

civil rights the rights guaranteed by the Constitution to all people as citizens, especially equal treatment under the law

Fourteenth Amendment a change to the Constitution, ratified in 1868, granting citizenship to anyone born in the United States and guaranteeing all citizens equal protection of the law

Based on the belief that the South had no legal governments, Congress reorganized the South into the five military districts shown here. Tennessee, which met the standards for readmission before the military districts were established in 1867, was not included in one.

23.3 Congressional Reconstruction

As 1865 came to a close, President Johnson announced that Reconstruction was over. The Southern states were ready to rejoin the Union.

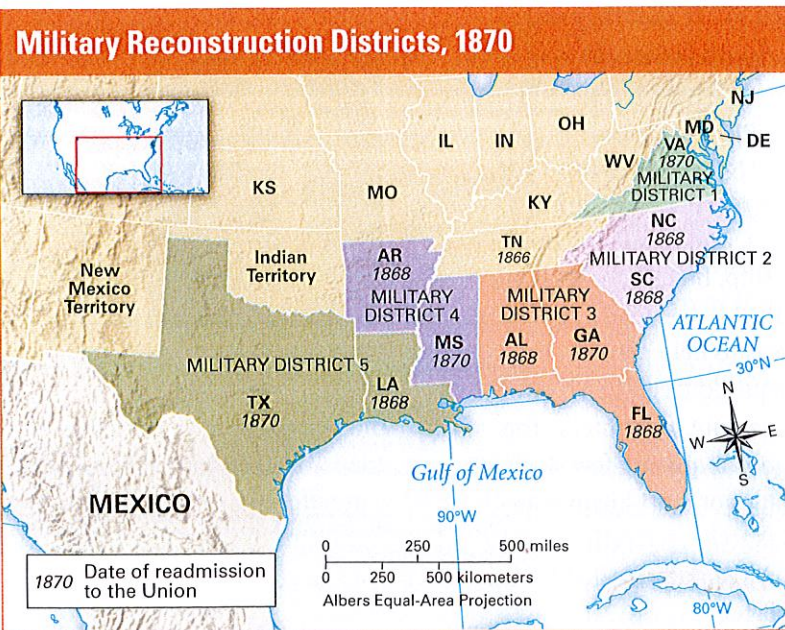
A group of Republicans in Congress did not agree with Johnson. Known as the Radical Republicans, these lawmakers had an additional goal for Reconstruction. They believed that the South would not be completely rebuilt until freedmen were granted the full rights of citizenship.

Radical Republicans wanted the federal government to take a more active role in Reconstruction—a role that would involve tougher requirements for restoring Southern governments. In the House of Representatives, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania led the Radical Republicans. In the Senate, they were led by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts.

Early in 1866, Radical Republicans joined with more moderate lawmakers to enact two bills designed to help freedmen. The first extended the life of the Freedmen's Bureau. The second was the Civil Rights Act of 1866. It struck at the black codes by declaring freedmen to be full citizens with the same **civil rights** as whites. Johnson declared both bills unconstitutional and vetoed them. An angry Congress overrode his vetoes.

The Fourteenth Amendment To further protect the rights of African Americans, Congress approved the **Fourteenth Amendment**. This amendment granted citizenship to “all people born or naturalized in the United States.” It also guaranteed all citizens “the equal protection of the laws.” This meant that state governments could not treat some citizens as less equal than others.

President Johnson opposed the Fourteenth Amendment and called on voters to throw Republican lawmakers out of office. Instead, Republican candidates won a two-thirds majority in both houses of Congress in the 1866 election. From then on, Congress controlled Reconstruction.



Military Reconstruction Act

Early in 1867, Congress passed the Military Reconstruction Act. Once again, it did so over Johnson's veto. This plan divided the South into five military districts, each governed by a general supported by federal troops. The state governments set up under Johnson's Reconstruction plan were declared illegal. New governments were to be formed by Southerners loyal to the United States—both black and white. Southerners who had supported the Confederacy were denied the right to vote.

Congress also passed two acts designed to reduce Johnson's power to interfere with congressional Reconstruction. The Command of the Army Act limited his power over the army. The Tenure of Office Act barred him from firing certain federal officials without the Senate's consent. President Johnson blasted both laws as unconstitutional. Then, to prove his point, he fired one of the officials protected under the Tenure of Office Act.

President Johnson Is Impeached The House of Representatives responded to Johnson's challenge by voting to impeach the president. Besides violating the Tenure of Office Act, the House charged, Johnson had brought "the high office of the President of the United States into contempt, ridicule, and disgrace, to the scandal of all good citizens."

During his trial in the Senate, the president's lawyers argued that Johnson's only "crime" had been to oppose Congress. If he were removed from office for that reason, they warned, "no future President will be safe who happens to differ with a majority of the House and Senate."

Two-thirds of the Senate had to find the president guilty to remove him from office. Despite heavy pressure to convict him, 7 Republicans and 12 Democrats voted "not guilty." Johnson escaped removal from office by one vote, but he had lost his power.

Sharecropping While Congress and the president battled over Reconstruction, African Americans in the South worked to build new lives. Most former slaves desperately wanted land to farm but had no money to buy it. Meanwhile, former slave owners needed workers to farm their land but had no money to pay them. Out of the needs of both groups came a farming system called sharecropping.

Planters who turned to sharecropping divided their land into small plots. They rented these plots to individual tenant farmers—farmers who paid rent for the land they worked. A few tenants paid the rent for their plots in cash. But most paid their rent by giving the landowner a portion of what they raised. This payment of crops was called a share. Usually it was about a third or a half of the tenant's crop.

Sharecropping looked promising to freedmen at first. They liked being independent farmers who worked for themselves. In time, they hoped to earn enough money to buy a farm of their own.

However, most sharecroppers had to borrow money from planters to buy the food, seeds, tools, and supplies they needed to survive until harvest. Few ever earned enough from their crops to pay back what they owed. Rather than leading to independence, share-cropping usually led to a life-time of poverty and debt.

Sharecroppers, such as these cotton growers, rented their land from plantation owners. In exchange, most paid one-third to one-half of their crops back to the landowners.

