**SSUSH10 – Identify legal, political, and social dimensions of Reconstruction**

Reconstruction, 1865-1877, involved the rebuilding of the South after the Civil War and readmitting the Confederate states to the Union. It is important to consider three ways the South was rebuilt - legally (through Congressional mandate), politically (with the arrival of the Republican Party and the weakening of the Democratic Party), and the social changes brought about with the attempt to blend freedmen into Southern society. Southerners resisted these attempts to change the political and social structure of the South. This resistance gave rise to secret societies, which used violence and intimidation to break the political will of Blacks and their White sympathizers. Ultimately, the reconstruction of the South was brought to an end by economic necessity and the lack of political will of Northern politicians to continue the democratic experiment in the South.

**SSUSH10a: Compare and contrast Presidential Reconstruction with Congressional Reconstruction, including the significance of Lincoln’s assassination and Johnson’s impeachment**

There were two different approaches to Reconstruction. Presidential Reconstruction was the approach that promoted more leniency towards the South regarding plans for readmission to the Union. Congressional Reconstruction blamed the South and wanted retribution for causing the Civil War. Their approach required much more submission from the South as a condition for readmission to the Union. Both Presidential and Congressional Reconstruction plans recognized the importance of rebuilding all aspects of the nation. Where they differed was in the details for implementation.

Reconstruction became a conflict between the Radical Republicans and Presidents Lincoln and Johnson, who proposed more moderate requirements for the former Confederate states. The Radical Republicans wanted to severely punish the South for the Civil War. Lincoln and the moderates wanted to bring the South into the Union quickly. The process of rebuilding the South began before the war ended.

**Presidential Reconstruction**

refers to when Lincoln proposed the Ten Percent Plan in 1863. This plan called on Southern states to complete three tasks to restore their status in the United States. First, they had to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery. Second, states had to repudiate secession. Third, when ten percent of the voters from 1860 had taken an oath of allegiance to the United States, that southern state would be restored to the Union.

Radical Republicans objected to Lincoln’s plan saying the plan was too lenient and did not go far enough to protect the rights of the newly freed slaves. In response, they proposed the Wade-Davis Bill. In addition to ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment, the proposed law would have required 50% of the voters of a southern state to swear their loyalty to the United States. Southern supporters believed that this was an impossible task designed to keep the South dominated by Northern political interests. Lincoln vetoed the Wade Davis Bill. Before Lincoln could reintroduce his plan he was assassinated.

Lincoln was shot and killed on April 14, 1865, just a few days after Robert E. Lee had surrendered at Appomattox. The assassination took place at Ford’s Theater in Washington, where Lincoln and his wife were attending a play. John Wilkes Booth was an actor who supported the Confederacy and shot the President in anger over the Southern loss in the Civil War. Lincoln was a skilled politician who was poised to negotiate a flexible solution to the Reconstruction issue. His assassination resulted in more turmoil and political wrangling. The chaos was in part due to the new President set to fill Lincoln’s untimely loss – Andrew Johnson.

Andrew Johnson had been chosen by Abraham Lincoln to be Vice President for his second term in office. Johnson was a Democrat from Tennessee, who remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War even though he was a supporter of slavery. His loyalty to the Union was about bringing down the wealthy plantation owners. Johnson believed these aristocrats restricted the small farmers’ ability to make money. Johnson was added to Lincoln’s 1864 Presidential ticket because he was a Democrat from the South and would be a symbol of goodwill as the Civil War was coming to a close. Lincoln wanted to send a message of reconciliation.

**Johnson’s Reconstruction Plan**

After the assassination of Lincoln, the Reconstruction task fell to the new President. Andrew Johnson's plan for Reconstruction was actually similar to Lincoln's. The new President sought to rapidly integrate Southern states back into the Union by appointing governors who would make the required political changes. There was significant opposition to this approach by Radical Republican members of Congress who wanted the South to be dealt with more harshly. The Congressional election of 1866 returned a Radical Republican majority to Congress. The group began pushing forward bills that favored their position and Johnson vetoed each one. Congress and Johnson were at odds with one another. The political struggle quickly escalated to a level not previously tested. In addition to vetoing Republican legislation that came to the White House for Johnson's signature, the President was also firing many Republicans from the executive offices they had held under Lincoln's administration. To preserve the Republican influence in the executive branch, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act over Johnson's veto in 1867. This law required Senate approval before the President could remove a federal official or military commander from a position in the government. Johnson ignored the law and fired Republican Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from his post. Congress responded by impeaching Johnson for breaking a federal law, but ultimately failed to remove him from office by one vote. The impeachment hearings lasted months and sidetracked the more important Reconstruction efforts of the government. Because the Congress had a Radical Republican majority, they were able to overturn any veto Johnson issued on proposed legislation. Rather than remove the President, the Radical Republicans simply waited out his term in office.

