

A Brief History of the United States

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Unit Five

1860-1877 Civil War- Reconstruction

The Civil War caught both the North (**the Union**) and South (**the Confederacy**) ill prepared. Both sides assumed that the war would be short, but instead it would drag on for five long, bloody years. Society transformed, slaves were freed, and the South was destroyed economically. The process of rebuilding the South, called **Reconstruction**, would be contentious. Some northerners wanted a fast reintegration of the southern states to the **Union**. While other northerners wanted to exact revenge upon the rebellious South. The **freedmen** began acquiring rights and exercising their new freedom. Unfortunately, this would be a brief period and African Americans would continue to suffer under oppression and racism, and be relegated to a life of poverty.

The South fired on **Fort Sumter**, beginning the Civil War. The first battle after Fort Sumter, the **Battle of Bull Run**, would prove it was going to be a larger, much longer conflict – in part because President Lincoln could not get General McClellan to go on the offensive.

In 1862 the North won the **Battle of Antietam**. This gave Lincoln the opportunity to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation**, which began freeing some slaves. It also kept Britain and France from entering in the war and supporting the south. The **Battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg** (July 3 & 4 1863) were turning points in the war. The North's overall strategy called the **Anaconda Plan** was coming to fruition with the tightening of the **blockade**. The second part of the plan, controlling the Mississippi River, was complete. The only part left was capturing the Confederate capital of Richmond.

In domestic affairs, Congress passed the **Homestead Act** and the **Morrill land grant**, and construction on the **transcontinental railroad** was started. These acts would fuel the growth westward in the following decades.

Lincoln's **Gettysburg Address**, given in November 1863, reminded the nation that its founding principles were independence, self-rule, and equality.

Lincoln had no luck in finding a capable general in the eastern theater of war. He went through a succession of worthless ones. Finally, he moved General **Ulysses S. Grant** from the west. Opposing Grant was **Robert E. Lee**. Lee, like much of his staff, had once been an officer in the U.S. Army. He was a very skilled general and had defeated all of Lincoln's generals except for General Grant in the east.

The year 1864 was a presidential election year. While we may think it was a forgone conclusion that Lincoln would win, it was quite uncertain that he would be re-elected. The Democrats chose a peace platform, which appealed to many war-weary northerners.

In the west that year **William Tecumseh Sherman** was the Union General that Grant put in charge. He, like Grant, believed in **total war**. This new concept involved, putting pressure on your opponent's army, but also destroying anything of value to him including crops, cattle, and civilian property. Sherman first applied this in **Atlanta**, where he burned the city to the ground in September of 1864. This victory helped Lincoln to win re-election. Sherman then conducted his **March to the Sea** that destroyed a sixty mile wide swath from Atlanta to Savannah. Then he turned north and destroyed the Carolinas. This had a devastating effect on southern morale.

In the east, Grant was slugging it out with Lee in the **Wilderness Campaign**. Though he lost more men, he could replace them. The south, whose draft policy was cradle to grave already, couldn't replace the lost men. Eventually, Grant backed Lee into the Confederate capital Richmond, and the city of Petersburg. He then set up a **siege** where he surrounded the cities and tried to cut off all supplies. Lee fled and surrendered to Grant at **Appomattox Courthouse**, Virginia in April 1865. The terms of the surrender were generous, as Grant provided rations and allowed Lee's men to keep their horses for plowing. The **Civil War**, which had lasted five long years (1861-1865) and had claimed more 600,000 lives was finally over.

Unfortunately, Lincoln wouldn't get to enjoy the victory as he was **assassinated** just days later. Ironically, with Lincoln's death the process of **Reconstruction**, or readmitting and rebuilding the South, would become significantly harsher. Lincoln favored a **10% plan**, in which only 10% of a state's population had to swear loyalty to the U.S. government to rejoin the Union. Vice President Andrew Johnson, who became president, had a similar plan to Lincoln's in mind when he took over. Opposing Johnson's policies were a group of **Radical Republicans** in Congress. They wanted to punish the south for causing the Civil War and give former slaves equal status in society legally. To do this, they needed to incapacitate Johnson's power. They passed the **Tenure of Office Act**, which made it a crime to fire a cabinet member after the Senate had approved them. Johnson, believing the act to be unconstitutional, took the bait and fired Secretary of War Edwin Stanton.

In 1868 Johnson was **impeached**, but found not guilty by one vote. He kept his job, but lost all political influence. The Radical Republicans were now in charge of **Reconstruction**. The radicals made the South ratify the **14th and 15th Amendments**. The **13th Amendment** had already been ratified. The 13th Amendment freed the slaves, the 14th made them citizens, and the 15th gave them the right to vote (but not women). To assist the newly freed slaves the government set up **the Freedmen's Bureau**. The bureau gave economic and educational assistance to the freedmen. This is the first intervention by the government to directly assist citizens.

The South was economically destroyed after the war. The former leaders were not allowed to have positions of political power. To fill this void, three groups stepped into political office. The **scalawags** were **yeoman** farmers who didn't like the rich and the elite who saw them as traitors despised them. The **carpetbaggers** were northerners who moved to the south. Some of them came to assist the south and others came to exploit them economically for personal financial gain. The third group was the **African Americans**. They voted often and won seats to the U.S. congress. Unfortunately, the fragile alliance was full of mistrust, hatred, and racism, and fell apart. The **Ku Klux Klan**, founded by a former confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest, was designed to scare off Republican voters from the **polls**. It also terrorized **freedmen** who dared to exercise their newfound freedoms. It was so effective that by 1880, it had nearly dissolved itself.

When the Republicans lost political control in the South the former Democratic leaders stepped back into power. This new (old) leadership is known as the **redeemers**. They sought to revert the South to the **antebellum (before the civil war) period** and make blacks second class citizens in a role nearly identical to slavery. They forced the freedmen into an economic subservient situation similar to slavery known as **sharecropping** and **tenant farming**.

At the conclusion of the war, many blacks moved around in search of family members who had been sold. Others moved to Kansas and were known as **exodusters**. This is known as the **first great African American migration**. Those who stayed in the south ended up as **tenant farmers** or **sharecroppers**. It was nearly identical to slavery, with the former masters in charge once again. The **redeemer's government** passed harsh **Jim Crow laws** to keep the races separate. They also passed **poll taxes**, **literacy tests**, and **grandfather laws** to keep them from voting.

In 1872, General **Ulysses Grant** was elected as president. This started a period of Republican presidential dominance. The north was encouraged to vote as you shot (against the democratic south) and they vigorously waved the **bloody shirt** to show that they had fought to save the Union. Grant himself was honest, but he was a terrible judge of character, and the people he appointed to office stole millions of dollars from the Federal government. The **Whiskey Ring scandal** was a tax skimming operation, but the biggest scandal involved bribes from railroad officials to bail out a company, this was called the **Credit Moblier Scandal**.

By the **election of 1876**, people in the north had tired of spending so much money to rebuild the south, especially after the economic **Panic of 1873**. The people who lost jobs didn't care about the freedmen anymore. The election itself was acrimonious with rampant charges of voter fraud; Florida was in a dispute with both the Democrats and Republicans claiming victory. The country nearly went to war again. The Democratic candidate had won more votes, but in a compromise deal the Republican candidate **Rutherford B. Hayes** became president. To appease the South, all northern troops were removed from occupying the south. Conditions would remain horrible for African Americans until the **Civil Rights Movement** of the 1950's and 1960's.