CHAPTER FIFTEEN
RECONSTRUCTION AND THE NEW SOUTH

Objectives

A thorough study of Chapter 15 should enable the student to understand

1. The conditions in the former Confederacy after Appomattox that would have made any attempt at genuine Reconstruction most difficult.

2. The differences between the Conservative and Radical views on the Reconstruction process and the reasons for the eventual Radical domination.

3. The functioning of the impeachment process in the case of President Andrew Johnson and the significance of his acquittal for the future of Reconstruction.

4. Radical Reconstruction in practice and southern (black and white) reaction to it.

5. The debate among historians concerning the nature of Reconstruction, its accomplishments, and its harmful effects on the South.

6. The national problems faced by President Ulysses S. Grant and the reasons for his lack of success as chief executive.

7. The diplomatic successes of the Johnson and Grant administrations and the role of the presidents in achieving them.

8. The greenback question and how it reflected postwar financial problems of the nation.

9. The alternatives that were available during the election of 1876 and the effects of the Compromise of 1877 on the South and on the nation.

10. The response of African Americans to conditions in the South following Reconstruction.

11. The reasons for the failure of the South to develop a strong industrial economy after Reconstruction.

12. The methods used in the South to regain control of its own affairs and the course of action it chose thereafter.

13. The ways in which southerners decided to handle the race question and the origin of the system identified with “Jim Crow.”

14. The typical pattern of southern agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the impact this had on the region and its people.

15. The debate among historians over the origins of segregation after the Civil War.

Main Themes

1. That the defeat and devastation of the South presented the nation with severe social, economic, and political problems.

2. How Radical Reconstruction changed the South but fell short of the full transformation needed to secure equality for the freedman.

3. That white society and the federal government lacked the will to enforce effectively most of the constitutional and legal guarantees acquired by blacks during Reconstruction.

4. How the policies of the Grant administration moved beyond Reconstruction matters to foreshadow issues of the late nineteenth century.

5. How white leaders reestablished economic and political control of the South and sought to modernize the region through industrialization.

6. How the race question continued to dominate southern life.
Glossary

1. **Whigs** A major political party between 1834 and the 1850s. The Whigs were unified by their opposition to Andrew Jackson and their support for federal policies to aid business. The party was strongest among the merchants and manufacturers of the Northeast, the wealthy planters of the South, and the farmers of the West most eager for internal improvements. Abraham Lincoln and many other Republicans had been Whigs before the issues of sectionalism destroyed the party.

2. **veto/pocket veto** The president’s refusal to sign a bill passed by Congress. He must send it back to Congress with his objections. Unless two-thirds of each house votes to override the president’s action, the bill will not become law. A pocket veto occurs when Congress has adjourned and the president refuses to sign a bill within ten days. Because Congress is not in session, the president’s action cannot be overridden. (See the Constitution, Article I, Section 7.)

3. **spoils system** The political equivalent of the military axiom “To the victor belong the spoils.” In the nineteenth century, the victorious political party in national, state, and local elections routinely dismissed most officeholders and replaced them with workers loyal to the incoming party. The “spoils” were the many jobs available in the government. At the national level, this included thousands of post office and customs positions. Political organizations especially adept at manipulating spoils to remain in power were often called machines. Civil-service reformers demanded that nonpolicy-making jobs be filled on the basis of competitive examinations and that officeholders would continue in office as long as they performed satisfactorily.

4. **Solid South** Refers to the fact that the South became overwhelmingly Democratic as a reaction to Republican actions during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Democratic domination of southern politics persisted for over a century despite occasional cracks, especially in presidential elections.

5. **Unionists Residents of the Confederate** states who counseled against secession and who often remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War. Unionists were more common in upcountry regions of the South, where the slave-based plantation economy was less influential than in coastal areas of the South. Some Unionists left the South during the Civil War but many remained.

