



Reconstruction

April 14, President Abraham Lincoln and the First Lady went to see the hit comedy *Our American Cousin* starring Laura Keane at Ford's Theater in Washington, D.C.

The Lincolns arrived late and the performance was briefly suspended to acknowledge their presence. ninety minutes later during act three, scene two, the character Asa Trenchard delivered a line that never failed to get a big laugh.

“Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, you sockdologizing old man trap.”

These were the last words that Lincoln heard – the time was 10:15 pm.

As the theater rocked in laughter, a shot rang out behind the president.

John Wilkes Booth, 27, a Pro-Confederate and an eccentric Shakespearian actor who had been reputed at one time to be the handsomest man in America, had slipped into the Presidential Box and shot the president in the back of the head with a single-shot .44 derringer. Booth, jumping from the box onto the stage and injuring his leg in the process, yelled “*Sic Semper Tyrannis*” (thus always to tyrants) and escaped.

Lincoln was carried across the street to a private home where he died at 7:22 am on the 15th of April.

The attack on Lincoln was part of a larger conspiracy. An assassination attempt on Vice President Andrew Johnson failed when the would-be assassin lost his nerve. The Secretary of State William Seward was stabbed in his bed by yet another conspirator, but survived.

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On April 15, 1865, the morning after Lincoln's assassination, Andrew Johnson was sworn in as President of the United States by Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase. Johnson was the first vice president to succeed to the presidency upon the assassination of a president and the third vice president to become a president upon the death of a sitting president.

Johnson was an accidental president. Some would even argue that he was an accidental vice president! He had been chosen by Lincoln as vice president to appease the South. Johnson was a native of Tennessee and a Democrat. With Lincoln's death, Johnson inherited a bleeding nation (over 600,000 had died) and a Republican Congress determined to punish the Confederacy.

The Radical Republicans despised Johnson, who was a Southerner and a Democrat, and was just as sympathetic toward the South as Lincoln had been. In fact, Johnson's Reconstruction policies weren't very different from those of his predecessor, Abraham Lincoln. Ironically, when he first came to the presidency, Radicals were pleased. Johnson had made a series of strong anti-Confederacy speeches in the Senate and during the war as vice president and they believed that Johnson would be more sympathetic to their policies. The Radicals quickly realized that that they were wrong.

Johnson was intent on following in the footsteps of Lincoln. Although Johnson disliked the Southern planter class, he had a very strict Jacksonian interpretation of the Constitution. He believed that the states had no right to secede and also that the federal government had no right to punish the states. The honeymoon with Congress quickly came to an end when Johnson recognized Lincoln's arrangements with the states that were already in the process of Presidential Reconstruction. His major innovation was to expand the list of people who were ineligible to take part in reconstructed governments to all planters worth more than \$20,000. He set up provisional governors in the states and left voting qualifications up to the new state governments. Johnson's only concession to black civil rights was to allow literate land-owning blacks to vote. Generally speaking, though, Johnson's policies would be the same as Lincoln's.

The Aftermath of War

At the moment of Lincoln's death, 200,000 Union troops remained in the South as occupation forces.

Lincoln had always contended that the Southern states had never "left" the Union, that secession was unconstitutional and therefore impossible. Lincoln was a realist, though. He realized that secession had happened, and the conquered Southern states had to be reintegrated into the Union. How do you

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reintegrate them? Do you punish them? Reform them? Let them back in as if nothing had ever happened?

What about the status of freed people of color in the South? What about ex-Confederate soldiers and officers?

How about the strength of the Republican party? You could be sure that the same folks who seceded were not going to vote for the Republicans. What happens if the Democrats take control of the national government?

These and other questions confronted the reintegrated nation after the Civil War.

In a great civil war, from 1861 to 1865, the North had conquered the South, and, as in any war, to the victor belonged the spoils. Well, what were the spoils? What did the North have to gain from its victory? What had the South suffered as a result of the Civil War? What did the South have left to lose? There are three ways of answering that question. First, we should look at the “physical” losses that the South suffered. Second, we need to look at the legal and/or constitutional situation of the defeated South. And third, and probably most important of all, what was the emotional effect of southern defeat, occupation and subjugation at the hands of a hostile foreign foe.

1. Physical Losses

The South was not only invaded and conquered, but utterly destroyed.

- ★ $\frac{2}{3}$ of assessed value of Southern wealth in 1860 disappeared as a result of the war.
- ★ Slave property valued at between 3 and 4 billion dollars vanished with emancipation.
- ★ $\frac{1}{4}$ of the white male population between the ages of twenty and forty were dead.
- ★ More than $\frac{1}{2}$ of the farm machinery was ruined, as were Southern railroads and Southern industry.
- ★ $\frac{2}{5}$ of the South's livestock was destroyed in the war.
- ★ At the same time, the *per capita* wealth in the North doubled between 1860 and 1870!

In many of the most important economic indicators, the South lagged behind the North even before the war, but the Civil War exacerbated this trend.

- ★ the 1870 tobacco crop in VA was $\frac{1}{3}$ of the 1860 crop

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- ★ Cotton values bottomed out in the later 1860s. Cotton production and prices in the South would not reach 1860 levels until after 1879.
- ★ Southern farmland that sold for \$100 an acre in the late 1850s would sell for as little as \$5 an acre in 1870.
- ★ In Mississippi alone, by 1870, 6 million acres of land were sold because of non-payment of taxes.