**Congressional Reconstruction**

The First Reconstruction Act, which was passed over Johnson's veto in 1867, divided the South into five military districts that were administered by military governors. The law turned the clock back on any Reconstruction measures passed by Southern states. To be readmitted to the Union, the Southern states were required to guarantee former male slaves and free Blacks suffrage. The states were also required to hold open elections for both White and Black representatives to the state constitutional convention. The purpose of the state constitutional conventions was to create new state constitutions that recognized the three Reconstruction amendments to the United States Constitution - the 13th, 14th, & 15th amendments.

By 1870, all the former Confederate states had been re-admitted to the Union. Federal troops remained in the South to enforce the provisions of Reconstruction and to protect former slaves from mob violence. The Reconstruction process was contentious. Both Presidential and Congressional Reconstruction plans were intended to repair the badly fractured nation - politically, physically, and socially. However, the plans differed on how harshly the South should be treated. Presidents Lincoln and Johnson favored a more lenient approach. The Radical Republicans of the Congress wanted harsh punishment against the South for causing the war.

**SSUSH10b: Investigate the efforts of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (the Freedmen’s Bureau) to support poor whites, former slaves, and American Indians.**

In March 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in order to ease freed slaves' transition from enslavement to freedom. The Bureau is often referred to simply as the **Freedmen's Bureau**. In addition to supporting former slaves in beginning their new lives, the Bureau was also intended to help the vast numbers of homeless Whites who had been displaced or lost their property during the war. The federal government was operating as a relief agency tasked with overseeing the social welfare of the nation's citizens.

In addition to assisting with basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and medical assistance, the Freedmen's Bureau was also responsible for introducing a system of free labor, overseeing approximately 3,000 schools for freed persons, settling disputes and enforcing contracts between the typically White landowners and their Black labor force, and securing justice for Blacks in state courts. The Bureau also worked to reunite families and legalize the marriages of former slaves.

One of the greatest areas of success attributed to the Freedmen's Bureau is the basic education it provided to approximately 200,000 Blacks. During slavery, it was illegal in most Southern states to teach slaves to read and write. White Southerners were worried that literate slaves would be better able to communicate to plan rebellion or to read newspapers reporting on the abolitionist efforts. Once the Civil War was over, it was essential that former slaves develop basic reading and math skills in order to not be taken advantage of when negotiating work contracts with White landowners.

While the Freedmen's Bureau did help some former slaves acquire land unclaimed by its pre-war owners, Congress did not grant land or the absolute right to own land to all freed slaves. Such land grants would have provided Blacks some level of economic independence. Without it, and with few skills outside of farming, the newly freed slaves had few options other than entering the sharecropping, crop lien, or tenant farming system, where they often ended up working for former slaveholders in conditions very similar to slavery.

Most of those people helped by the Freedmen's Bureau were Black. However, some White Southerners also received ration assistance for food and clothing. There is also some evidence in the detailed records kept by the Freedmen's Bureau that some American Indians drew rations from the agency. The records document some Cherokee and Creek tribal members on the ration rolls.

As in the case of land grants, the Bureau lacked any enforcement authority on its own and lost its remaining ability to carry out its mission when Federal troops were withdrawn from the South. The lack of adequate funding restricted the number of agents working in the South. A Freedmen's Bureau agent was often the only Northern government representative in a former Confederate community. The agent was often harassed and threatened. Most White Southerners refused to support the Bureau's objectives and Northern politicians neglected to give it financial support, thus causing its demise. The Freedmen's Bureau ceased operation in 1872.

***SSUSH10c: Describe the significance of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments***

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth amendments are collectively referred to as the Reconstruction Amendments. They effectively ended slavery, extended citizenship, and allowed voting rights for former (male) slaves. These amendments are significant because they establish a federal mandate concerning the end of slavery in the United States. Even with these amendments to the United States Constitution, many states in the South passed Black Codes, or Jim Crow Laws, that restricted Blacks and denied them true equality.

**13th Amendment**

adopted in 1865 and is very direct concerning the end of slavery in the United States. The amendment reads, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for a crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." Because the amendment ended slavery, it made null the provisions for slavery within the original Constitution. The overturned policies included a fugitive slave clause requiring runaway slaves to be returned to their owners and the 3/5 Compromise concerning the count of slaves as part of a state's population for representation in the Congress

**14th Amendment**

adopted in 1868 and is a little more complex than the Thirteenth amendment, which banned slavery. There are two main provisions in the amendment. First, it declares that all people born or naturalized to the United States are citizens. As a Reconstruction Amendment, this provision meant that former slaves were indeed citizens of the United States. The second provision of the Fourteenth Amendment requires that states protect the rights of all United States citizens. States are expected to provide “equal protection of the laws” and “due process of law.” This particular amendment is still often used by civil rights activists to defend against discrimination.

**15th Amendment**

adopted in 1869. The text of this amendment is also very brief. The amendment reads, “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The second section adds, “The Congress shall have the power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” The Fifteenth Amendment did little to limit the effects of poll taxes, the grandfather clause, and literacy tests implemented in Southern states to block Blacks from voting after Reconstruction ended. It was not until the 1950s and 1960s that Black Codes were struck down by Supreme Court rulings and Congressional legislation. An example of legislation that struck down discriminatory state policies was the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed by the United States Congress.