Pertinent Questions

**THE PROBLEMS OF PEACEMAKING (402-406)**

1. What effects did the Civil War have on the economy and social system of the South?
2. What special problems did the freedmen face immediately after the war? What efforts were made to help them?
3. What were the competing notions of freedom that existed in the post-war South?
4. What political implications did the readmission of the southern states pose for the Republicans?
5. What were the differences between the Conservative, Radical, and Moderate factions of the Republican Party during Reconstruction?
6. What were the objectives and provisions of Lincoln’s plan for Reconstruction? How did the Radical Republicans respond to it?
7. Describe Andrew Johnson’s approach to Reconstruction. How was it shaped by his political background and his personality?

**RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION (406-409)**

8. What did the southern state governments do during the “presidential Reconstruction” of 1865 and 1866?
9. How did Congress respond to the Black Codes and other southern state actions of 1865 and 1866?
10. What did the Congressional elections of 1866 reveal about the public attitude toward Reconstruction?
11. Explain the basic provisions of the Congressional plan of Reconstruction of 1867. On what principle was it based?

12. What measures did the Radical Republicans take to keep President Johnson and the Supreme Court from interfering with their plans?

13. Why did Radical Republicans want to impeach President Johnson and why did they fail?

**THE SOUTH IN RECONSTRUCTION (409-414)**

14. What three groups constituted the Republican Party in the South during Reconstruction?

15. What role did blacks play in southern political life during Reconstruction?

16. What was the balance between corruption and positive accomplishment by the Reconstruction-era state governments in the South?

17. What patterns of southern education began to emerge during Reconstruction?

18. What changes in land distribution occurred in the South after the Civil War? How were the hopes of blacks mostly dashed?

19. What economic advances did the freedmen make? How did the economic status of blacks compare with that of the average white southerner?

20. How did the crop-lien system overshadow the economic gains made by blacks and poor whites?

21. How did freedom affect black family life?

**THE GRANT ADMINISTRATION (414-416)**

22. How did Ulysses S. Grant’s political accomplishments compare with his military ability?

23. What were the scandals that came to light during the Grant Administration? What role did Grant play in these?

24. People in what financial condition were most likely to favor expansion of the currency supply with greenbacks? What was done about the greenback issue?

25. What were the diplomatic accomplishments of the Grant administration?

**THE ABANDONMENT OF RECONSTRUCTION (416-421)**

26. What tactics did white southern Democrats use to restrict or control black suffrage?

27. Why did northern Republicans begin to take less interest in Reconstruction and the cause of the freedmen after about 1870?

28. Why was the presidential election of 1876 disputed? How was the controversy resolved by the “Compromise of 1877”?

29. What was President Rutherford B. Hayes’s objective in the South? Did he succeed?

30. Compare white and black expectations for Reconstruction with the actual results.

**THE NEW SOUTH (421-431)**

31. What were the socioeconomic and political characteristics of the “Redeemers” (Bourbons)?

32. How did the policies of the “Redeemer” governments compare with those of the Reconstruction era administrations?

33. In what particular products was industrialization in the South most advanced? What factors attracted industrial capital to the region after the war?

34. How did industrialization in the South compare with that in the North?

35. Describe the composition of the industrial workforce in the South. What problems did the workers face?
36. Describe the typical pattern of southern agriculture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What problems confronted most farmers?

37. Describe the rise of the black middle class. How widespread were economic gains by southern blacks?

38. What was Booker T. Washington’s prescription for black advancement?

39. How did the civil-rights cases of 1883 and Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) substantially negate the effect of the equal-protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment?

40. What strategies and legal devices did the southern states use to evade the spirit of the Fifteenth Amendment?

41. Explain how southern whites used lynching to control the black population. How did some whites, both northern and southern, respond?

WHERE HISTORIANS DISAGREE (418-419)

42. How have historians differed over the nature of Reconstruction?

43. What part has the public played in this debate and why is the era so controversial?

44. How have historians attempted to explain the origins of segregation in America?

45. How have social and political development in the United States influenced the debate over the origins of segregation?