The coastal cities of the South — from Richmond down to Savannah — lay largely in ruins. Cities were the hardest hit areas of the South.

Transportation and communication systems were largely destroyed.

It's not surprising that most of the memoirs left by Southerners during the days of Reconstruction paint a picture of a devastated, ruined South. Now this notion was not entirely correct. Some areas of the South experienced little or no damage or devastation as a result of the war. Also, the labor represented by the slaves was not lost; it was simply transformed from one of legal chattel slavery to that of freedmen and, in many cases, the tenant farmer (sharecropper).

The landowners of the South, both members of the old planter class and some new planters who had come south in search of cheap property, had a bit of a quandary. They needed labor, but could no longer depend on slave labor. But, freedmen and many dispossessed small farmers needed land to plant.

Planters subdivided their plantations and allowed families to occupy and farm the land. The tenant farmers (sharecroppers) rented land from the farmers and paid their rent with some fraction (usually half) of their crop. At first this system worked out relatively well for both farmers and planters, but several problems made sharecropping difficult for both planters and renters, but *always more difficult for the renters*.

- ★ The traditional cash crops in the South, cotton and tobacco were no longer as profitable as they had been in the 1850s. British and French textile industries had found cheaper cotton in Egypt, India, and Mexico during the Civil War, so cotton prices were very low and would go lower when the South began to produce cotton for export. Similarly, the tobacco market, once an American near monopoly, had grown during the war, with sizable exports from Turkey, Egypt and the Caribbean.
- ★ A third economic player the plantation store entered an already cluttered rural economy. Shop keepers, often from the North, started stores on or near plantations and offered credit to sharecroppers to buy the goods that they could not produce. Often, sharecroppers would have very little left

once they had settled with the planter landlord, *and* paid off their tab to the local shopkeeper.

- ★ Finally, rising local and state land taxes, while used to create much needed reform progress in the South placed a great deal more stress on the southern rural economy.

2. The Constitutional Situation of the Defeated South

The constitutional position of the defeated South was a vexing question anyway. But it would become all the more vexing because it awakened other constitutional questions as well. Constitutionally, the problem rested on how one viewed the seceded states:

Were the former Confederate states still part of the Union or had they left the Union legally and fully when they seceded? This question seems a bit of a “no-brainer.” In 1860 and 61, the Southern states held conventions and voted to secede, after all. They formally severed the bonds of membership in the Union and created a new political state—the Confederate States of America. But it wasn’t that easy. The myth of the Union, inseparable and indivisible, was pretty powerful.

Lincoln, who claimed to be guided by the Constitution (which provides no guidance at all in this matter) refused to recognize that secession was legal under the Constitution. For Lincoln, once a state entered the Union, it could never leave—as the Pledge of Allegiance asserts, the Union is “indivisible.”

Another constitutional view might be called the Secessionist View. It had a pretty good pedigree. It was the view of Jefferson and Madison in the *Kentucky* and *Virginia Resolutions*, the view of John C. Calhoun and most Southerners since the 1830s. It was certainly the view held by the Southern leadership in 1860. According to this notion, states had entered the Union voluntarily, and so had the right to leave it. The Radical Republicans in Congress quickly latched on to at least some elements of this view while denying that the states had the right to secede! They argued that there were eleven states that had “opted out” of the Union, and now had to be re-annexed, as it were, back in. In fact, one could easily make the argument that the Radical Republicans used whichever argument—indivisible Union or divisible Union—depending on the context of their debate.

Which position one took on the big constitutional question would have a profound effect, as we’ll see in a bit, on how the South should be reorganized and reincorporated into the Union. But, regardless of the political theory one espoused, the facts remained that A) the South had to be reintegrated into

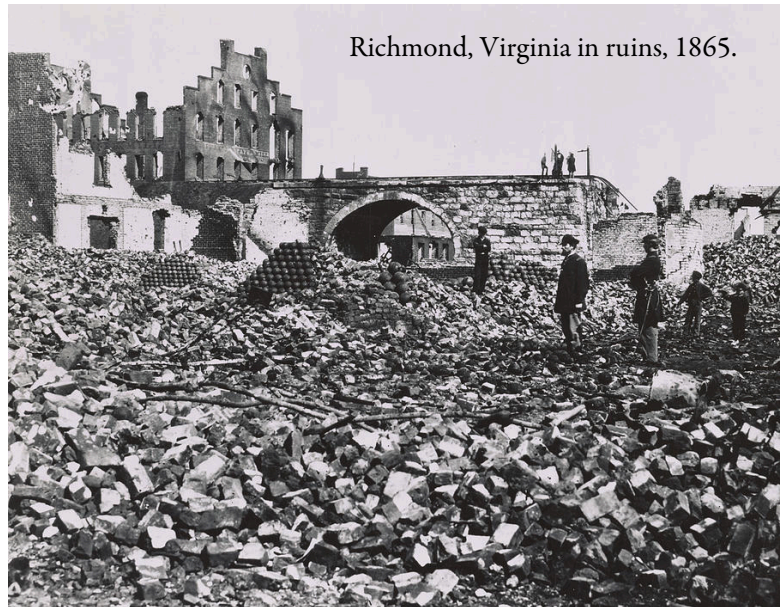
the Union, and B) Radical Republicans were bound and determined to make the process as painful for white Southerners and as profitable (politically and, in some cases economically) for themselves and their party, as possible.

