CHAPTER 15
Reconstruction 1865–1877

This chapter covers the aftermath of the Civil War in the South; the battle over Reconstruction under Lincoln, Johnson, and Congress; how black and white southerners viewed Reconstruction; Reconstruction under Grant, including the scandals and eventual northern disillusionment; and a discussion of Reconstruction's impact on the nation's future.

CORE OBJECTIVES
1. Identify the federal government’s major challenges in reconstructing the South after the Civil War during the period from 1865 to 1877.
2. Describe how and why Reconstruction policies changed over time.
3. Assess the attitudes of white and black southerners toward Reconstruction.
4. Analyze the political and economic factors that helped lead to the end of Reconstruction in 1877.
5. Explain the impact of Reconstruction on the nation's future.

CHAPTER OUTLINE
1. The War’s Aftermath in the South
2. The Battle over Political Reconstruction
   A. Lincoln’s Wartime Reconstruction Plan
   B. The Freedmen’s Bureau
   C. The Assassination of Lincoln
   D. Johnson’s Plan
   E. The Radical Republicans
   F. Unreconstructed Southerners
   G. Johnson’s Battle with Congress
   H. Congressional Reconstruction
      I. Impeaching the President
      J. Republican Rule in the South
3. Reconstruction in Practice
   A. The Reconstruction of Black Social Life
   B. African Americans in Southern Politics
   C. Land, Labor, and Disappointment
   D. “Carpetbaggers” and “Scalawags”
   E. Southern Resistance and White “Redemption”
   F. The Legacy of Republican Rule
4. The Grant Years and Northern Disillusionment
   A. The Election of 1868
   B. Scandals
   C. The Money Supply
   D. Financial Panic
   E. Liberal Republicans
   F. White Terror
   G. Southern “Redeemers”
   H. The Compromise of 1877
      I. The End of Reconstruction
5. Reconstruction’s Significance

LECTURE IDEAS
1. A lecture could focus on one or more aspects of Reconstruction policy, emphasizing how and why each plan differed from the other approaches. During wartime, Abraham Lincoln proposed the first reconstruction plan. Steven Spielberg’s film Lincoln (2012), as well as the book it was based on, Doris Kearns Goodwin’s Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (2005), provides helpful information about Lincoln’s plan. Students may benefit from a showing and discussion of the film in its entirety. David O. Stewart’s Impeached: The Trial of Andrew Johnson and the Fight for Abraham Lincoln’s Legacy (2010) points out how Johnson’s plan, although strikingly similar to Lincoln’s, differed in significant ways. Congressional reconstruction offered yet another approach. The best general overview of the era and all the variations of presidential and congressional reconstruction remains Eric Foner’s prize-winning Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 (updated 2014).
2. The more one studies Reconstruction, the more evident it becomes that the Civil War’s last battle was not fought in 1865. Write a lecture on the relentlessly violent and largely successful effort of white supremacist ex-Confederates to reverse the progress in black rights and restore the South to conservative, Democratic control. A great source, which concentrates on developments in Louisiana and Mississippi in the early 1870s, is Nicholas Lemann’s Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War (2007). This can be...

3. During Reconstruction hundreds of African Americans served in politics. A discussion of that topic could spark considerable discussion and comparisons with more recent political developments, such as the nation’s election of its first African American president, Barack Obama. Philip Dray’s *Capitol Men: The Epic Story of Reconstruction through the Lives of the First Black Congressman* (2008) is a collective biography of several African American congressmen from the South. In Mississippi alone, 226 African Americans held political office during Reconstruction, including Hiram Revels, who served as a U.S. Senator. A lecture sharing the stories of these men would provide interesting narratives, driving home the story aspect of the past and how large historical movements affect people’s lives, hopes, and ambitions. Such a lecture could be followed by a discussion of how the examples set by these people influence student views about their own ambitions and how to help others, as well as the obstacles one might face.

4. Develop a lecture on the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant. Start with the election of 1868, and discuss his effectiveness as a campaigner and leader. Continue with the financial issues of the day and an overview of the culture of corruption that surrounded his administration. One could help students relate to and understand the issues of the past by discussing the oft-recurring nature of financial concerns, fraud, and race relations. See William S. McFeely’s *Grant: A Biography* (2004) and Brooks D. Simpson’s *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861–1868* (1997).

5. Students would be fascinated with a lecture that puts the activities of some of the most famous outlaws in American history in the context of the social and political turmoil that followed the Civil War. A good source for this is T. J. Stiles’s *Jesse James: Last Rebel of the Civil War* (2002). In this lecture, explore whether or not Jesse James was one of the classic Robin Hood figures that emerges in many different countries and time periods. Good sources for this are Eric Hobsbawm’s *Bandits* (2000) and Kent Steckmesser’s *Western Outlaws: The Good Badman in Fact, Film, and Folklore* (1983). Other outlaws for discussion could include Cullen Baker and John Wesley Hardin. A clip from the film *The Outlaw Josey Wales*, a fictionalized account of a Reconstruction Era outlaw, could be used to introduce the lecture.

**IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES / FLIPPED CLASSROOM SUGGESTIONS**

1. Thomas Nast has been called “the Father of the American Cartoon,” and many of the iconic images of American politics owe their popularity to him. Some of his images have been reprinted in the text, and many more can easily be found online. Class could begin by discussing the power of the visual image, both then and now. Give students some prompting and guidance on how to analyze a visual image. Consider beginning by using a current example and discussing how every detail is fraught with meaning and significance. Then divide the class into small groups and ask them to analyze the images in a select group of Nast’s cartoons. Albert Boime has stated that Nast’s “impact on American public life was formidable enough to profoundly affect the outcome of every presidential election during the period 1864 to 1884.” For more on Nast and his artwork, see Donald Dewey’s *The Art of Ill Will: The Story of American Political Cartoons* (2007) and Fiona Deans Halloran’s *Thomas Nast: The Father of Modern Political Cartoon* (2012).

2. One way to help students understand the complexity of Reconstruction and the multiple concerns and goals of the individuals involved is to stage a historical “encounter.” Provide a list of the various entities involved and have students select from the names. For instance, that list could include a Radical Republican, a moderate Republican, a Democrat, a former plantation owner, a former non-slave-owning white southerner, a Freedmen’s Bureau agent, a former slave, a black male who had been a free black before the Civil War began, a political leader in the former Confederacy, a member of the U.S. military sent to enforce the Military Reconstruction Act, a northern businessman, an African American politician, a black minister, and various other interest groups. Have the students come to class in character, complete with costume if desired, having done background research on their chosen individual. The instructor would then act as a facilitator in getting the various individuals to share their perspectives and concerns.

3. Only two presidents have been impeached in U.S. history: Andrew Johnson and Bill Clinton. Neither was convicted. Accusations have been made that partisan motivations played a significant role in
4. Divide the class into three groups, and have them research a specific Reconstruction policy: Lincoln’s plan, Johnson’s plan, and Congressional Reconstruction. See Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution*, A. J. Langguth’s *How the North Won the War and Lost the Peace* (2014), and Michael L. Benedict’s *A Compromise of Principle: Congressional Republicans and Reconstruction* (1974). Have each group present the unique aspects of their policy, including its purposes and results. The activity could also be turned into a modified debate by separating out a few students to be judges who could also ask questions of the three groups presenting. Each group would then argue why their policy would be the best option.

5. In 2004, PBS released a documentary titled *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War* as part of its *American Experience* series. The website for that movie offers a variety of classroom activities to encourage active learning. One of those activities introduces students to the enduring myths of Reconstruction (www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/plantation/sf_myths.html). After students familiarize themselves with the six myths and misconceptions of the period that are addressed on this website, divide them into groups representing the various Confederate states. Each group should be tasked to find three examples in their respective states of particular myths or misconceptions being perpetuated in the present day. To find examples, students are encouraged to look at war cemeteries, parks, public events, official monuments to the war, and organizations dedicated to preserving the Confederacy’s memory. Each group should present its findings to the entire class, which then can discuss what arguments might be used to support or oppose the particular memory of the era under consideration. For this and other classroom activities that address Reconstruction, see www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/tguide/index.html.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What were the federal government’s major challenges in reconstructing the South after the Civil War during the period from 1865 to 1877?
2. How and why did Reconstruction policies change over time?
3. What were the attitudes of white and black southerners toward Reconstruction?
4. Why did Reconstruction come to an end in 1877?
5. What makes the Reconstruction era significant in United States history? What is its legacy? How did it impact the nation in the future?
6. Was Reconstruction a failure? Why or why not? Who deserves the blame for its shortcomings or credit for its achievements?
7. If Lincoln or Johnson had the opportunity to see their respective Reconstruction plans through, did either one (or both) have the potential to be more effective than Congressional Reconstruction? Why or why not?
8. Did Andrew Johnson deserve to be impeached?
9. Was it a mistake by the Radical Republicans to emphasize civil rights of the freedmen in their Reconstruction plans? Was it a mistake to de-emphasize those rights as Reconstruction dragged on?

**PRACTICING CITIZENSHIP**

With its adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment, the United States obliterated the remnants of slavery in this country and struck a powerful symbolic blow against this institution wherever else it existed in the world. Is it possible that slavery is still being practiced in parts of the world today, legally or illegally? What forms of human trafficking still exist? Conduct research on this question to find out where slavery and human trafficking may still persist and why. Encourage students to search for organizations that are fighting to put an end to slavery and human trafficking and have them find ways to contribute or get involved in their efforts, especially in nearby areas that may be affected by the issue.

**NORTON COURSEPACKS**

In addition to the resources and recommendations in this manual, Norton provides PowerPoint slides of all the maps and art in the chapter, additional Lecture PowerPoint slides,
and a Test Bank. Norton Coursepack content is available for hybrid, online, or lecture courses and is designed to work with any existing learning management system. Norton Coursepack content is free to students and instructors and includes “office hour” videos of David Shi discussing topics in each chapter, chapter review quizzes, maps and the map questions from AMERICA: The Essential Learning Edition, Thinking Like a Historian exercises and documents from the book, additional Primary Source Exercises, Guided Reading Exercises, and more. An online reader with additional primary source documents and images is also available in the Norton Coursepack.