Chapter 16
Reconstruction, 1865—1877

Chapter Summary

Chapter 16 presents an overview of the Reconstruction era, focusing on the following topics: the disparity of southern white and African American expectations for the post-war South, federal programs for Reconstruction, the successes and failures of Republican state governments in the South during Reconstruction, and the circumstances and decisions that brought an end to the Reconstruction era.

I. White Southerners and the Ghosts of the Confederacy, 1865

II. More than Freedom: African American Aspirations in 1865
   A. Education
   B. “Forty Acres and a Mule”
   C. Migration to Cities
   D. Faith and Freedom

III. Federal Reconstruction, 1865–1870
   A. Presidential Reconstruction, 1865–1867
   B. Congressional Reconstruction, 1867–1870
   C. Southern Republican Governments

IV. Counter-Reconstruction, 1870–1874
   A. The Uses of Violence
   B. The Failure of Northern Will
   C. Liberal Republicans and the Election of 1872

V. Redemption, 1874–1877
   A. The Democrats’ Violent Resurgence
   B. The Weak Federal Response
   C. The Election of 1876 and the Compromise of 1877
   D. The Memory of Reconstruction

VI. The Failed Promise of Reconstruction
   A. Sharecropping
   B. Modest Gains and Future Victories

VII. Conclusion
Learning Objectives

After a careful examination of Chapter 16, students should be able to do the following:

1. Describe the South’s response to defeat in 1865 and understand how southern whites and blacks differed in their perspectives on the post Civil War South.

2. Identify and explain the role of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

3. Discuss the nature of African American education as coordinated by the Freedmen’s Bureau. Assess African American literacy rates in the South and comment on the Bureau’s impact on improving literacy among African Americans. Describe white southern reaction to African American education during Reconstruction.

4. Comment on the extent of African American farm ownership in the South by the end of Reconstruction.

5. Describe early efforts during Reconstruction to establish free labor in the South.

6. List the major motivations for African American migration to urban areas after the Civil War. Describe the living and working conditions of urban African Americans.

7. Discuss the role of African American churches in the political, social, and educational development of African Americans after the Civil War.

8. Explain the two major obstacles to federal implementation of a Reconstruction policy. Explain how the ten-percent plan and the Wade-Davis Bill reflect these obstacles.


10. Explain the Reconstruction policy of the Radical Republicans and identify their major leader in the House and in the Senate.

11. Explain the role of the Civil Rights Act of 1866 in the transition from presidential to Congressional reconstruction.

12. Outline the provisions of the Fourteenth Amendment and explain its impact on the founding of the American Equal Rights Association.

13. Outline the provisions of the Military Reconstruction Acts of 1867 and explain how the laws fulfilled three major Radical Republican objectives.

14. Explain the provisions of the Tenure of Office Act and its connection to the impeachment of Andrew Johnson.

15. Explain the provisions of the Fifteenth Amendment and its impact on the women’s suffrage movement.
16. Identify the three major Republican constituencies who supported radical state governments in the South during Reconstruction.

17. Discuss the nature of African American Republican political leadership during Radical Reconstruction.

18. Describe the activities of southern paramilitary groups in attempting to counter Reconstruction. Identify two pieces of congressional law that were designed to protect citizens from racial violence.

19. Identify the Liberal Republican branch of the Republican Party and explain its role in the presidential election of 1872.

20. Define the term Redemption as it was used by southern conservatives to describe the end of Radical Reconstruction.

21. Describe the methods used by southern white organizations to regain control of southern state governments. Outline the provisions of the Civil Rights Acts of 1875 and assess their effectiveness in defending the civil rights of southern African Americans.

22. Describe the dispute in the presidential election of 1876. Outline the components of the Compromise of 1877 and comment on how the compromise resolved the disputed election.

23. Explain the operation of the sharecropping system of labor and how it assisted southern whites in reasserting control over African American labor.

24. Define the term segregation and explain its use in southern urban centers as a means of controlling the African-American community.

25. Explain what eventually happened to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments as protections against racial discrimination.