3. The Emotional Impact of the War and Defeat of the South

A third way of approaching our understanding of the impact of the War and defeat on the South is to examine the emotional impact. Southern Historian, C. Vann Woodward in “The Burden of Southern History,” argued that the Southern experience of defeat, humiliation, and occupation by a foreign enemy created a distinctive Southern character that set the South apart from the North. The North was a nation that had never lost a war, never been occupied by a foreign foe. “Yankees” were a successful, prosperous, ever-victorious and undefeated people.

For Woodward and other Southern historians, despite all of the destructive effects of the war, the real tragedy of defeat was overwhelmingly a state of mind. Defeat by the Yankees represented a humiliation and also an indictment of the Southern way of life, with its “peculiar institution,” and the myth of Southern manhood and southern arms. Combined with

military defeat was a spiritual defeat that Southerners were loath to accept. Increasingly in the years after the war, Southern leaders and thinkers would return again and again to the myths of the prewar South, to a romantic notion of the “Lost Cause,” and to a memorialization of the Antebellum South and the “Confederate heroes” of the Civil War. They would try to turn material defeat into social and spiritual victory.



Richmond, Virginia in ruins, 1865.

Reconstructing the South

Abraham Lincoln and the Radicals didn't see eye to eye on what to do with the defeated South. Their differences led to confrontation over an important constitutional question that would become a reoccurring debate in American politics in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even today. The

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question is essentially, who runs the country? Is it the president and his administration or is it the legislative branch of the government—the United States Congress?

Control of Reconstruction was hotly debated between Lincoln and Radical Republicans in Congress. Lincoln argued that reconstruction fell to the executive branch because the Civil War was a rebellion rather than a war between two sovereign powers. He had called up the troops as commander in chief to quash the rebellion, and he had the constitutional power to punish or pardon traitors.

The Radical Republicans in Congress argued that Lincoln was far too soft on the rebels. He'd even said in his Second Inaugural Address in March of 1865, "With malice toward none. With charity toward all." The Radicals weren't in a charitable mood; they wanted revenge, and they wanted to maintain their power over the nation. The Radicals advocated a tougher stance toward the defeated South. Folks like Thaddeus Stevens, Representative from Pennsylvania, and Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts wanted to punish the South for a variety of reasons, and now they believed that they had their chance. They were joined by a host of other Northern Congressional and Republican Party leaders who saw gains in treating the South as a conquered territory for as long as possible.

Lincoln, on the other hand, wanted to get the Union back to normal as soon as possible. Why?

- ★ Well, first, he felt a strong sense of responsibility for the carnage of the war and was horrified by it.
- ★ His second reason was political. Southern electoral strength was an attractive lure to someone with national political ambitions. Now, in this case, Lincoln wasn't personally ambitious, he wanted to turn the Republican Party into a truly national party. The South, once reintegrated into the Union, had 22 Senators, 83 Representatives and lot of electoral votes, and Lincoln hoped that a relatively painless Reconstruction might help to get some of those political numbers into the Republican Party. Lincoln had been a Whig, and the Whig Party had retained a substantial presence in American politics in both the North and South down to the mid-1850s. Lincoln believed that a national political party that was based only in one region of the country—like the Republican Party—might not last very long, especially since the election of 1864 had indicated a drift in some areas of the North back into Democratic Party ranks.
- ★ Finally, although Lincoln believed that slavery was morally wrong, he was not emotionally tied to the plight of slaves in the South. He had grown up

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in a racist atmosphere that was emotionally tied to slavery, first in Kentucky and later in Southern Illinois. Lincoln was personally convinced that Blacks were unfit to be citizens in a republic. He framed his policies under four basic assumptions:

1. Slaves should be gradually emancipated, but not necessarily enfranchised.
2. The government should promote colonization of freed slaves—sending them back to Africa.
3. Those free blacks who stayed in the United States should accept an inferior social and political status.
4. Leniency should be shown to Southern white citizens, and they should be reintegrated back into the nation as soon as possible.

Lincoln proposed to bring the South back into the Union quickly once the war came to a conclusion. In December of 1863, he had issued a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction. In the proclamation, Lincoln argued that the Southern states, even though they were at war with the Union, had *never actually left the Union*.

- ★ Therefore, to restore the South to full partnership in the nation, Lincoln proposed that Southerners be required to take a very simple loyalty oath, in essence saying, “I have never been disloyal to the Union.”
- ★ If ten percent of the citizens of a Southern state who had been eligible to vote in 1860 would take that oath, Lincoln would recognize the new government that those individuals elected.
- ★ Lincoln had no provision for enfranchising freed blacks, in fact he pretty much ignored them altogether.
- ★ Only a very small percentage of Southern whites would not be eligible for a pardon—a few high ranking Confederate officials and people who had held federal positions and resigned to take jobs in the Confederacy were ineligible for pardons, having violated their federal oath of office. But, most all other Southerners would be eligible to take part in government under Lincoln’s amnesty proposal.

