

Looking to the Future

After the Civil War ended, Americans had to live in a country that was far different from the one only five years earlier. The period from 1865 to 1877 is called **Reconstruction**, which means to rebuild. The Reconstruction was both a time period and a process of rebuilding the South and reuniting the nation. During this time, Americans had to rebuild their nation physically, socially, and politically.

Even after the fighting from the Civil War stopped, many Americans still did not feel like one people. The three main groups of Americans were freedmen, Southerners, and Northerners.

The **freedmen** were people who used to be slaves but were now free. Many freedmen were joyful and hopeful about freedom. Some were concerned about finding a home or a job. Most freedmen praised God for delivering them from bondage.





At the end of the Civil War, most Southerners were hurt and confused. Invading armies had destroyed their states. Many men had died in battle or of disease. Without slavery, many Southerners were concerned about who would work in the fields. The war had brought peace. But Southerners did not feel that the war had helped them. It only left them with new problems.

Northerners celebrated the war's end. They had accomplished their goals. The Union, or the states that had remained in the United States, stayed together and slavery ended. Although many Northern soldiers had died, their deaths were not in vain. Northerners looked forward to a better future.

Everyone hoped Reconstruction would form America into a better nation. However, they did not agree on exactly what a better America was.

Reconstruction Begins

Freedmen began to enjoy life as free people. Some left their plantations, looked for family, or looked for work. When the freedmen had been slaves, they could not leave their plantations without a written pass. Now the freedmen could go where they liked.

Freedmen realized that to enjoy their freedom, they needed to work. They hoped to be repaid for the many years they had worked as slaves. Most freedmen wanted land so that they could raise their own food. They did not want to work for someone else.

Southerners hoped to rebuild the South as it had been before the war. Although Northern armies had destroyed Southern cities, bridges, and railroads, Southern culture remained. Southerners planned to reopen their schools and colleges. They also wanted to rebuild their plantations and cities. And even though slavery had ended, many Southerners still wanted to direct the freedmen's work.



The effects of the Civil War in the South on Carey Street in Richmond, Virginia



The war had little effect on the North in Broadway, New York.

Most Northerners felt pleased. Their states suffered little physical damage from the war. Factories kept running. Many immigrants had arrived during the war. The number of people in the North continued growing. Many in the North hoped to help the freedmen make new lives. Many Northerners wanted to change the way Southerners treated freedmen.

Northerners also wanted to change Southern industry.

Industry is the making of things

or providing of services for the purpose of making money. Some industries get materials to sell to people or factories. Some industries manufacture goods. Other industries provide services like education.

Northerners, Southerners, and freedmen each had their own hopes and plans for Reconstruction. Not all these goals could be met. Southerners wanted life to return to what it was like before the war. This would stop the changes the freedmen wanted. Northerners wanted to make the South more like the North. But changing the South might destroy the old Southern culture. Most freedmen wanted freedom to control their own work, families, and social groups. Few Northerners and Southerners thought the freedmen could care for themselves. During Reconstruction, each of these groups tried to change the country. Each group succeeded in some ways. None of the groups succeeded in everything.

