

Reconstruction the period of time after the Civil War in which Southern states were rebuilt and brought back into the Union

Thirteenth Amendment a change to the Constitution, ratified in 1865, abolishing slavery in the United States

Freedmen's Bureau an agency established by Congress at the end of the Civil War to help and protect newly freed black Americans

During Reconstruction, former slaves gained the rights to marry and to reunite families divided by slavery. Forms such as this one allowed freedmen to keep family records.



23.2 Presidential Reconstruction

As the Civil War ended, people in the United States had sharply different views about how to rebuild the Southern states and bring them back into the Union. This period of time came to be called **Reconstruction**. For President Andrew Johnson, a Southerner from Tennessee, Reconstruction had two major aims. First, Southern states had to create new governments that were loyal to the Union and that respected federal authority. Second, slavery had to be abolished once and for all.

These aims left many issues to be **resolved**. For example, who would control the new state governments in the South—former Confederates? Would freed slaves have the same rights as other citizens? And what would the relationship be between freed slaves and former slave owners?

Many Republicans in Congress believed that strong measures would be needed to settle these issues. To them, Reconstruction meant nothing less than a complete remaking of the South based on equal rights and a free-labor economy. The stage was set for a battle over the control—and even the meaning—of Reconstruction.

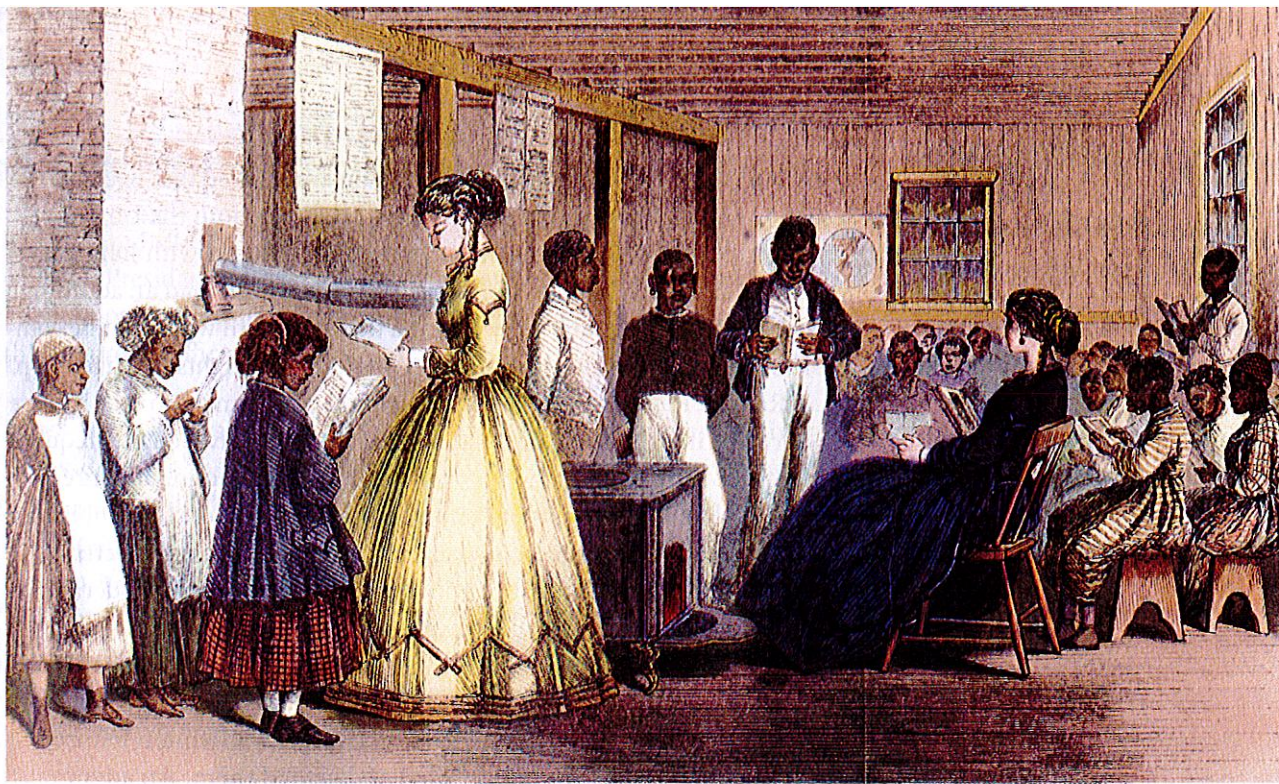
President Johnson's Reconstruction Plan In May 1865, President Johnson announced his Reconstruction plan. A former Confederate state could rejoin the Union once it had written a new state constitution, elected a new state government, repealed its act of secession, and canceled its war debts. There was a final requirement as well. Every Southern state had to ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which abolished slavery throughout the United States.

By the fall of 1865, every Southern state had met the president's requirements. The Thirteenth Amendment became part of the Constitution. Presidential Reconstruction had begun.

The Freedmen's Bureau For former slaves, called freedmen, the freedom guaranteed by the Thirteenth Amendment brought problems as well as opportunities. Frederick Douglass described the freedman as "free from the individual master but a slave of society." Douglass wrote,

He had neither money, property, nor friends. He was free from the old plantation, but he had nothing but the dusty road under his feet . . . He was turned loose, naked, hungry, and destitute [penniless] to the open sky.

To assist former slaves, Congress established the **Freedmen's Bureau** in March 1865. Over the next four years, the bureau provided food and medical care to both blacks and whites in the South. It helped freedmen arrange for wages and good working conditions. It also distributed some land in 40-acre plots to "loyal refugees and freedmen."



Some whites, however, attacked the bureau as an example of Northern interference in the South. Ultimately, the hope of many freedmen for “forty acres and a mule” died when Congress refused to take land away from Southern whites.

The most lasting benefit of the Freedmen’s Bureau was in education. Thousands of former slaves, both young and old, flocked to free schools built by the bureau. Long after the bureau was gone, such institutions as Howard University in Washington, D.C., continued to provide educational opportunities for African Americans.

Black Codes As new state governments took power in the South, many Republicans in Congress were alarmed to see that they were headed by the same people who had led the South before the war—wealthy white planters. Once in office, these leaders began passing laws known as **black codes** to control their former slaves.

The black codes served three purposes. The first was to limit the rights of freedmen. Generally, former slaves received the rights to marry, to own property, to work for wages, and to sue in court. But they did not have other rights of citizenship. Blacks, for example, could not vote or serve on juries in the South.

The second purpose of the black codes was to help planters find workers to replace their slaves. The codes required freedmen to work. Those without jobs could be arrested and hired out to planters. The codes also limited freedmen to farming or jobs requiring few skills. African Americans could not enter most trades or start businesses.

The third purpose of the black codes was to keep freedmen at the bottom of the social order in the South. Most codes called for the segregation of blacks and whites in public places.

The Freedmen’s Bureau built more than 1,000 schools for African Americans between 1865 and 1872.

black codes laws passed in 1865 and 1866 in the former Confederate states to limit the rights and freedoms of African Americans