Chapter 22

The Ordeal of Reconstruction

1865-1877

**The Problems of Peace**

All rebel (Confederate) leaders were pardoned by President Johnson in 1868. After the war, Southern people continued to believe that their view of secession was correct.

**Freedmen Define Freedom**

Emancipation took effect unevenly in different parts of the conquered Confederacy.  Some slaves resisted the liberating Union armies due to their loyalty to their masters.

The church became the focus of black community life in the years following emancipation.  Blacks formed their own churches pastured by their own ministers, and they had an opportunity for education. Blacks could now learn to read and write.

**The Freedmen's Bureau**

Because many freedmen (people who were freed from slavery) were unskilled, without property or money, and had little knowledge of how to survive as free people, Congress created the **Freedmen's Bureau**on March 3,**1865**.  It provided clothing, medical care, food, and education to both freedmen and white refugees.  Union general Oliver O. Howard led the bureau.  The bureau's greatest success was teaching blacks to read.  Because it was despised by the President and by Southerners, theFreedmen's Bureau expired in **1872**.

**Johnson: The Tailor President**

When Andrew Johnson was in Congress, he refused to secede with his own state of Tennessee.

Johnson was listed as the Vice President on Lincoln's 1864 election ticket to gain support from the War Democrats and other pro-Southern elements.  Johnson was a strong supporter of state's rights and of the Constitution.  He was a Southerner who did not understand the North and a Democrat who had not been accepted by the Republicans.

**Presidential Reconstruction**

In **1863**, Lincoln released his "**10 percent**" **Reconstruction** **plan** which dictated that a state could be reintegrated into the Union when 10% of its voters in the presidential election of 1860 had taken an oath of allegiance to the United States and pledged to abide by emancipation.  Then, a formal state government would be constructed within the state, and the state would be re-admitted into the Union.

Due to Republican fears over the restoration of planter aristocracy and the possible re-enslavement of blacks, Congress passed the **Wade-Davis Bill**in **1864**.  It required that 50% of a state's voters take the oath of allegiance and it demanded stronger safeguards for emancipation.  President Lincoln refused to sign the bill.

The disagreement between the President and Congress revealed differences in Republicans and **two factions** arose within the party:  a **majority** that agreed with Lincoln and believed that the seceded states should be restored to the Union as quickly as possible, and a radical **minority** that felt the South should suffer greatly before its re-admittance - this minority wanted the South's social structure to be uprooted, the planters to be punished, and the newly-emancipated blacks to be protected by federal power.

President Johnson issued his own **Reconstruction plan** on May 29, **1865**.  It called for special state conventions which were required to:  repeal the decrees of secession, repudiate all Confederate debts, and ratify the slave-freeing **13th Amendment**. States that agreed to these concessions would be re-admitted.

**The Baleful Black Codes**

The **Black Codes** was a series of laws designed to regulate the affairs of the emancipated slaves.  **Mississippi** passed the first such law in November **1865**.

The Black Codes aimed to ensure a stable and subservient labor force.

Blacks were forced to continue to work the plantations after their emancipation due to the system of "**sharecropping**."  Plantation owners would rent out pieces of their land to blacks and make the cost of rent higher than the return the land produced.  The renters of the land were bound by contract to continue to work the land until debts were repaid to the plantation owner.  Unable to repay the debts, blacks began to "jump" their contracts.

The codes imposed harsh penalties on blacks who "jumped" their labor contracts, some of which usually forced the blacks to work for the same employer for one year.  The codes also sought to restore the pre-emancipation system of race relations.  The codes forbade a black to serve on a jury or to vote.  The Black Codes mocked the idea of freedom and imposed terrible hardships on the blacks who were struggling against mistreatment and poverty to make their way as free people.

The Republicans were strongly opposed to the Black Codes.

**Congressional Reconstruction**

In December **1865**, Southern states represented themselves in Congress with former Confederate generals and colonels.  This infuriated the Republicans who were apprehensive about embracing their Confederate enemies in Congress.

The Republicans had enjoyed their supreme rule in Congress during the Civil War, but now there would be an opposing party.  This time, the South would have much more control in Congress due to the fact that slaves were now counted as a whole person, not just 3/5. (This gave the South a larger population.)  Republicans feared that the South would take control of Congress.

President Johnson announced on **December 6, 1865** that the Southern states had met his conditions and that the Union was now restored. This statement angered the Republicans.

**Johnson Clashes with Congress**

In **February 1866**, the president vetoed a bill extending the controversial Freedmen's Bureau (later re-passed).  In response to this, Congress (controlled by the Republicans) passed the **Civil Rights Bill** in March**1866**, which gave blacks the privilege of American citizenship and struck at the Black Codes. Congress overruled the President's veto for this bill.

Fearing that the Southerners might someday repeal the Civil Rights Law, Congress passed the **14th** **Amendment** in **1866**.  The amendment had the following components:  1) Gave civil rights, including citizenship, to the freedmen; 2) Reduced proportionately the representation of a state in Congress and in the Electoral College if it denied blacks the right to vote; 3) Disqualified from federal and state offices former Confederates who, as federal officeholders, had once sworn to support the Constitution of the United States; 4) Guaranteed the federal debt, while the Union assumed all Confederate debts.

