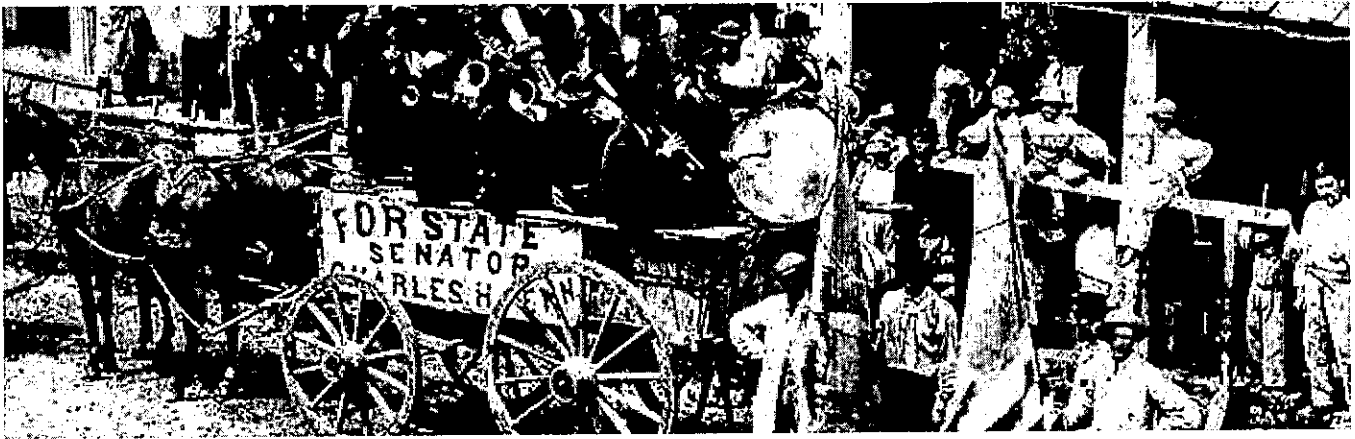


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Reconstruction, 1865-1877

RECONSTRUCTION PLANS



The period following the Civil War is known as Reconstruction, beginning in 1865 and ending in 1877. The Civil War devastated the South, leaving cities destroyed, its wealth depleted, illness rampant, and people hungry and jobless. In addition, the nation also mourned the loss of over 600,000 people, from both the Union and the Confederacy combined.

Rebuilding the South and stitching the fragmented nation back together was an immense task with several complex concerns. It was decided that the federal military would occupy the South and aid in Reconstruction. Another important problem was how to deal with the states that seceded. Thirdly, one of the most important concerns the government faced was the difficult issue of how to handle the millions of newly freed African Americans.

President Abraham Lincoln and his advisers began thinking about healing the nation's wounds before the war was even over. They knew that bringing the 11 Confederate states back into the Union would be no simple task. Thus, Lincoln had a plan for Reconstruction ready as the war came to a close. However, after his assassination in 1865, new voices entered the discussion. The next battle—over how to conduct Reconstruction —began and quickly became ugly.

Lincoln's Plan



At the heart of Lincoln's reconstruction plan, sometimes called the Ten Percent Plan, was the belief that the South still possessed Unionists who wanted to see the restoration of the nation, but were forced into supporting the secession by the separatists. His strategy for reunification offered the South generous terms in the hope that the nation would be reconciled and the Republicans would gain more supporters in the South, especially Unionists and former Whig Party members. Lincoln laid out his plan in the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, issued December 8, 1863.

On the premise that secession was illegal and that Southern citizens were not individually responsible, Lincoln proposed pardoning all Confederates, with the exception of those in government and military leadership positions. Under Lincoln's plan, states would be readmitted into the union if 10% of their voting population signed a loyalty oath, pledging allegiance to the nation and to agreeing to abide by all executive orders and congressional laws, especially those regarding slavery. These states would then pass new state constitutions that prohibited slavery, thus abolishing slavery on the state level rather than the federal level.

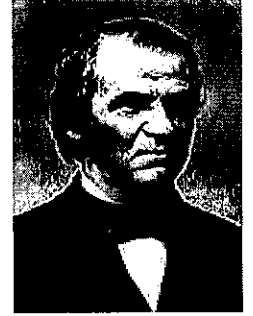
Many in Congress reacted negatively; they thought the plan was too lenient and did not adequately protect freed African Americans. In response, they proposed the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery on the national level and also advocated more severe punishment for Confederate leaders and states. Furthermore, Congress advanced its

own right to determine how Reconstruction would be handled. Before those conflicts could be resolved, Lincoln was assassinated, and Vice President Andrew Johnson became president.

Johnson's Plan

Taking up where Lincoln left off, Johnson followed a moderate approach to Reconstruction, or "Restoration" plan as he called it. As a Southern Democrat and former slave owner, Johnson did not seek to protect or gain equality for African Americans. Under his plan, most Southern whites received amnesty and retained their property; high ranking Confederate leaders, key supporters, and the wealthiest plantation owners were ineligible, however, unless they received a presidential pardon. States could reenter the Union by ratifying the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery at the state level, nullifying their acts of secession, and paying their war debts, along with other requirements.

However, Johnson did not necessarily hold the Southern states strictly to these terms, ignoring Mississippi's failure to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. Johnson's plan left the states to form their own governments after his appointment of a governor, allowing whites and former Confederate officers to regain political control. Although an oath stating that the elected official did not voluntarily participate in secession was required for election, many states disregarded it and chose former Confederates. Johnson also overlooked this and appointed several past Confederates to federal positions.



In addition, he required no role for freed African Americans in the new state governments. Johnson opposed African American suffrage in the South, especially as it had not been granted in the North. His Reconstruction plan enabled Southern states to enact constitutions that did not extend voting rights to African Americans and that passed black codes, severely restricting the rights of African Americans. Johnson's plans were largely enacted in the summer of 1865, during Congress' recess.

Congressional Plan

Congress, faced with Southern members attempting to retake their seats, responded angrily. Many of those congressmen had just a year ago been in open rebellion against the Union. Additionally, Congress found the black codes—laws enacted by the new Southern state governments to restrict the real rights of freedmen—offensive. They voted to seize the Reconstruction process from Johnson and to implement their own plan. Led by a group called the Radical Republicans, Congress refused to seat the Southern representatives.

They then passed such laws as the Freedmen's Bureau Act, the Civil Rights Act (1866), and finally in 1867, the Reconstruction Acts—often over Johnson's veto—in order to shape their own Reconstruction. Military supervision began in the Southern states, and each state was required to accept the Fourteenth Amendment (granting citizenship to blacks) and the Fifteenth Amendment (guaranteeing civil rights to blacks) as well as to enfranchise black citizens. Radical Reconstruction lasted until 1877 but solved little. The battle over Reconstruction, its methods, and its control left bitterness in the government and among the people, especially in the South.

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Election campaign band in Baton Rouge: Miller, Francis Trevelyan and Robert Sampson Lanier, *The Photographic History of the Civil War*, vol 9, 1911

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