PATTERNS OF POPULAR CULTURE (422-423)

46. How was the minstrel show both a testament to the high awareness of race and the high level of racism in American society before the Civil War?

Identification

Identify each of the following and explain why it is important within the context of the chapter.

1. Thirteenth Amendment
2. O. O. Howard
3. Thaddeus Stevens
4. Charles Sumner
5. Wade-Davis Bill
6. John Wilkes Booth
7. Alexander H. Stephens
8. Joint Committee on Reconstruction
9. Fourteenth Amendment
10. Tenure of Office Act
11. Edwin M. Stanton
12. scalawag
13. carpetbagger
14. Blanche K. Bruce
15. Hiram R. Revels
16. sharecropping
17. crop lien system
18. Horatio Seymour
19. Hamilton Fish
20. “Grantism”
21. Liberal Republicans
22. Horace Greeley
23. Credit Mobilier
24. “whiskey ring”
25. Panic of 1873
26. “Seward’s Folly”
27. “redeemed”
28. Ku Klux Klan
29. Samuel J. Tilden
30. Readjuster
31. Henry W. Grady
32. the “Lost Cause”
33. Joel Chandler Harris
34. James B. Duke
35. standard gauge
36. convict lease system
37. “fence laws”
38. The Atlanta Compromise
39. Jim Crow laws

Document 1

Read the portions of the chapter that discuss the Black Codes. Also read the section “Where Historians Disagree: Reconstruction.” The following selection is taken from the writings of William A. Dunning. Consider the following questions: How does Dunning’s account reveal his racist assumptions? How would accounts such
as Dunning’s lead white southerners in the twentieth century to conclude that they had been gravely wronged by Reconstruction? Which of the following positions is more convincing? Were the Black Codes a necessary and realistic response to the situation or were they a thinly disguised attempt to resubjugate the freedmen?

To a distrustful northern mind such legislation could very easily take the form of a systematic attempt to relegate the freedmen to a subjection only less complete than that from which the war had set them free. The radicals sounded a shrill note of alarm. “We tell the white men of Mississippi,” said the Chicago Tribune; “that the men of the North will convert the state of Mississippi into a frog-pond before they will allow any such laws to disgrace one foot of soil over which the flag of freedom waves.” In Congress, Wilson, Sumner, and other extremists took up the cry, and with superfluous ingenuity distorted the spirit and purpose of both the laws and the law-makers of the South. The “black codes” were represented to be the expression of a deliberate purpose by the Southerners to nullify the result of the war and reestablish slavery, and this impression gained wide prevalence in the North.

Yet, as a matter of fact, this legislation, far from embodying any spirit of defiance towards the North or any purpose to evade the conditions which the victors had imposed, was in the main a conscientious and straightforward attempt to bring some sort of order out of the social and economic chaos which a full acceptance of the results of war and emancipation involved. In its general principle it corresponded very closely to the actual facts of the situation. The freedmen were not, and in the nature of the case could not for generations be, on the same social, moral, and intellectual plane with the whites; and this fact was recognized by constituting them a separate class in the civil order. As in general principles, so in details, the legislation was faithful on the whole to the actual conditions with which it had to deal. The restrictions in respect to bearing arms, testifying in court, and keeping labor contracts were justified by well-established traits and habits of the negroes; and the vagrancy laws dealt with problems of destitution, idleness, and vice of which no one not in the midst of them could appreciate the appalling magnitude and complexity.