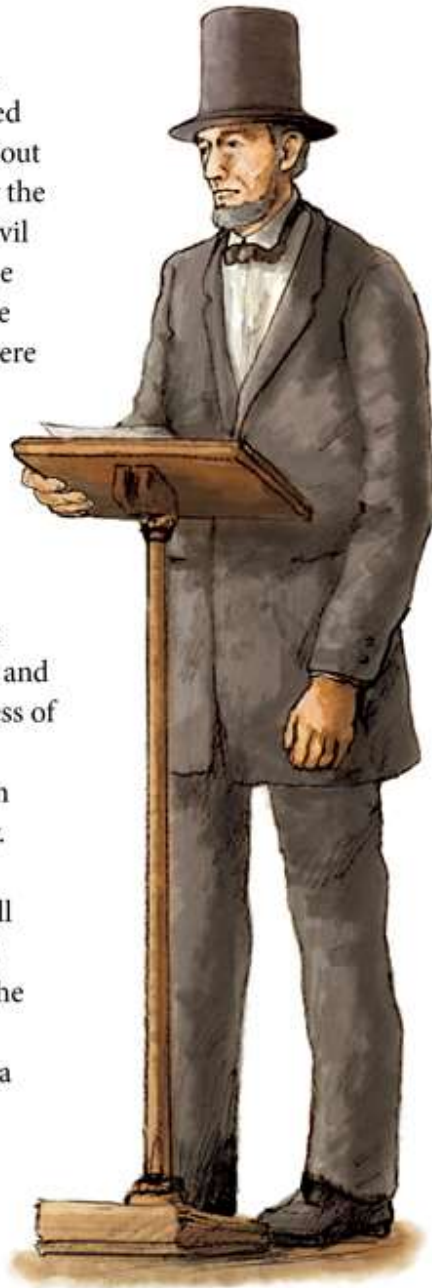
Who were the three groups of Americans after the Civil War?

Healing the Nation Reconstruction and Lincoln

As Reconstruction began, Americans faced many questions. The biggest question was about the states that used to be the Confederacy, or the Confederate States of America. Before the Civil War, these states had voted to secede from the nation. Now that the war was over, were these states still part of the United States? If they were not, how could they rejoin? Americans wondered who was in charge of making the decision. Could the president accept these states? Did Congress get to decide?

The confusion about who was in charge made Reconstruction hard. At this time, the president seemed to be in favor of what most congressmen wanted. But both the president and Congress wanted to be in charge of the process of Reconstruction.

As the Civil War ended, President Lincoln wanted to be sure the country healed quickly. He said that all Americans should “bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan.” Lincoln also wanted to be sure the freedmen were treated fairly. He hoped that all Americans, black and white, would enjoy a peaceful and successful country.



The New President

At Ford's Theatre in Washington, DC, John Wilkes Booth assassinated President Abraham Lincoln.



Andrew Johnson

Sadly, President Lincoln was **assassinated**. On the evening of April 14, 1865, Lincoln took his wife to see a play. The Civil War was coming to an end. Since the main Confederate army had surrendered,

the Union's victory seemed sure. The president could finally enjoy a night of relaxation. It seemed as though victory was almost complete. But John Wilkes Booth, an actor who liked the South, burst into Lincoln's theater box and shot him.

Lincoln's vice president, Andrew Johnson, became president. Johnson was very angry

about Lincoln's assassination. He promised to punish the people who did it. Many Americans believed that the leaders of the Confederacy were to blame for Lincoln's death. Johnson said that the leaders of the South would pay for their crimes.

Johnson believed that he should be in charge of Reconstruction. Most of the men in Congress hoped Johnson would do a good job. These men were from the North and were members of the Republican Party. They believed that leaders of the Confederacy should be punished for fighting against the Union. When Johnson talked with these congressmen, they thought he agreed with their ideas.

Laws for Slaves	New Southern Laws for Freedmen
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slaves must work under a master. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedmen must have a job with an employer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slave contract gives the master ownership of the slave and his family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work contract requires a freedman along with his family to work for an employer.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of slaves are also slaves and belong to the master. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children of freedmen can be apprenticed without their parents' permission.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slaves have no choice of living quarters; they are told where to live. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedmen cannot live in some towns.

Instead, Johnson treated the Southerners mildly. He pardoned almost all the Confederate leaders. He did not make rules to protect the freedmen. He let Southern states hold elections to choose representatives to send to Congress. These representatives were often men who had supported the Confederacy. Johnson claimed to be doing what Lincoln wanted.

While most white Southerners were happy with Johnson's choices for Reconstruction, many freedmen suffered. Southern states passed harsh laws. These laws seemed to be set up to make the freedmen almost slaves again. Few people in the North knew about the new Southern laws.