The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments are together known as the Reconstruction amendments. They were intended to establish policy at the national level regarding the end of slavery and the process for ensuring a protection of rights for former slaves. Even with the power of these amendments, the Black population of the United States did not experience true equality until almost 100 years later with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Brown v. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling in 1954.

***SSUSH10d: Explain the Black Codes, the Ku Klux Klan, and other forms of resistance to racial equality during Reconstruction.***

In the South, resistance to Reconstruction took several forms. Many White southern citizens refused to participate politically in opposition to the outcome of the Civil War. Southern states passed harsh laws that restricted the economic and political rights of freedmen. Racial equality was not fully achieved during Reconstruction.

**Black Codes**

enacted by many Southern states immediately after the Civil War. These state level laws were designed to regulate relations between White Southerners and newly freed slaves. While recognizing some rights, such as legalized marriage, ownership of property, and limited access to the courts, Black Codes denied Blacks the rights to testify against Whites, to serve on juries or in state militias, to vote, and to express legal concern publicly. Also the Codes were an attempt by plantation owners to secure the labor supply lost as a result of the Thirteenth Amendment by requiring all Blacks to provide proof of employment or be forced to work for White land owners. Black Codes enraged Northern Congressmen and the public who saw the laws as a re-introduction of slavery.

**Ku Klux Klan**

founded in 1866. It was originally a Confederate veterans’ club but quickly became an organization closely associated with the worst forms of violence and intimidation. Initially, the Klan tried to scare Blacks into compliance and keep them from voting. When this method did not work Klan members attacked Northern Whites who came South. The racist organization also targeted Southern Whites who tried to support Reconstruction, and Blacks who were educated and participated in community affairs. Eventually, anyone who Klan members disliked could be attacked, beaten, or brutally murdered, often in front of family members.

Resistance to the Klan was difficult due to a lack of weapons among Blacks and control of the court system by the KKK sympathizers. Some states, notably Arkansas, Tennessee, and Texas successfully broke up the Klan with special police forces. Eventually, the Federal government used the Enforcement Acts to break up Klan activities. By 1872, Klan violence had greatly lessened as some Southern leaders urged the Klan to step down because federal troops would stay in the South as long as Blacks needed protection from society. The Ku Klux Klan re-emerged in earnest after Reconstruction ended and the federal soldiers were no longer in the South to provide protection.

***SSUSH10e: Analyze how the Presidential Election of 1876 marked the end of Reconstruction***

The period of Reconstruction has a definite beginning and a definite end. The efforts of the Federal government to direct the rebuilding of the physical, social, and economic features of the United States began after the Civil War and ended with Rutherford B. Hayes’ election to the Presidency in 1876. Without federal government oversight, racial equality was not protected in the South. Political and economic factors contributed to the federal government’s abandonment of Reconstruction.

**Reconstruction Politics**

By the mid-1870s, there had been a change in state level politics in the South. The White Southerners who had refrained from voting and participating in government began to reclaim their position of dominance in state level politics. Until this point, Black Republicans had held many elected positions in Southern state legislatures following the Civil War. The Reconstruction amendments had guaranteed citizenship and voting rights for former slaves. The federal government’s military occupation of the South during the period of Reconstruction between 1865 and 1877 had helped to guarantee the safety of Blacks and allowed them to safely vote in many states. The result was the election of approximately 2,000 Black candidates to state, local, and even United State Senate positions. In fact, South Carolina’s majority slave population before the Civil War meant that the former slaves who exercised the right to vote in the state after the war held tremendous power. This was especially true since White voters across the South were refusing to participate in elections as a form of protest over their loss in the Civil War. The political power of Black Republicans in the South was brief and came to an end with the 1877 end of Reconstruction.

**Presidential election of 1876**

Democrats nominated Samuel J. Tilden and the Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes to be their candidates. The campaign was a bitter one. Tilden won the popular vote by 260,000 votes, but failed to carry a majority of the Electoral College votes. The Electoral votes in four states (Florida, Louisiana, Oregon, and South Carolina) were disputed. A special federal commission was appointed to sort out the Electoral College dispute. The commission awarded the Republican, Hayes, the election along straight party lines. Democrats in Congress threatened to filibuster the vote count.

**Compromise of 1877 = The End of Reconstruction**

In exchange for Democrats’ support, Hayes agreed to support internal improvements for the South, appoint a Southerner to the Cabinet, and withdraw federal troops from the South. A key factor in the North’s willingness to abandon Reconstruction efforts was the economy. The nation was faced with an economic downturn in the 1870s and the Reconstruction expenses put a significant strain on the federal government. The North viewed themselves as solely financing the military occupation and relief programs such as the Freedmen’s Bureau. Ending Reconstruction was a way to cut expenses.

Shortly after his inauguration in March of 1877, President Hayes ordered the removal of federal troops from the South. Republican dominated state governments collapsed across the South and Blacks were slowly disenfranchised by state laws. Reconstruction had ended.