Document 2

The crop lien system, initiated during Reconstruction, continued to be a major grievance of southern farmers well into the twentieth century. The following selection is taken from The Ills of the South, by Charles H. Otken, a Mississippi Baptist preacher and schoolteacher. Consider this document and the relevant parts of the text and answer the following questions: Why did the crop lien system arise? What were the consequences of the system on land ownership and crop selection? Could the system be fairly described as a “vicious circle”? When all the cotton made during the year has been delivered and sold, and the farmer comes out in debt on the 31St of December, that farmer has taken the first step toward bankruptcy. If he is a small farmer, $25, $50, or $75 is a heavy burden to carry. Take these cases: Hezekiah Drawbridge owes $25 at the close of the year; his credit limit was $75. Stephen Goff owes $50; his credit limit ws $150. Buff Tafton owes $75; his credit limit was $250. The year during which these debts were made was fairly good, the purchases were moderate, there was no sickness in these families. The following year similar credit arrangements are made, and they purchase the full amount agreed upon between them and their merchants. From some unaccountable or accountable cause, the crop is a little worse, or the price of cotton is a little less. The winding up of the second year’s farm operations finds Drawbridge, Goff, and Tafton with the following debts confronting them, respectively: $65, $115, $155. The outlook is blue for these farmers, and they feel blue. Thus, or nearly thus, this system operates in thousands of cases. Each year the plunge into debt is deeper; each year the burden is heavier. The struggle is woe-begone. Cares are many, smiles are few, and the comforts of life are scantier. This is the bitter fruit of a method of doing business which comes to the farmer in the guise of friendship, but rules him with despotic power. To a large class of men, the inscription printed in large, bold characters over the door of the credit
system is: “The man who enters here leaves hope behind,” and it tells a sad and sorrowful history. Anxious days, sleepless nights, deep wrinkles, gray hairs, wan faces, cheerless old age, and perhaps abject poverty make up, in part, the melancholy story.

Charles H. Otken, The ills of the South or Related Causes Hostile to the General Prosperity of the Southern People (New York: Putnam, 1894).

Document 3

Read the section of the text concerning the case Plessy v. Ferguson which was decided by the Supreme Court in 1896. Included here are excerpts from the majority opinion and from Justice John Marshall Harlan’s lone dissent. Consider the following questions: Which opinion is more convincing concerning the implication of the inferiority of blacks in the “separate but equal” doctrine? How does Harlan’s dissent foreshadow the arguments of twentieth-century civil-rights crusaders? Is the United States Constitution today truly “color blind”?

The object of the amendment was undoubtedly to enforce the absolute equality of the two races before the law, but in the nature of things it could not have been intended to abolish distinctions based upon color, or to enforce social, as distinguished from political equality, or a co mingling of the two races upon terms unsatisfactory to either. Laws permitting, and even requiring, their separation in places where they are liable to be brought into contact do not necessarily imply the inferiority of either race to the other, and have been generally, if not universally, recognized as within the competency of the state legislatures in the exercise of their police power. The most common instance of this is connected with the establishment of separate schools for white and colored children, which has been held to be a valid exercise of the legislative power even by courts of States where the political rights of the colored race have been longest and most earnestly enforced.

Laws forbidding the intermarriage of the two races may be said in a technical sense to interfere with the freedom of contract, and yet have been universally recognized as within the police power of the State.

So far, then, as a conflict with the Fourteenth Amendment is concerned, the case reduces itself to the question whether the statute of Louisiana is a reasonable regulation, and with respect to this there must necessarily be a large discretion on the part of the legislature. In determining the question of reasonableness it is at liberty to act with reference to the established usages, customs and traditions of the people, and with a view to the promotion of their comfort, and the preservation of the public peace and good order....

We consider the underlying fallacy of the plaintiffs argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction upon it.