Lincoln applied his amnesty proclamation in the reconstruction of three states, Virginia, Louisiana and Tennessee. At the end of 1862, Lincoln sent a message to Congress with a scheme for the gradual emancipation of Slaves that would not have been complete until 1900. He also told a delegation of rebels in 1864 that the Emancipation Proclamation was a wartime measure and would be cancelled at the end of the war. But, the demand for black suffrage was widespread in the North by 1864. By that time, nearly 10% of

the Union Army was made up of blacks. Under pressure, Lincoln relented somewhat, saying that he would allow some blacks to vote, especially veterans, artisans and professionals.

The Radicals in Congress were increasingly displeased with Lincoln's policies, but members of Congress found it difficult to stand up to the popular and very powerful president. Lincoln's reputation and his mystique as the Great Emancipator and symbolic father of the Union, a mystique that some of his bitterest critics in Congress had helped to create, made it very difficult to cross him.

The Wade-Davis Bill

The contention between Lincoln and the Radicals in Congress came to a head with the passage of the Wade-Davis Bill in July of 1864. This Civil War measure, introduced by two Radical Republicans, Ohio Senator Benjamin F. Wade and Maryland Representative Henry Winter Davis, claimed congressional power over Reconstruction. The bill set forth a much harsher formula for Reconstruction.

- ★Wade-Davis required that a majority of a seceded state's white men take an oath of loyalty to the Constitution. Fifty percent of those eligible to vote in 1860 would have to take what came to be called the "iron-clad loyalty oath." That was an oath that not only said that "I have never been disloyal to the Union," but that "I've never taken up arms against the Union," and even "I've never had the slightest thought in my imagination of being disloyal to the Union." Those citizens who took the oath, could then create a new state constitution.
- ★The Wade-Davis Bill said that each new state constitution had to include legislation that would take the vote away from all those who had been disloyal.
- ★It required that new state constitutions contain a clause that forever abolished slavery, and required a guarantee of black equality.
- ★Each new Southern constitution had to repudiate the Confederate debt.

The Wade-Davis Bill essentially demanded that some answer be framed to that difficult question: Who runs the country? The president or Congress?

Now, this question was somewhat new in American constitutional history. Up to the Civil War, the most important constitutional question was "Who has precedence, the federal government or the states?" Just about every contentious issue in "History 201" had to do with states' rights versus federal authority. A few examples that you might remember are the Alien and

Sedition Act in the late 1790s, the nullification controversy of the 1830s, and even the discourse over slavery itself.

The Civil War ended that argument in a pretty forceful way. Federal authority trumped states' rights and the federal government had proved that point, not by means of learned debate or a Supreme Court ruling, but through the cannon's mouth and at the point of the bayonet! After the Civil War, the new debate was over who had the greatest authority over the nation, the president or Congress.

The first salvo in this competition for power between the two branches was over the reconstruction of the South. But, in order to frame the debate there existed the question, "What actually happened between the North and the South in 1860-61?" This question is more difficult than it seems, because it is tied to the more complicated political question, "Just what kind of political state *IS* the United States?" Four theories of the 1860-61 split between the South and the Union were framed.

Theories of Reconstruction

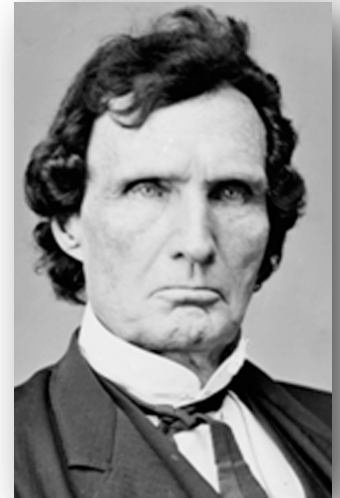
1. Presidential Theory
2. Southern Theory
3. Conquered Provinces Theory
4. "Forfeited Rights" Theory

The **Presidential theory** was originally put forward by Abraham Lincoln and then picked up by his successor, Andrew Johnson. The first premise of the theory argued that the Southern states had *never actually left* the Union because it was *impossible* to leave the Union. Thus, what was needed was not Reconstruction but "Restoration." Some leaders of the Southern states had acted treasonably, however, and, under the Constitution, the president, with the power to punish or pardon traitors and other criminals, had full authority over so-called Reconstruction. Johnson promised to use his pardoning power to appoint provisional governors sympathetic to the Southern cause and to bring the South back into the Union as quickly and painlessly as possible.

The **Southern theory** argued that the results of the war proved secession could not take place and that therefore Southern states never had left the Union. There was no Constitutional question. Everything should revert to its pre-war status.

The **Conquered Provinces theory** represented the most extreme viewpoints of Radical Republicans. Its greatest proponent and enunciator

was Thaddeus Stevens (right), a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania and a leading abolitionist. Stevens argued that the actions of Southern states and Southern individuals had been so heinous and so politically criminal they had shattered the Constitution. If the Constitution was essentially broken, it no longer applied. The bonds that had united the Union were broken and the United States (North) had conquered the independent South by force of arms. The South belonged, thus to the Union by right of conquest, so Congress had the right to reconstruct Southern states in whatever manner it chose. Southern states, Stevens said, must be treated as conquered provinces under international law.



