

Three groups made up the Republican party in the South. Scalawags—white Southerners who joined the party—were mostly former Unionists. Carpetbaggers were Northerners who moved South after the war to reform Southern society or to make a fortune. The third group was African Americans eager to vote. Most white Southerners disliked the new governments. They resented Northern attitudes and could not accept equality for African Americans.

African Americans worked hard to improve their lives. Many sought husbands or wives who had been sold elsewhere in the South. Once reunited, they married and raised their families. Thousands—of all ages—sought an education in newly established schools. Many joined churches and volunteer groups to better African American society. Some joined the new state governments, and more than a dozen served in the U.S. Congress.

Economic changes were harder to enact, however. Congress debated whether to break up the plantations and give land to the freed slaves, but most members were unwilling to overturn the right to property. Southern planters forced black workers to sign labor contracts, but neither white landowners nor black workers liked the system. African Americans thought the wages too low. Planters lacked the cash to pay workers.

They created two optional plans. In sharecropping, planters gave small plots of land to workers—black and white—in return for a share of the crop. In tenant farming, laborers rented land. Both systems faced a new reality of Southern agriculture: world demand for Southern cotton—and thus the price of cotton—had fallen.

③ The Collapse of Reconstruction

KEY IDEA *Continued opposition to Radical Reconstruction in the South and economic problems in the North bring the Reconstruction process to an end.*

Some white Southerners formed groups that tortured and murdered former slaves. The most famous of these groups was the Ku Klux Klan. Between 1868 and 1871, the Klan killed several thousand people—including whites who helped African Americans. Some Klan leaders tried to stop the violence, but it continued. In the mid-1870s, Klan violence prevented African Americans from voting and returned Democrats to power in several

Southern states. Congress took action with laws in 1870 and 1871 to try to suppress the Klan. Other laws, however, weakened the Republican Party in the South.

Meanwhile, the Grant administration was plagued by scandal. Though Grant never engaged in any corruption, some of his appointees did, including his first vice-president; private secretary; and the secretaries of war, navy, and interior. In 1872, the Republican Party splintered. Reform-minded members chose newspaper editor Horace Greeley to run for president. Though the Democrats also backed Greeley, Grant won.

A financial panic in 1873 upset the country further. Many banks closed, and a depression followed. People argued about whether or not to stop using paper money. The debate took attention away from Reconstruction.

By the mid-1870s, Northern desire to maintain Reconstruction was low. At the same time, Supreme Court decisions had weakened the power of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. Sentiment in the North grew to reconcile the two sections of the country. A disputed election then helped Democrats regain control of Southern state governments.

In the 1876 presidential election, Democrat Samuel J. Tilden finished one electoral vote short of victory. Congress appointed a commission to settle disputed electoral votes. The commission chose Republican Rutherford B. Hayes after Hayes made a deal with Southern Democrats to end Reconstruction. Upon taking office, Hayes pulled federal troops out of the South. Democrats, called Redeemers, now controlled every Southern state government.

Reconstruction had failed to secure equality for African Americans. The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments remained part of the Constitution, however. In later years, they were used to protect African Americans' rights.

Review

1. What were Lincoln's and Johnson's plans for Reconstruction?
2. What groups were important in the South during Reconstruction?
3. How did African Americans change during Reconstruction?
4. What factors led to the end of Reconstruction?