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It was said in argument that the statute of Louisiana does not discriminate against either race, but prescribes a rule applicable alike to white and colored citizens. But this argument does not meet the difficulty. Everyone knows that the statute in question had its origins in the purpose, not so much to exclude white persons from railroad cars occupied by blacks, as to exclude colored people from coaches occupied by or assigned to white persons. . . . No one would be so wanting in candor as to assert the contrary. . . . In view of the Constitution, in the eye of the law, there is in this country no superior, dominant, ruling class of citizens. There is no caste here. Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. . . . The destinies of the two races, in this country, are indissolubly linked together, and the interests of both require that the common government of all shall not permit the seeds of race hate to be planted under the sanction of law. . . . The arbitrary separation of citizens on the basis of race, while they are on a public highway, is a badge of servitude wholly inconsistent with the civil freedom and the equality before the law established by the Constitution.

Plessy v. Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

Map Exercise
Fill in or identify the following on the blank map provided. Use the map in the text as your source.

1. Former Confederate states.
2. First state to be readmitted, including the year.
3. Last three states to be readmitted, including the years. (Note that the other seven were readmitted ‘in 1868.)
4. First three states to reestablish Conservative government, including the years.
5. States in which Conservative government was not reestablished until 1876.
6. The extent of the crop lien system in the South in 1880.

Based on what you have filled in, answer the following. On some of the questions you will need to consult the narrative in your text for information or explanation.

1. Note the location of the first state to be readmitted by Congress and explain why it was restored to the Union so quickly.
2. What did the other ten states have to do to gain their readmissions in 1868—1870? What additional requirements did the last three face?
3. Note the first three states to experience the reestablishment of Conservative government and explain why the restoration of Democratic Party rule came so quickly there.
4. What forces delayed the reestablishment of Conservative government in the other states? What episode symbolically marks the end of the Reconstruction era?
5. Compare the crop lien system in 1880 to the location of cotton and slaves in 1860. What does this comparison tell you about the nature of postwar agriculture and labor in the New South?

Interpretive Questions

Summary

The military aspect of the American Civil War lasted less than five years and ended in April 1865, but it would take another dozen years of Reconstruction to determine what the results of the war would be. The only questions clearly settled by the time of Appomattox were that the nation was indivisible and that slavery must
The nation faced other issues with far-reaching implications. What would be the place of the freedmen in Southern society? How would the rebellious states be brought back into their “proper relationship” with the Union? The victorious North was in a position to dominate the South, but Northern politicians were not united in either resolve or purpose. For over two years after the fighting stopped, there was no coherent Reconstruction policy. Congress and the president struggled with each other, and various factions in Congress had differing views on politics, race, and union. Congress finally won control and dominated the Reconstruction process until Southern resistance and Northern ambivalence led to the end of Reconstruction in 1877. Whites who reassessed their economic and political control set out to industrialize the region but with little success. The South remained a troubled agricultural sector. No economic, political, or social issue in the South could escape the race question. The Jim Crow system of the southern establishment succeeded in evading the spirit of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments and many African Americans began to wonder just who won the Civil War. Meanwhile the South continued its colonial relationship with the North and southern plain folk, black and white, found themselves trapped by crop liens in circumstances some felt were almost as bad as slavery.

Review Questions

These questions are to be answered with essays. This will allow you to explore relationships between individuals, events, and attitudes of the period under review.

1. Compare and contrast Lincoln’s plan, the Wade-Davis Bill, Johnson’s plan, and Radical Reconstruction. Consider provisions, motives, goals, and results.

2. Evaluate the successes and failures of Reconstruction. What decision could have been made to avoid the failures? What groundwork was laid for future changes?

3. What factors made the railroad the “central symbol of American progress” in the nineteenth century?

4. What was the ecological impact of the railroad on the American West?

5. Although many changes had occurred by 1900, the South remained an impoverished agricultural region, lagging well behind the rest of the nation. Describe the economic changes in the South and assess why they were not adequate to bring the old Confederacy into the national mainstream, as some of the region’s spokespersons had hoped.

6. Explain the ways in which the southern white establishment was able to evade the spirit of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution.

Chapter Self Test

After you have read the chapter in the text and done the exercises in the Study Guide, take the following self test to see if you understand the material you have covered. Answers appear at the end of the Study Guide.

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