Finally, the **Forfeited Rights theory**, the one that ultimately would govern Reconstruction, declared secession null and void while also emphasizing that governments had rebelled against the Union. Because Southern governments had rebelled, they had forfeited their rights under the United States Constitution. Under the Constitution it would be both the duty and right of Congress to ensure every state a republican form of government. This Forfeited Rights theory ultimately gained the support of a majority in Congress. The most radical of the so-called Radical Republicans agreed with Stevens, but the forfeited rights theory brought the more moderate Republicans into a consensus with the Radicals.

Who Were the Radical Republicans?

Now I've been talking a lot about the "Radical Republicans," so maybe its time to give you a better idea of who they were. The fact of the matter is there is not a single answer to the question, "who was a Radical?" There are men who, quite obviously, were extremists. Men like Thaddeus Stevens, men like Charles Sumner, the fiery Senator from Massachusetts. There were men like Wendell Phillips, one of the leading abolitionists and leading orators and agitators against the South during the 1840s and the 1850s. These were men of extreme positions on certain issues—and especially the issue of the abolition of slavery. Now, we need to remember that the Republican Party had come into being in the mid-1850s committed to *limiting the extension* of slavery, not to abolishing it. Lincoln initially had stayed with that position. During the early years of the war, a growing number of Republicans in Congress had moved closer and closer to the position of the extremists. The extremists were radical abolitionists who wanted to abolish slavery in the United States, *and*, this bit's important, they demanded the immediate

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enfranchisement of the freedmen. These were men who defied Lincoln time and again, men who would defy the new president, Andrew Johnson, in the years after the war. When Johnson came to power in 1865, the leading Radicals in Congress saw their chance to push their viewpoints about reconstructing the South. Lincoln's reputation and power within the party had been too difficult to challenge, but Johnson was another matter entirely. Radicals regarded Andrew Johnson with contempt.

Although the political viewpoints of "radicals" came in many flavors and they often disagreed about other important national issues, from the 1866 elections on, a Radical Republican was any member of Congress committed to destroying the institution of slavery and committed to civil rights for freed blacks, *AND*, we might add, they were committed to punishing the South for the past sin of slavery and for rebellion against the Union.

The Radicals seized power, in part, because of growing hostility toward President Johnson and some of his actions. In the early months of 1866, Johnson vetoed two bills that Congress had passed.

★The first was an extension of a former piece of legislation called the Freedman's Bureau Bill, designed to educate newly freed slaves while also providing "forty acres and a mule" to aid freedmen in farming. Johnson vetoed the bill on the grounds that until the former Confederate states returned to the Union, Congress did not have the right to set up such provisions.



★The second bill that Andrew Johnson vetoed angered the Radicals even more. this one was the first civil rights act in American history, the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Essentially, all it did was bestow citizenship on the newly freed slaves, but Johnson vetoed it as an unnecessary invasion of states' rights.

The Radicals regarded the President's vetoes as an affront to the power of Congress and evidence that he was soft on the Southern whites. Radical members of Congress stepped up their demands for control over Reconstruction.

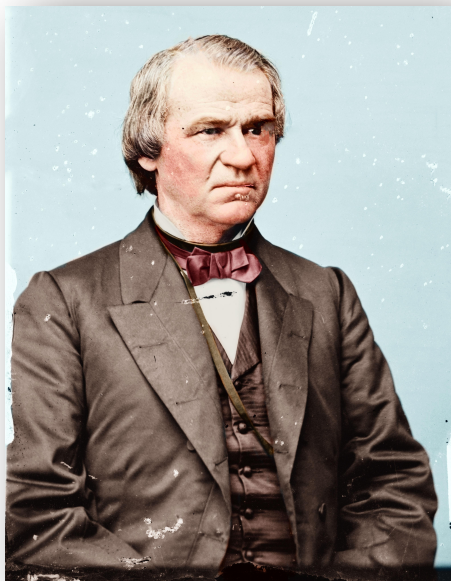
Radicals controlled the powerful Joint Committee of Fifteen that Congress created to oversee Reconstruction. The Joint Committee perfected the Forfeited Rights theory and applied it to Reconstruction of the South. Their

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cause was helped by the fall elections of 1866. The Congressional Radicals essentially took over the Republican Party. They campaigned very skillfully against Johnson and the moderate Republicans and were able to swell the ranks of Radicals in Congress. From that point on, the Radicals were in full charge of Reconstruction, and would have their way with the South.

In 1866 and 67 a series of racial clashes in southern cities gave Radical Congressmen an excuse to launch a counter attack against Johnson's lenient policies. By this time the Radicals had veto-proof majorities. In the spring of 1867, Congress passed three Reconstruction Acts, which:

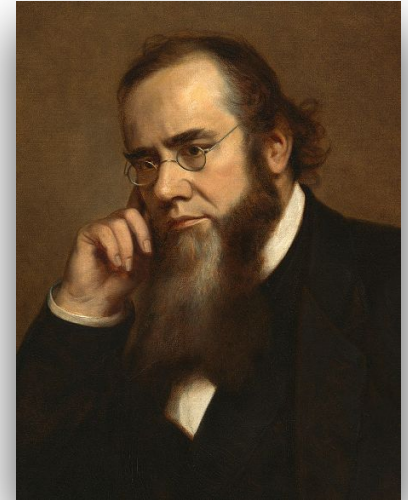
- ★ Created five military districts in the seceded states not including Tennessee, which had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution and was readmitted to the Union.
- ★ Required congressional approval for new state constitutions. A Southern state could not re-enter the Union without a new constitution.
- ★ Confederate states were required to extend voting rights to all men, EXCEPT, of course Southern men who could not conform to the Congressional loyalty oath (which excluded most white southerners).
- ★ All former Confederate states were required to ratify the 14th Amendment (which banned slavery).



