. White farmers grew more receptive to Democratic party appeals for the restoration of “White man’s government.” In the end the shaky coalition fell apart.

• Congressional Reconstruction made it easier for former slaves to negotiate the terms of their labor contracts in part because many Southern states had abolished the Black Codes and also because there was a shortage of agricultural workers in the South. The shortage forced land owners to renegotiate their labor contracts with freed people. Share cropping differed from region to region but wherever it existed, it reshaped the political economy of the south. Plantations were broken up into family-sized farms and instead of gang laborers, families worked the land. The families developed individual relationships with merchants and creditors. African-American families also changed as black husbands and fathers were presumed to be the heads of their households and in charge of economic decision-making. Share cropping
also tied the south’s economy to agriculture, especially cotton, and that impeded the South’s overall economic development.

What was so “radical” about Radical Reconstruction?

**The Retreat from Republican Radicalism:** The Republicans backed away from Radical Reconstruction in part because voters seemed to be tiring of Radical Reconstruction. The Republicans portrayed themselves as the party of moderation especially when compared to the Democrats who, according to the Republicans, represented extremism and continued disruption.

- **By 1867, President Johnson and the Congress were at an impasse.** Johnson had waged a relentless campaign against the Congress and the two sides fought their final battles over who would control the military in the South: the President who was commander in chief or the Congress which had empowered the military to enforce the Reconstruction Acts. Johnson went out of his way to undermine the law. When Johnson fired Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who was sympathetic to the Republicans, the die was cast and Congress voted nearly a dozen articles of impeachment against the President of the United States.

- **While Johnson was on trial, state elections told the Republicans what they already knew:** American voters were backing away from the Radical Republican issues. They could no longer interest voters in educational opportunities for African-Americans, land redistribution, or voting rights for freedmen but not Confederates. In the election of 1868 the Republicans offered General Ulysses S. Grant to the voters while the Democrats nominated Horatio Seymour. Grant’s “Let Us Have Peace” campaign appealed to more voters than Seymour’s racist pandering and voter intimidation by the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, voters were repulsed by the Democrats and the Klan and the Republicans regained the White House as well as most of the state legislatures. Victorious, the Republicans seized the opportunity to preserve the gains of Reconstruction.

- **The Grant administration and the Republican Congress reinforced their image of moderation by attempting to restore law and order in the South, by enforcing the Fifteenth Amendment, and suppressing Klan violence.** The administration also shifted to an aggressive foreign policy. It purchased Alaska from Russia and negotiated the payment of over fifteen million dollars from Great Britain for damage done to American shipping by Confederate ships built in England. Grant was not so successful in his attempts to acquire Santo Domingo. Grant’s heavy-handed plans which did not include the Congress or the Secretary of State, resulted in alienating members of the President’s party and in effect weakening the party.

Why was Andrew Johnson impeached?

**Reconstruction in the North:** Reconstruction politics affected Northerners in ways that were not predicted. White feminists asked why they were denied the right to vote when male freed slaves were guaranteed the same right. The alliance between abolitionists and feminists in the North was disrupted. Northern workers also protested. Racial discrimination, which was also prevalent in the North, extended to voting rights. Most northern blacks lived in states that denied a right to vote and in 1865 three northern states refused constitutional amendments designed to enfranchise black men. Ohio, Minnesota, and Kansas followed suit in 1867. But the elections of 1868 gave the Republicans the numbers needed to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. It provided for nationwide black male suffrage. Congress also required ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment of those as yet unreconstructed states. The issue of black voters’ rights disrupted the coalition of abolitionists and feminists. The women argued that they had worked for emancipation and had been loyal Republicans and now the Republicans had abandoned them. The arguments for female suffrage and against black male suffrage devolved into stereotyped name calling; abolitionists argued that black male suffrage was just more urgent than woman’s suffrage. The once workable coalition weakened the Radical Republicans.

- **National Labor Union was inspired by the radicalism of the Civil War and Reconstruction.** It was the first significant post-war effort to organize “working people” in America. It sought to unify those whose labors and skills produced wealth and it included women’s rights advocates and wage earners, but did not really address the concerns of unskilled workers, blacks, rural workers, or working women.

How did Reconstruction affect the North? What were the major causes for the decline of Radical Reconstruction?
The End of Reconstruction: Reconstruction came to an end because voters reacted to political corruption in both regions of the country. Equally influential, however, was an economic depression and a new round of electoral violence. The Republicans rallied around a political bargain instead of around a determination to enforce Reconstruction.

- From the White House, to state capitals, to cities and towns, Americans following the Civil War witnessed an unusual display of public dishonesty. One explanation for the increase in graft and corruption is that the war itself had swollen government budgets—there were taxes coming in and more money being paid out. The availability of funds made it easier and more profitable to acquire money in illegal ways. Influence peddling, accepting bribes and kickbacks were all common forms of corruption. Corruption at all levels in the north and particularly in the south weakened public support for Reconstruction policies.