Topics for Classroom Lecture

1. Discuss the transition from slave labor to free labor in the South after the Civil War. Consider early experimentation with retaining gang labor immediately after the war. What were the typical provisions of labor contracts under this method? To what extent did free gang labor differ from slavery? Look at tenancy and sharecropping. How did living arrangements for laborers change with tenancy and sharecropping? What were the terms of agreement between cropper and landlord? To what extent did sharecropping differ from slavery? Consider as well the fates of middle and lower southern whites. Were they immune from the same fate as former slaves? Was sharecropping a racial institution?

2. Prepare a lecture on the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the women's movement. Trace the political maturation of American women from their involvement in the abolitionist movement to the creation of the New England Woman Suffrage Association and the American Equal Rights Association. How did the fight for abolition refine women's understanding of their own status in the United States? How did progressive supporters of women's suffrage respond to the Fourteenth Amendment and Fifteenth Amendments? How did these amendments impact the organization of the women's suffrage movement? Are women poised after the Civil War and Reconstruction to become more effective in realizing their own political goals?
3. Discuss the Compromise of 1877. Who was involved in the deal and what were each side’s motivations to mend sectional strife? To what extent were the terms of the compromise realized? What impact would the compromise have on the legacy of Reconstruction?

**Topics for Class Discussion and Essays**

1. Discuss the successes and failures of Reconstruction in terms of providing for economic stability in the southern African American community. For a reference, Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: The Unfinished Revolution* (1988) is one of the best assessments of the long-term effectiveness and legacy of Reconstruction. Also look at Foner’s *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (1980). Have students consider some of the following questions connected to the debate on land redistribution:
   a. Did the federal government have an economic or financial responsibility to freedmen after the Civil War?
   b. How far did the promise of emancipation go? Did it include personal freedom, civil rights, political rights, and economic rights?
   c. During Reconstruction, even some Radical Republicans opposed a federal program guaranteeing property to freedmen especially if it involved federal confiscation of private property. Why would they oppose such a policy? What traditional American economic and political principles prevented even Radical Republicans from supporting a land redistribution policy?
   d. Was the failure to provide economic security and independence to the freed black population in the South the major downfall of Reconstruction? In spite of traditional American principles, was there anything unique about the ex-slave population and the economic challenges it faced after the Civil War? Did the federal government abdicate its responsibility in failing to meet that challenge?
   e. Students may also want to comment on present-day debates regarding compensation to African Americans for their suffering during slavery.

2. Who won the Civil War? Have students consider the years from 1865 to 1900. If the Civil War was intended to resolve issues connected to emancipation and the preeminence of the federal government, to what extent was it successful? Have students look at the Compromise of 1877, sharecropping, racial segregation, African American disfranchisement, and the lack of Northern resistance to these trends especially in the Supreme Court with *Plessy v. Ferguson* and the Civil Rights cases. What did these trends in the South say about the supposed victory over slavery and states’ rights?

3. Discuss the differences and similarities between the disputed election of 1876 and the disputed election of 2000. Why were these two elections disputed? How did the South and race issues figure into these disputes? How was each election resolved? Do students feel that each resolution was constitutional?

**Topics for Term Papers and Class Projects**

1. Have students write a comparative book review on Reconstruction. Ask each student to choose two books dealing with the period of Reconstruction and write a comparison and contrast of the two writers’ treatments of the period. Some excellent choices for the review would include something from the Dunning school such as Claude Bowers’s *The Tragic Era* (1929), a revisionist treatment such as Kenneth Stampp’s *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865—1877* (1965), an economic analysis such as Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch’s *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation*
(1972), or a treatment by an African American historian such as John Hope Franklin’s *Reconstruction after the Civil War* (1966).

2. Write a paper on white terrorism in the South during Reconstruction, concentrating on some of the more obscure local paramilitary groups such as the Mississippi Riflemen or the South Carolina Red Shirts.

3. Have students look at the persistence of sectional tensions in the United States today. Are there southerners who won’t forget? What issues still distinguish the South from other parts of the nation? Do these same issues even divide modern-day southerners? Is the South still a region apart?

**Resources for Lectures and Research Projects**


**Audio-Visual Resources**

*The Promised Land: Anywhere but Here*, A&E, 60 minutes.
This video looks at the legacy of sharecropping in the American South by the early twentieth century.

*The Twentieth Century with Mike Wallace: The Ku Klux Klan: A Secret History*, The History Channel, 50 minutes.
This video chronicles the history of the Ku Klux Klan from its origins during Reconstruction to the present day.