Although slavery had ended, most freedmen did not seem much better off than before they were emancipated, or freed from slavery. Instead, Reconstruction under President Johnson seemed to help mainly the Southerners.

What were some of President Johnson's decisions for Reconstruction?



Congress Takes Over Reconstruction

A Report on the Freedmen

In 1865 the president sent Carl Schurz to tour the South. Schurz had to report back to the president on how Reconstruction was doing in the South. After Carl Schurz returned to Washington, DC, his report helped change Reconstruction.

Schurz's report said that Johnson's decisions for Reconstruction did not work. Southerners seemed convinced that they could go back to living as they had before the war. The Southerners were also mistreating freedmen, Northern soldiers, and Northern civilians who had moved south to help the freedmen. A civilian is someone who is not serving in the army.

Schurz was an abolitionist. In his report he was most concerned about how freedmen were treated. Throughout the South there were leaders who used to be Confederates. They passed many laws. These laws made the freedmen work as if they were still slaves.

Many Southerners wanted to make the freedmen start working on plantations again. These Southerners tried to make this happen by passing laws. Often freedmen could not live in cities. They also had to have a job. If a freedman had no job, he could be forced to work. Those who hired freedmen were allowed to whip them.

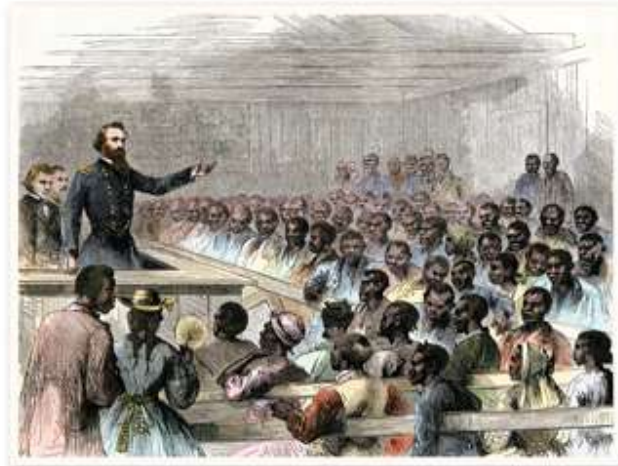
The Southern laws also made freedmen unequal with other people in society. Freedmen were required to show extra respect to white people. Freedmen could not serve on juries. They were not allowed to testify in court against white people.

Congress Takes Action

When Northerners heard Schurz's report, they grew angry. They thought of the deaths of thousands of soldiers and Abraham Lincoln. The Northerners wanted those deaths to count for something. Most Northerners knew people who had fought in the Civil War. The North expected Southerners to admit to losing the war. Northerners believed that since the South lost, it should change.