- Reconstruction, corruption, and the demands of women, blacks, and workers caused a group of Republicans to separate from the main body of the party. Known as “Liberal Republicans,” they reacted to developments within the party that they believed had taken the Republican party away from its roots. The 1872 and 1874 elections indicated that Reconstruction was no longer a powerful topic with voters. Grant was re-elected but the Democrats in the North were becoming powerful once again. Freed men, however, were fast becoming unimportant to the Republicans and although the Republicans passed the Civil Rights Act of 1875, they had lost their enthusiasm for and dedication to political equality for black Americans.

- Democrats in the South succeeded in drawing white Republicans to its side with an appeal to restore white supremacy. They “redeemed” states from Republican and African-American rule. The commitment to Reconstruction was dieing and with a national economic collapse in 1873 Reconstruction’s demise was evident. The nation turned its attention to labor unrest and economic depression. To redeem the south from black Republicans, the Democrats used intimidation, violence, and murder to keep them from voting. To “redeem” white Republicans, and to get them to switch parties, the Democrats used the old ploy of racial fear. Washington turned a deaf ear to black pleas for protection. Democrats controlled the South once again and they set their sites on a possible presidential victory with Samuel Tilden.

- The election of 1876 was marked by electoral fraud on the state level. The disputed election was determined by an electoral commission made up of Republicans, who gave the election to the Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. Immediately after his inauguration, Hayes ended the military occupation of the South and with it the symbolic end of Reconstruction was at hand. By late 1877, every southern state had been redeemed by the Democrats. The last nails in the coffin for Reconstruction came from the Supreme Court. Using a very narrow interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendments’ equal protection clause it further limited any gains made by Reconstruction.

Feature: The President On Trial: The Constitution allows for the impeachment of a president but no Congress had ever actually attempted it. In February 1868, the Congress voted nearly a dozen articles of impeachment against President Johnson. Behind the charges was the real issue: the Congress was disgusted with Johnson’s behavior and his interference with their duties. In the end, the Senate fell one vote short of the required two-thirds vote needed to convict.

Conclusion: Before dismissing Reconstruction as a total failure, consider the gains made by African-Americans born to slavery. The Civil War and the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments abolished slavery, defined citizenship, and gave black men the right to vote. For many who were born slaves but died free, the war and Reconstruction were nearly miraculous. For generations that followed, the road to equality had just begun. For other Americans, the post Civil War world of industrialization and urbanization was just beginning.

Making links to other ideas Using the maps and websites, in addition to your prepared lectures and other assignments, can give you more resources to enable your students see that history is much more than memorizing names and dates. You will find that the websites are even more comprehensive and adaptable than described and because they have been collected here in one volume you have a world of information no further away than the click of your mouse. If you are new to the web’s opportunities, you will be pleasantly surprised at the breadth and depth of the information available in these sites.
Map 01: Sharecropping redefined the political economy of the South. Was sharecropping more common in some areas than others? If so, why?

Map 02: What information does this map convey? Why was Tennessee readmitted so soon after the war?

Map 03: According to this map, Samuel J. Tilden should have been elected president. Was he? If not, why was he not elected?

Web connections and resources  Consider using these websites to supplement your students’ reading and analytical skills. The sites were chosen because of their relevance to the material in the chapter -- not just to mirror it but to provide additional materials and perspectives. Questions from the student study guide have been included so that you can use or amend them to your own needs. Your students may find it insightful for you to guide them through the site as you help them develop research strategies.

“Reconstructing a Nation” www.prenhall.com/boydston/reconstruction

Lincoln's assassination led to a power struggle between President Andrew Johnson, former Democratic Senator from Tennessee, and the Republican Congress over how to "reconstruct" the South. Both sides agreed on the abolition of slavery but on little else. Often overlooked in the struggles over national policy were the everyday experiences of the newly freed slaves. How did they attempt to build lives for themselves? What were the principal obstacles they faced?


By examining the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, this web site explores the major issues behind the impeachment debate and describes the political factions vying to determine Reconstruction policy. The site employs the use of Reconstruction-era editorials and provides biographical sketches and portraits of many of the key figures involved.

1. What were the impeachment arguments of 1867 and 1868? How did President Johnson spend the last months in office? How did he spend the last years of his life?

“The Black Codes and Reaction to Reconstruction” http://chnm.gmu.edu/courses/122/recon/code.html

This site contains the text of the Mississippi Black Code and other Reconstruction policies. The site also chronicles citizens' reactions to these policies through contemporary newspaper editorials, magazine articles, and Congressional testimony, and discusses the impact of these reforms on African Americans.

