

The Ten-Percent Plan

Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction included the **Ten-Percent Plan**, which stated that a southern state could be readmitted into the Union once 10 percent of its voters swore an **oath of allegiance** (loyalty) to the Union. Voters could then elect representatives to draft new state constitutions and create new state governments. All southerners except for high-ranking Confederate army officers and government officials would be given a full pardon. Lincoln promised southerners that he would protect their private property, though not their slaves. Most moderate Republicans in Congress supported the president's plan for Reconstruction because they wanted to bring a quick end to the war.

Lincoln wanted to end the war quickly. He feared that a long-drawn-out war would lose public support and that the North and South would never be reunited if the fighting did not stop quickly. His fears were correct: by late 1863, a large number of Democrats were asking for a truce and peaceful end to the war. Lincoln's Ten-Percent Plan was very easy on the South—an effort to get the South to surrender.

Lincoln's Idea for Reconstruction

President Lincoln seemed to favor self-Reconstruction by the states with little help from Washington. To appeal to poorer whites, he offered to **pardon** all Confederates; to get former plantation owners, he promised to protect private property. Unlike **Radical Republicans** in Congress, Lincoln did not want to punish southerners or reorganize southern society. His actions showed that he wanted Reconstruction to be a short process in which secessionist states could create new constitutions as fast as possible so that the United States could exist as it had before. But historians can only guess that Lincoln wanted a quick reunification, for his assassination in 1865 cut his plans for Reconstruction short.

The Radical Republicans

Many leading Republicans in Congress feared that Lincoln's plan for Reconstruction was not strong enough, believing that the South needed to be punished for causing the war. These Radical Republicans hoped to control the Reconstruction process, change southern society, destroy the planter class, redistribute land, develop industry, and guarantee civil rights for former slaves. Although the Radical Republicans were the minority party in Congress, they managed to influence many moderates in the postwar years and came to dominate Congress.

The Wade-Davis Bill

In the summer of 1864, the Radical Republicans passed the **Wade-Davis Bill** to counter Lincoln's Ten-Percent Plan. The bill stated that a southern state could rejoin the Union only if 50 percent of its voters swore an "ironclad oath" of allegiance to the United States. The bill also created safeguards for black civil rights but did not give blacks the right to vote.

President Lincoln feared that asking 50 percent of voters to take a loyalty oath would ruin any chance of ending the war quickly. Moreover, 1864 was an election year, and he could not afford to have northern voters see him

as an stubborn radical. Because the Wade-Davis Bill was passed near the end of Congress's session, Lincoln was able to pocket-veto it, effectively blocking the bill by refusing to sign it before Congress went into recess.

Lincoln's Assassination

At the end of the Civil War, in the spring of 1865, Lincoln and Congress were on the brink of a political showdown with their opposing plans for Reconstruction. But on April 14, **John Wilkes Booth**, a popular stage actor from Maryland who was sympathetic to the South, shot Lincoln at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C. When Lincoln died the following day, Vice President **Andrew Johnson**, a Democrat from Tennessee, became president.

Reconstruction after Lincoln

Lincoln's assassination gave Radical Republicans in Congress the clear path they needed to start their plan for Reconstruction. The new president, Andrew Johnson, had seemed supportive of punishing measures against the South in the past: he disliked the rich southern planter and believed they had been a major cause of the Civil War. But Johnson surprised Radical Republicans by constantly blocking their efforts to pass punitive laws for the South.

Johnson, Laissez-Faire, and States' Rights

Johnson, a Democrat, favored stronger state government (in relation to the federal government) and believed in the principle of *laissez-faire*, which stated that the federal government should stay out of the economic and social concerns of its people. Even after the Civil War, Johnson believed that states' rights took priority over central authority, and he disapproved of legislation that affected the American economy. He rejected all Radical Republican attempts to dissolve the plantation system, reorganize the southern economy, and protect the civil rights of blacks.

Although Johnson disliked the rich southern planter, his actions suggest otherwise: he pardoned more people than any president before him, and most of those pardoned were wealthy southern landowners. Johnson also shared the southern racist point of view that former slaves should not receive the same rights as whites in the Union. Johnson opposed the **Freedmen's Bureau** because he felt that targeting former slaves for special help would be bad for the South. He also believed the bureau was an example of the federal government taking political power reserved to the states, which went against his pro-states' rights belief.

