

In 1863 President Lincoln introduces his **10% Plan** in the wake of a Northern victory. His plan states that once 10 % of a Southern States 1860 voters take an oath of loyalty, and accept the **13th Amendment** (abolishment of slavery), they would be readmitted into the Union. Upon readmission, they would be permitted to have a constitutional Convention, create a new government, and send representation to congress. The plan was purposely lenient because Lincoln was interested in a speedy reunification of the North & South and to heal the wounds of the Civil War. The South rejects the plan and in 1864 there is a congressional reconstruction with the introduction of the “**Wade Davis Bill.**”

This bill required a majority of white male Southerners to pledge support for the Union before reconstruction could begin in any state, and it guaranteed blacks equality before the law, although, not the right to vote. Lincoln vetoed the bill.

It is clear that the Presidency and Congress are at odds when it came to dealing with the South. In 1865 President Johnson offered a pardon to all white Southerners who would take an oath of allegiance. He excluded Confederate leaders and those who were worth \$20,000 before the war. His reasons for excluding this particular class were to eliminate their political influence. This results in the formation of new governments in the South; however, the South restores the Elite class to power who devise a series of laws called the **Black Codes**. These codes were instituted to regulate the lives of ex-slaves. Black Codes denied former slaves the right to testify against a white man, to sit on a jury, and vote. In addition they were prohibited to carry a weapon, consume alcoholic beverages, and were required to meet contract laws. The end of slavery does not necessarily mean the beginning of freedom for these ex-slaves.

In the spring of 1866 congress passes the “**Civil Rights Bill**” which states that all persons born in the United States were natural citizens. This immediately changes the status of the ex-slaves. These ex-slaves now become enfranchised and have equality before the law. To ensure that the law was enforced congress passes the **14th Amendment** (anyone born in the United States is a natural citizen).

In 1867 congress passes “**The Radical Reconstruction Act.**” This act divided the South into five military zones (Occupation of the South). Admittance to the Union would now be contingent on the acceptance of the 14th Amendment and giving Blacks the right to vote. To insure Black suffrage, congress passes the **15th Amendment**, giving all citizens the right to vote regardless of race, color or creed.

Once slavery is abolished society must now decide what to do with 4,000,000 freed slaves. Ex-slaves wanted the same rights as whites. They sought to express their freedom on social, economic, and political levels. Socially they would construct legitimate families and marriages. They would take on names that gave them a sense of self-identity. Most would take on their ex-master’s names, president’s names, and biblical names. This was done for linkage with the master class and the ability to control who they were. The church was a central social institution in the Black community. Most ex-slaves followed the Baptist or Methodists forms of Christianity.

They sought an education with a strong thirst for knowledge. In the 1860’s they built Black colleges (Fisk in Tennessee, Hampton in Virginia, and Howard in Washington D.C.). Politically, the Black community desires freedom in one word—

voting.

Their idea of economic freedom was the right to own land and they believed in the redistribution of property with the appropriation of the land of the ex-master. They wanted **“40 acres and a mule.”**

To help the ex-slaves acclimate to a life of freedom the government creates **“The Freedmen’s Bureau.”** For Whites freedom was a birthright and for Blacks it was a transformational process.

The white Southerners response to reconstruction was met with negative resistance. This resistance shows up as the Ku Klux Klan which was founded by a military officer and considered a freedom fighting organization. The targets of this resistance were ex-slaves, **Carpetbaggers**, and a group called **Scalawags** who were Southerners that joined forces with Republicans and supported Blacks. They would Lynch, shoot, and kill, using any means of violence and economic warfare. In 1870 The government reacts by passing **“The Enforcement Acts.”** The K.K.K. is declared a terrorist organization, and the army is ordered to suppress them by arresting and incarcerating their leaders.

By this time a sect of the Republican party begins to question Reconstruction. They were appalled by the corruption in the South. The North begins to argue along the lines of Social Darwinism. They believed the government should withdraw and let the Blacks either find a way to survive or sink. In 1876 Reconstruction comes to an end. In 1877 troops are withdrawn from the South. All white Southern males are enfranchised and Whites in the South are given the responsibility to deal with racial matters.

Though the Reconstruction era brought about revolutionary changes in our country's history (13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments), it could easily be considered a failure because of the lack of enforcement of these laws. Blacks were still treated as second class citizens. Even though these laws existed, they were never enforced and the government turned a blind eye to what was happening in the South. Even with the “Civil Rights Act of 1875”, little had changed in the treatment of the Whites towards the Blacks in the South. I guess the Southern attitude was, “the rules are the rules, but they don’t apply to me.” The more the South got away with not following the laws, the more they felt empowered to degrade African-Americans. And while America sat silently and accepted racism as a part of life, the South became once again sectionalized, playing by its own set of rules to be followed into the next century.