Andrew Johnson (right) vetoed all of the Reconstruction Acts, and Congress passed all of them over the president's veto. But, in order to actually control these new policies, Congress needed to control the president and the administration. To do this Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act. The act, passed over a veto, provided that federal officials whose appointment required Senate confirmation could not be removed without the consent of the Senate. When the Senate was not in session, the Act allowed the President to suspend an official, but if the Senate upon its reconvening refused to concur in the removal, the official must be reinstated in his position. The law was meant to

place the army in the hands of a Radical, the Secretary of War Edwin Stanton who supported Congress against Johnson.

In August 1867, President Johnson suspended Stanton (right) pending the next session of the Senate. However, when the Senate convened on January 3, 1868, it refused to ratify the removal by a vote of 35-16. Notwithstanding the vote, President Johnson attempted to appoint a new Secretary of War. Proceedings began within days, leading to Johnson's impeachment, the first ever of a United States President. After a three-month trial, Johnson avoided removal from office by the Senate by a single vote.



The Myth of Reconstruction: According to the myth of Reconstruction that was believed by most Americans by the 1880s, in 1867, a radical Northern Congress bent upon revenge placed Southern states under military tyrants. Congress imposed government manned by outsiders (carpetbaggers), turncoat Southern whites (scalawags), and their ignorant Negro allies, once slaves, now freedmen. According to this myth, for the next ten years, foreign oppressors and their corrupt cronies methodically looted the South, impoverished Southerners with high taxes, and spread a reign of corruption and terror. This dreadful state of affairs finally came to an end in 1877 when the Democratic Party of the South, composed of virtuous white Southerners, once again won local elections and took control of their own destiny.

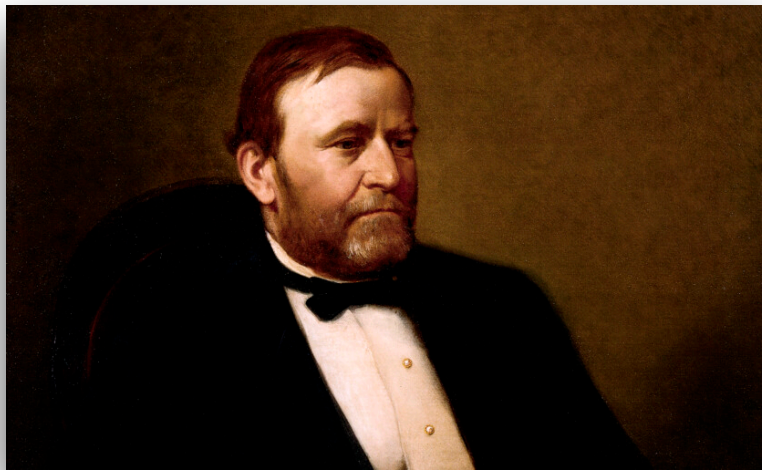
It would be nice to say that every word of the myth is hogwash, but, all myths, contain at least a tiny kernel of truth. That is the case with the “myth of Reconstruction.” There were Union armies in parts of the South. There was certainly corruption in most Southern “carpetbagger” state governments (and just as much corruption in Northern states as well). Blacks held state offices in several Southern states, most notably in South Carolina and Louisiana. Some of these black office holders had been free people of color before the war. Most of these folks were well-educated. Some few were freedmen, poorly educated and unprepared to take part in government. But, sadly, most black state officeholders were put into office by white carpetbag Republicans who actually controlled and dominated state politics. Usually these Northern leaders were well-meaning reformers who wanted to give the newly-freed blacks freedom and civil rights. Some carpetbaggers fleeced the states under their control. Most carpetbaggers, whether saints or sinners, were Republican politicians who wanted to preserve the power of their party in national politics for as long as possible. They rationalized that this was for the good of the nation.

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Taxes did increase in most Southern states in the late 1860s and the early 1870s. But, these taxes paid for a series of reforms that weren't necessarily popular with the planter class that no longer wielded power over the southern states. but still paid the higher land taxes necessitated by reforms. For the first time in many Southern states public education systems were introduced (for whites and blacks), sanitary and health improvements were undertaken, states offered tax incentives to encourage the growth of urban industry, public urban transportation was improved, police and fire departments, and colleges and hospitals were built. All of these reforms required public revenues, so state and local taxes rose. The size of state and local governments grew, and with the growth of government came not only higher taxes, but more corruption than had been encountered in the past. In essence, more public servants simply meant more palms to grease than ever before.

The Election of 1868 & 1872

Ulysses S. Grant (below) was elected 1868 (53% of the popular vote – 214 to 80 electoral votes) and again in 1872 (56% – 286 to 0), when his opponent Horace Greeley died after the election but before the electoral votes were cast. Grant and his administration were tied very closely to the Radical Republicans who had secured his nomination and supported his election. Many of the Radicals assumed that Grant would be a pliable president, who



could be controlled relatively easily.

- ★Grant went along with Congressional Reconstruction effort.
- ★his election marks a victory for the Radicals.
- ★his administration is marked by scandal as we will see in a bit.