Presidential Reconstruction

Like Lincoln, Johnson wanted to restore the Union in as little time as possible. While Congress was in recess, the president began fulfilling his plans, which became known as **Johnson's Plan**. He returned property to white southerners, issued hundreds of pardons to former Confederate officers and government officials, and weakened the Freedmen's Bureau by ordering it to return all confiscated lands to white landowners. Johnson also appointed governors to supervise the drafting of new state constitutions and agreed to readmit each state provided it ratified the **Thirteenth Amendment**, which abolished slavery. Hoping that Reconstruction would be

complete by the time Congress resumed a few months later, he declared Reconstruction over at the end of 1865.

The Northern Response

Northerners felt Congress was *not* being harsh enough toward the South. Many northerners were troubled by the presidential pardons Johnson had handed out to Confederates, his decision to strip the Freedmen's Bureau of its power, and the fact that blacks were basically slaves again on white plantations. Many in the North believed that a president sympathetic to southern racists and secessionists could not correctly reconstruct the South. As a result, Radical Republicans overwhelmingly beat their Democratic opponents in the elections of 1866, ending Presidential Reconstruction and starting the era of **Radical Reconstruction**.

Radical Reconstruction

After the elections of 1866, the Radical Republicans gained almost complete control over decision-making in Congress. They gained control of the House of Representatives and the Senate and thus gained enough power to override any potential vetoes by President Andrew Johnson.

Congress began the job of Reconstruction by passing the **First Reconstruction Act** in March 1867. The bill reduced the confederate states to little more than conquered territory, dividing them into five military districts, each governed by a Union general. Congress declared **martial law** in the territories, sending troops to keep the peace and protect former slaves.

Congress also declared that southern states needed to rewrite their constitutions, ratify the **Fourteenth Amendment**, and give the right to vote to blacks in order to get back into the Union. They also placed Union troops in charge of voter registration. Congress overrode two presidential vetoes from Johnson to pass their plan.

Reestablishing Order in the South

Radical Republicans hoped that by declaring martial law in the South they would be able to create a Republican political base in the seceded states to help their plans for Radical Reconstruction. Though most southern whites hated the "regimes" that Congress created, they proved successful in speeding up Reconstruction. Indeed, by 1870 all of the southern states had been readmitted to the Union.

Johnson's Impeachment

House Republicans, tired of the presidential vetoes that blocked their plan for Reconstruction, **impeached** Johnson by a vote of 126–47 for violating the Tenure of Office Act. The Senate then tried Johnson in May 1868 in front of a gallery of spectators. However, the prosecutors, two Radical Republicans from the House, were unable to convince a majority of senators to convict the president. Seven Republican senators sided with Senate Democrats, and the Republicans fell one vote shy of convicting Johnson.

Reconstruction Questions: Classwork Grade

- 1. The Ten-Percent Plan:** Why did Lincoln want to end the war quickly?
- 2. Lincoln's Idea for Reconstruction:** How did Lincoln try to get southerners to support his reconstruction plan?
- 3. The Radical Republicans:** Did the Radical Republicans agree with Lincolns plan? How did the Radical Republican feel Reconstruction should be carried out?
- 4. The Wade-Davis Bill:** How was Lincoln able to defeat the Wade-Davis bill?
- 5. Lincoln's Assassination:** Who killed Abraham Lincoln?
- 6. Reconstruction after Lincoln:** Why were the Radical Republicans surprised by Johnson?
- 7. Presidential Reconstruction:** Was Johnson hard on the South? Explain.
- 8. The Northern Response:** Why did many Northerners vote Republican in the election of 1866?
- 9. Radical Reconstruction:** How did the Radicals use the U.S. military to support their plan?
- 10. Reestablishing Order in the South:** How did many Southerners feel about their new governments?
Were the new governments successful?
- 11. Johnson's Impeachment:** Why did the Republicans impeach Johnson? Were they able to kick him out of office? Explain.