With the ability to overrule a presidential veto, Congress began to develop into the dominant role in controlling the government.

All Republicans agreed that no state should be welcomed back into the Union without ratifying the 14th Amendment.

**Swinging 'Round the Circle with Johnson**

In anticipation of the congressional elections of 1866, President Johnson went on a tour of giving speeches denouncing the radical Republicans in Congress.

Over 2/3 of the ballots cast in the **congressional elections of 1866** went to the Republicans.

**Republicans Principles and Programs**

Charles Sumner led the Republican radicals in the Senate for black freedom and racial equality.  Thaddeus Stevens led the radicals in the House of Representatives.

The moderate Republicans, the majority in Congress, preferred policies that restrained the states from cutting citizens' rights, rather than policies that directly involved the federal government in individual lives.

**Reconstruction by the Sword**

On **March 2, 1867**, Congress passed the **Reconstruction Act**.  It divided the South into **5 military districts**, each commanded by a Union general and policed by Union soldiers.  It also required that states wishing to be re-admitted into the Union had to ratify the 14th Amendment, and that states' constitutions allowed former adult male slaves to vote.  The moderate Republican goal was to create voters in Southern states that would vote those states back into the Union and thus free the federal government from direct responsibility for the protection of black rights.

The **15th** **Amendment** was passed by Congress in **1869**.  It granted black men the right to vote.

**Military Reconstruction** of the South took control of certain functions of the president and it set up a military rule of the South.

In **1877**, the last federal troops were removed from the South and Democracy returned to the South (in theory).

**No Women Voters**

Feminists were angered that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments gave rights to black males, but not to women.

**The Realities of Radical Reconstruction in the South**

After gaining the right to vote from the 15th Amendment, blacks began to organize politically.  They were strong participators in the **Union League**, originally a pro-Union organization.  Freedmen turned the Union League into a network of political clubs that educated members and campaigned for Republican candidates.  The League also built black churches and schools, represented black grievances before local employers and governments, and recruited militias to protect black communities from white retaliation.

From 1868-1876, blacks began to hold major offices in government.

"**Scalawags**" were Southerners who were accused of plundering the treasuries of the Southern states through their political influence in the radical governments.

"**Carpetbaggers**" were sleazy Northerners who had come to the South to seek power and profit.

**The Ku Klux Klan**

The "**Invisible Empire of the South**", otherwise known as the **Ku Klux Klan**, was founded in Tennessee in **1866**.  It was formed by disgruntled white Southerners who were angered by the success of black legislators.  The group worked through intimidation.

Congress passed the **Force Acts of 1870 and 1871** in response to murders that the Klan had committed.  The Acts enabled Federal troops to stop the atrocities of the Ku Klux Klan.  The Acts came too late, though, as the Klan had already intimidated many people.

**Johnson Walks the Impeachment Plank**

Congress passed the **Tenure of Office Act** in **1867**.  It required the president to secure the consent of the Senate before he could remove his cabinet members once they had been approved by the Senate.  Its purpose was to keep the secretary of war, Edwin M. Stanton (a spy for the Republican party), in the president's cabinet.  When Johnson dismissed Stanton in **1868**, the House of Representatives voted to **impeach** Johnson for "high crimes and misdemeanors."

**A Not-Guilty Verdict for Johnson**

The House of Representatives prosecuted the president, while the Senate served as the court to try Johnson on the impeachment charges.

President Johnson argued that the Tenure of Office Act was unconstitutional and that he had fired Stanton to challenge the Act before the Supreme Court.

On **May 16, 1868**, the Senate voted the president "not guilty" by a margin of one vote.  The radical Republicans failed to gain the necessary 2/3 majority vote in the Senate to remove the president.

Some Senators voted "not guilty" because they feared creating a bad precedent of abusing the checks and balances system. These Senators also did not like the economic policies of Johnson's presidential replacement, Ben Wade.

**The Purchase of Alaska**

In **1867**, Secretary of State William Seward signed a treaty with Russia that gave **Alaska** to the United States for $7.2 million.

Russia sold Alaska to the U.S. because it felt that it was over-expanded in North America.  Russia also wanted to strengthen the United States as a barrier against its enemy, Britain.

Although the American people were focused on Reconstruction and anti-expansion, they supported the purchase of Alaska because they did not want to offend the Russians, who had helped them during the Civil War. All Americans did not support this purchase, though, and some referred to it as **Seward's Folly**.

**The Heritage of Reconstruction**

Many white Southerners felt that Reconstruction was more painful than the war itself.

During Reconstruction, the Republican Party wanted to protect the freed slaves and to promote the fortunes of the Republican Party.  These principles removed the party from the South for nearly 100 years.

Despite good intentions by the Republicans, Reconstruction did not really change the way that the South treated or viewed blacks.

Thaddeus Stevens had a radical program of drastic economic reforms and extensive protection of political rights.  This program was never enacted.