Radical Reconstruction in a Nutshell

The goals of Radical or Congressional Reconstruction program can be summarized as follows:

- ★ To keep ex-Confederate states out of the Union until they had set up governments that could be regarded as “republican” in nature.
- ★ To require Southern states to repeal the “black codes,” disqualify those who had been active in the rebellion from holding state office, guarantee the freedman his civil rights and give him the right to vote and hold office. Remember the 14th and 15th Amendments.
- ★ To ensure a larger role for Congress in the process of Reconstruction.

The Radical program was meant to overturn the whole of Lincoln’s and Johnson’s Presidential Reconstruction and place the Confederate states back where they had been in 1865.

Under Thaddeus Stevens’ leadership and with a new contingent of Radical Republican legislators, 4 Reconstruction Acts were passed.

The **First Reconstruction Act** of 2 March 1867 the most important one was

- ★ “No legal government” existed in any Southern state except Tennessee
- ★ They created 5 military districts of southern occupation subject to army commanders
- ★ Escape from this military regime and restoration of state rights were promised on condition that a constitutional convention, chosen by universal male suffrage, set up governments based on black and white suffrage, and that new state legislatures ratify the 14th Amendment

In 1867, military rule replaced civil rule in the South.

- ★ Thousands of local officials are removed and replaced by freedmen and “carpetbaggers”—northern politicians and reformers who went South after the Civil War to profit from Reconstruction.
- ★ Occasionally, the rights of white Southerners were ignored.
- ★ Governors of 6 states were replaced by Congressional appointees.
- ★ Civil courts were replaced with military tribunals.
- ★ Georgia, Alabama, and Louisiana’s state legislatures were purged of conservatives.

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The white Southern response was coercion. Organizations like the Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1866 at Pulaski, TN), the Knights of the White Camellia, and “rifle clubs” were created by frustrated and angry whites in order to intimidate freedmen and resist federal occupation.

President Grant and Congress responded with the Force Acts in 1870 and 1871 and the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871. In all 1,000 Southerners were convicted and the Klan was subdued, racial violence continued but became less dramatic.



Klansman (right) and “rifle club member” (left) intimidating freedman and woman.

Corruption and incompetence was pervasive, but really corruption in the state politics of the post-war Union was so widespread that its hard to say that it was any worse in the South than in party machine dominated states and cities in the North. The real difference is perhaps that the beneficiaries of southern corruption (Republicans and “carpetbaggers”) were perceived to be foreign occupiers.

The End of Reconstruction

Reconstruction ended because:

1. The Northern populace “got tired” of the fight.

- ★their power waning, Radicals called for more military intervention which was not popular in the North anymore. Northerners didn’t want a “new Civil War.”
- ★The North was never really committed to the cause of black equality, and many Northern states during Reconstruction, began to pass legislation that restricted free blacks in Northern counties and towns as well.
- ★The Panic of 1873 led to a 5 year depression, the worst in American history up to that time (3 million unemployed, \$500 million in business failures)
- ★In 1874 Democrats won control of the House of Representatives as a result of the passage of the 1872 Amnesty Act, which restored white voting power in the South.

2. Grant’s administration was corrupt, Grant himself was increasingly too drunk to know what was going on, and lost public confidence in his administration and among the Radicals. A series of corrupt activities were tied both to the Grant administration and some of the members of Congress.

- A. Black Friday (scandal broke in 1869): In an effort to corner the gold market on Wall Street, James Fisk and J. Gould led a group of investors who used

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inside information from the Grant administration to corner the gold market. They bought lots of gold. Through Grant's brother-in-law, Gould and Fisk convinced Grant to tighten the sale of gold coins, making the price of gold skyrocket. Then Fisk and Gould dumped their gold and made a killing. The result of their activities sent the gold market into a tailspin. When Grant sobered up long enough to realize the plot he sold 4 million dollars in government gold to stabilize prices. He saved the stock market from a crash, but lots of legitimate investors were ruined and the administration received a black eye.

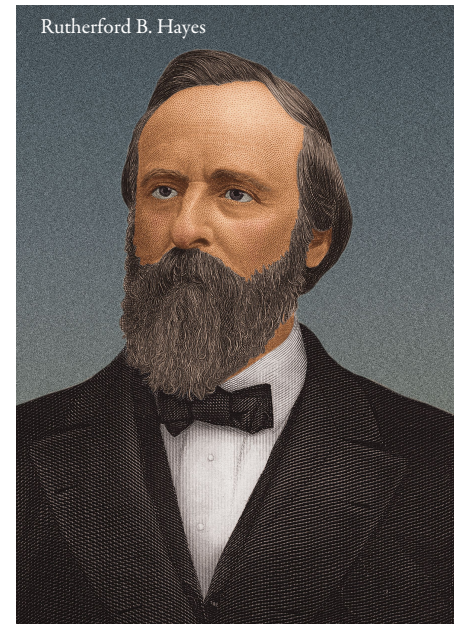
- B. Credit Mobillier (1872): members of the Credit Mobillier Company received a government contract to build railroads subsidized by Congress. The directors of the company skimmed off huge amounts from the federally subsidized construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. To prevent an investigation they sold shares of stock at a deep discount to Republican congressmen. A number of Radical congressmen were caught in the ensuing scandal.
- C. Delinquent tax collection (1874): The Secretary of the Treasury made a contract with a fellow named Sanborn to collect some \$427,000 in delinquent taxes. Sandborn was allowed to keep 50% of all the money that he collected in exchange for kickbacks to members of Congress and the Treasury. Sweet work if you can get it...
- D. Whiskey Ring (1875): Collectors of the liquor excise made deals with distillers and deceived the government, making lots of money for themselves. Grant's personal secretary Orville Babcock was involved. Grant was able to protect his friend Babcock, but 114 people were convicted and went to prison.
- E. Belknap Bribery (1876): Secretary of War W.W. Babcock was taking annual kickbacks from suppliers of military goods. At first the kickbacks were paid to his wife and he got away with it. After she died to took the money himself directly, then he got caught and resigned when he was about to be impeached.
- F. There were actually a few more scandals, but these should get the point across.