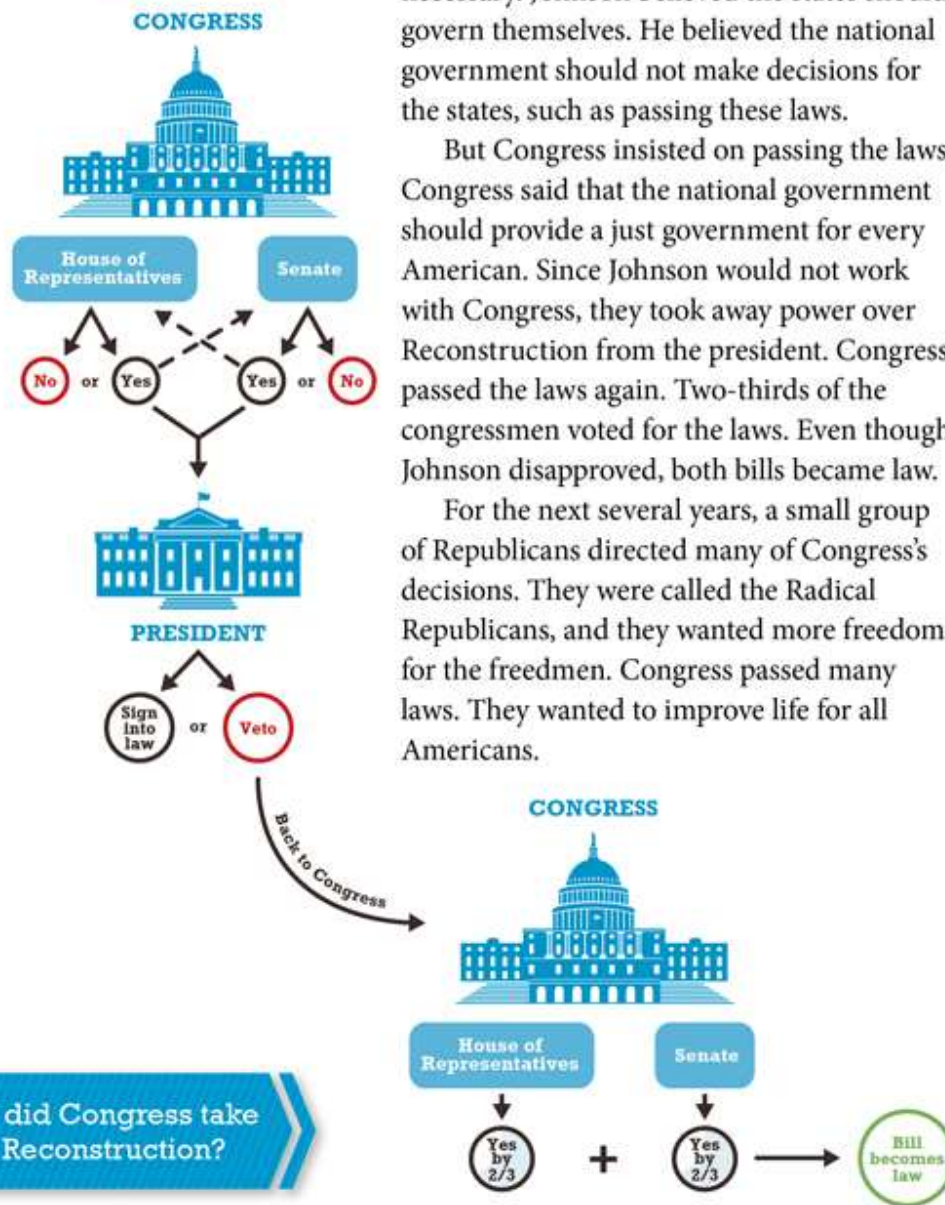
Congress met in late 1865. Northern congressmen wanted Reconstruction to change. First, they said certain men could not join Congress. These men who could not join were the newly elected representatives and senators from states that used to be Confederate. The Northern congressmen's decision made President Johnson unhappy.

Then Congress passed two laws that caused Reconstruction to change. The first law strengthened a government organization called the **Freedmen's Bureau**. This powerful organization was supposed to help anyone who had lost his home during the Civil War. The second law Congress passed was the Civil Rights Bill. This law said that the freedmen were free from unjust Southern laws.



Government officials met with freedmen in North Carolina to see how the Freedmen's Bureau was working.

Passing a Law After a Veto



Why did Congress take over Reconstruction?

Johnson tried to stop these two bills by vetoing them. He said that the laws were not necessary. Johnson believed the states should govern themselves. He believed the national government should not make decisions for the states, such as passing these laws.

But Congress insisted on passing the laws. Congress said that the national government should provide a just government for every American. Since Johnson would not work with Congress, they took away power over Reconstruction from the president. Congress passed the laws again. Two-thirds of the congressmen voted for the laws. Even though Johnson disapproved, both bills became law.

For the next several years, a small group of Republicans directed many of Congress's decisions. They were called the Radical Republicans, and they wanted more freedom for the freedmen. Congress passed many laws. They wanted to improve life for all Americans.