1. What is a “black code?” Read these from Mississippi from 1865 and 1866. What are these codes designed to accomplish? Is there any recourse for those charged with having violated these codes?

“Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861-1877: Reconstruction and Rights” http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/ndpedu/timeline/civilwar/recontwo/recontwo.html

In addition to a good overview of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, read transcripts of oral histories from whites who actually experienced Reconstruction in the South. Their stories include eyewitness accounts of racially-motivated violence in regard to black voting.

1. Read the recollections entitled “The Goodings Describe Reconstruction in South Carolina,” George Ogden Recalls Reconstruction in the South,” and Judge J. H. Yarborough Recalls the End of the Civil War.”

What do these recollections have in common? Are there any differences in recollections? What are they? What do these recollections tell you about the nature of reconstruction regardless of locale?

Analytical reading  Your students may need more experience analyzing a short reading passage so that he or she can determine its component parts. They may need help identifying primary and supporting information as well as the author’s analysis. The analytical reading passages and the questions from the student study guide have been duplicated in the instructor’s manual for your use. Your students may need direction and encouragement in using them.

Sharecropping shaped the political economy of the postwar South by transforming the way cash crops were produced and marketed in much of the region. Most dramatically, it required
landowners to break up their plantations into family-sized plots. Under slavery, most blacks worked in gangs under the direct supervision of a master, an overseer or a driver. By contrast, sharecroppers worked in family units with no direct supervision. Before the Civil War, slaveholders relied on “factors” (agents in port cities) to sell their crops and supply their plantations. With the breakup of the plantations after the war, each sharecropping family established its own relationship with local merchants and creditors. Merchants became crucial to the southern credit system because during the Civil War the Congress had established nationwide banking standards that most southern banks could not meet. Local storekeepers were usually the only people who could extend credit to sharecroppers. The result was a dramatic proliferation of merchants within the South. In the 1870s the number of stores grew by perhaps three hundred percent. Local merchants soon became an essential part of the postwar southern economy. They provided sharecroppers with food, fertilizer, animal feed, and other provisions, over the course of the year, until the crop was harvested.

These same developments had important consequences for small white farmers in many parts of the South. As the number of merchants grew, they fanned out into “upcountry” areas inhabited mostly by ordinary whites. Reconstruction legislatures meanwhile sponsored the construction of railroads into many of those same upcountry districts. The combination of merchants offering credit and railroads offering transportation made it easier than ever for small farmers to focus on the production of cash crops. Thus Reconstruction accelerated the process by which the southern yeomen abandoned self-sufficient farming in favor of cash crops. Up through the 1870s, however, most white farmers continued to own their own land.

1. Define sharecropping.
2. How did it change the political economy of the south?
3. In what ways did it effect nonlandowning whites; poor white farmers?
4. Why would black farmers participate in such an arrangement?

Writing  The questions or writing prompts from the student study guide have been duplicated here for your use. These writing topics make good lecture topics especially if you help your students see the development of the idea in lecture format before they refine the idea in their writing assignments.

1. Compare the intentions and results of Lincoln’s, Johnson’s, and the Congressional reconstruction plans. Based on the information in the chapter, if given a chance, which one do you think could have succeeded?
2. For what reasons did the Congress take the option to amend the Constitution rather than just passing legislation dealing with the abolition of slavery, defining citizenship, and black male voting rights?
3. Discuss the relationship of reconstruction policies and labor movements in the north; and the women’s movement.
4. What problems did reconstruction create in the south for white poor farmers; white wealthy planters; for black men and women?
5. Discuss the events surrounding the Congressional attempt to impeach President Johnson.

Lecture Strategies Ultimately the lecture is where you impart, or profess, your knowledge for the benefit of your students. These strategies were designed around the textbook and if your classroom strategy is to use the organization of the text to organize your course content, these lecture ideas may prove helpful. However, if you lecture around themes please see the section entitled “Thematic Lecture Topics.” You may find that you are more comfortable with and your students are more responsive to a combination of the two. Consider, too, the projects suggested in the student study guide. If your students complete these before your lecture, their comprehension will surely be enhanced.

After decades of conflict and years of bloodshed and regional distrust and hatred -- not to mention vicious racism -- the nation faces the almost impossible task of putting itself back together. If you considered the notion of "revolution" when you discussed the war for independence, you may want to bring that topic back again and consider whether or not the Civil War was a revolutionary war. If your students have been progressing throughout
the course, they should have developed some thoughts on this question. Reconstruction plans were politically divisive. The nation's economic reconstruction was especially challenging. But above all of the problems was the problem of what the nation was going to do with recently freed men and women that they have their own individual problems to be considered. How Americans manage any of this is confusing and challenging.