All of this scandal within the Grant administration and among Republican Congressmen, along with a general loss of sympathy for Radical Reconstruction among many Northern voters. seemed to pretty much guarantee a massive Republican defeat at the polls in the election of 1876.

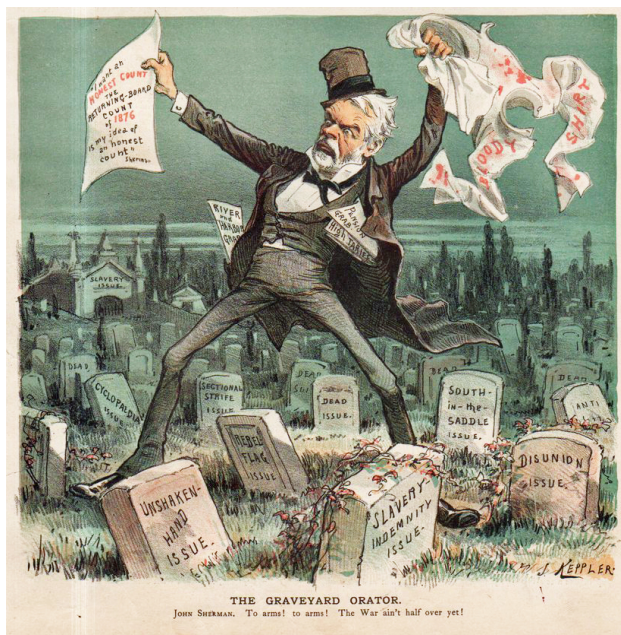
- ★ Both candidates Rutherford B. Hayes (R) and Samuel J. Tilden (D) had the support of reformers. Both vowed to clean up Washington if elected.

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- ★Tilden lambasted Republican corruption, reminding the voters of the many scandals of the Grant Administration.
- ★Hayes and Republicans “waved the bloody shirt” with abandon. Waving the bloody shirt was a Republican political tactic of bring up that southern Democrats had been the enemy of the Union during the Civil War, and that any northern Democrats, called “Copperheads” had been critical of the Republican North, sympathetic to their southern political compatriots. Republicans labeled the Democrats as the party of treason and rebellion, and reminded voters that the Republicans were the party that preserved the Union.



At first, the returns seemed to indicate that Tilden, the Democratic Party candidate, had won a sweeping victory. He carried New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Indiana, and the entire South. Tilden won a 260,000 vote majority. But, Republicans scanned the returns and determined that, with a little tweaking, South Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and Oregon might go Republican. Without these 4 states Tilden had only 184 electoral votes; he needed 185.



Waving the bloody shirt

The election came down to the three Southern states, South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana. Voter fraud was rampant in all three of them; and probably elsewhere as well. To make matters even more bizarre, these three states each submitted TWO sets of returns, one compiled by carpetbaggers that indicated Republican victories, one submitted by Democrats that gave the state victory to Tilden. The truth is that the election in these three states was so heavily manipulated by both parties and so fraudulent, that we can't really tell who won—we aren't

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even sure who, if anyone, voted! Ballot boxes were emptied, restuffed and destroyed by both parties, miscounts were legion; many blacks were intimidated away from the polls by whites; federal troops in some areas were used to keep whites from voting. What a mess!

- ★ The votes in South Carolina were recounted by a “bipartisan commission” made up almost entirely by Republicans, and Hayes, the Republican, won the recount.
- ★ 13,000 votes were thrown out in Louisiana
- ★ 1,000 votes were thrown out in Florida
- ★ a Republican elector replaced a Democrat on a technicality in Oregon.

A federal commission was set up to look at the 4 states and voted 8-7 on party lines to award the election to Hayes 185 electoral votes to 184.

Some Southern Democrats threatened open rebellion, Tilden restrained them BUT, in a back room deal, Hayes and the Republicans agreed that if Hayes got the presidency, Congress would remove all remaining Federal troops from the South. In other words, the Republicans were perfectly willing to end Reconstruction if they could have the White House one more time. The deal went through, Hayes received the presidency, federal troops came home, and Reconstruction ended.

The result of the abandonment of Reconstruction is that black civil rights were restricted until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The Civil Rights Act of 1875 assured blacks of “full enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns public conveyances on land or water, theaters, and other places of amusement.” The Act was declared unconstitutional in 1883 on the basis that Congress had no power to regulate the conduct of individuals. This decision essentially laid civil rights for blacks to rest and ended Reconstruction.