Civil War and Reconstruction 1861–1877

THE BLUE AND THE GRAY

The “American” War

The American Civil War lasted four years, from April 1861 to April 1865. It was fought over more than half of the United States, for battles took place in every slave state except Delaware, and Confederate forces made incursions into Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kansas, and (raiding from Canada) Vermont.

From a total of 14 million white males, 2.9 million were in uniform—2.1 million for the Union and 800,000 for the Confederacy. This was over 20 percent—a higher proportion than in any other American war. The Union total included 180,000 black soldiers and perhaps 20,000 black sailors, nearly one tenth of the men in the Northern armed forces. Either as battle casualties or as victims of camp maladies, 618,000 men died in service (360,000 Union troops and 258,000 Confederates). More than one soldier in five lost his life—a far heavier ratio of losses than in any other war in our history. For the Confederate soldiers it was one in three.

Partly because the cost was proportionately so heavy, and partly because the Civil War was distinctly an American war, this conflict has occupied a place in the American memory and the American imagination that other wars—more recent, more destructive over-all, and fought on a global scale—have never held. On both sides, men were fighting for what they deeply believed to be American values.

Southerners were convinced that their right to form a Confederacy was based on a principle of the Declaration of Independence—that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. They were also fighting to defend their states from invasion. “All we ask is to be let alone,” said Jefferson Davis in his first war message to the Confederate Congress. Early in the war some Union soldiers captured a Southern soldier, who from his tattered homespun butternut uniform was obviously not a member of the planter class. They asked him why he, a nonslaveholder, was fighting to uphold slavery. “I’m fighting because y’all are down here,” was his reply.

The North was fighting to defend the flag and to prove that a democracy was not too weak to hold together. Secession was the “essence of anarchy,” said Lincoln. “The cen-
tral idea pervading this struggle is the necessity of proving that popular government is not an absurdity. We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose.”

**The Resources of North and South**

In later years, after the Confederacy had gone down to defeat, men said that the Lost Cause, as Southerners called it, had been lost from the beginning and that the South had been fighting against the census returns. In many respects this seems true, for the South was completely outnumbered in almost all the factors of manpower and economic strength that make up the sinews of modern war. The eleven Confederate states had a white population of 5,450,000, while the nineteen free states had 18,950,000. These figures leave out both the population of the four border slave states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware and the slave population of the Confederate states.

The four border states were divided, but most of their people and resources supported the Union side. Slaves strengthened the Confederate war effort in an important way, however, for they constituted a majority of the South’s labor force and thereby enabled most white men to leave home to fight in the army.

The Union was far ahead of the Confederacy in financial and economic strength. It had a bank capital more than four times as great as that of the South. It led the South in the number of manufacturing enterprises by six and a half to one; in the number of industrial workers by twelve to one; and in the value of its manufactures by eleven to one. In railroad mileage, it led by more than two to one.

But against these ratios of strength must be placed the fact that the Union was undertaking
a vastly more difficult military objective. It was seeking to occupy and subdue an area larger than all of western Europe. This meant that armies had to be sent hundreds of miles into hostile territory and be maintained in these distant operations. This necessity involved the gigantic tasks of transporting the immense volume of supplies required by an army in the field and defending long lines of communication, which would be worthless if they were cut even at a single point. In wars prior to the Civil War, armies had depended upon the use of great wagon trains to bring supplies. As the supply lines lengthened, the horses ate up in fodder a steadily increasing proportion of the amount they could haul, until there was scarcely any margin left between what the supply lines carried and what they consumed in carrying it.

During the Civil War, for the first time in the history of warfare, railroads played a major part in the supply services. If these more efficient carriers of goods had not changed the whole nature of war, it is questionable whether invading armies could ever have marched from the Ohio to the Gulf of Mexico. Ten years earlier the United States had not possessed the railroad network that supplied the Union armies between 1861 and 1865. At an earlier time the defensive position of the South would have been far stronger.

But even with railroads, superior munitions, and superior industrial facilities, the military tasks of the Union were most formidable. America was a profoundly civilian country. The peacetime army numbered only 16,000, and few people on either side had any conception of the vast problems involved in recruiting, mobilizing, equipping, training, and maintaining large armies. It was an amateur's war on both sides, and many of its features seem inconceivable today.

Most of the troops were recruited as volunteers rather than drafted. The Confederacy enacted conscription in April 1862 and the Union in March 1863. But the real purpose of these laws was to stimulate volunteering rather than to institute a genuine draft. Both the North and the South allowed drafted men to hire substitutes, until the Confederacy abolished this privilege in December 1863. The Union government also exempted a drafted man upon payment of a $300 commutation fee, until this privilege was abolished in July 1864.

Union conscription was applied only in localities that failed to meet their quotas. Thus communities were impelled to pay “bounties” to encourage men to volunteer. This resulted in the practice of “bounty-jumping.” A man would enlist, collect his bounty, desert, enlist again in some other locality, collect another bounty, and desert again.

Volunteers enlisted for specified periods, normally three years. The Confederacy's draft laws compelled them to reenlist even when their enlistment terms were up. On the Union side, by contrast, volunteers could not be compelled to reenlist, and in 1864 the North had to rely on bounties and patriotic persuasion to induce more than half of its three-year volunteers to reenlist.

Volunteer regiments at first elected their own officers, up to the rank of captain, and they frequently preferred officers who were not strict in matters of discipline. This was to handicap them in battle, however. Men without prior training as officers were placed in positions of command, and recruits were often thrown into combat with little basic training as soldiers. Even physical examinations for recruits were often a farce. It was, to a considerable extent, a do-it-yourself war, because the machinery of the modern state was in its infancy, even in the North.
THE WAR IN THE FIELD

The Virginia Front

From the very outset of the war, attention was focused on the Virginia front. After fighting had begun at Fort Sumter and the states of the upper South had joined the Confederacy, the Confederate government moved its capital to Richmond, Virginia, about one hundred miles south of Washington. With the two seats of government so close together, the war in the East became a struggle on the part of the Union to capture Richmond and on the part of the South to defend it.

Between Washington and Richmond a number of broad rivers—the Potomac, the Rappahannock, the York, the Chickahominy, and other tributaries—flow more or less parallel with one another from the Allegheny Mountains in the west to Chesapeake Bay in the east. This grid of rivers afforded a natural system of defense to the South and presented an obstacle course to the North. Southern armies on the defensive could lie in wait for their attackers on the south banks of these streams, as they did at Bull Run, Fredericksburg, Chancellorsville, and the Wilderness. When the Southern army was driven back after going on the offensive, it could recross to safety, reorganize, and recoup, as it did after Antietam (Sharpsburg) and Gettysburg.

For four years the principal army of the North, the Army of the Potomac, struggled against the principal army of the South, the Army of Northern Virginia, over this terrain. Each side placed its foremost commander here. Robert E. Lee headed the Army of Northern Virginia after Joseph E. Johnston was wounded in 1862, while Ulysses S. Grant was brought east to take overall command of Union armies in 1864 after his great successes in the West. Public attention centered primarily upon these campaigns, and they have con-
continued to receive more than their share of attention in history.

During the first half of the war, the Union met with a long succession of disappointments and defeats on the Virginia front. In July 1861, when both armies were still raw and unseasoned, the Union sent General Irvin McDowell south with the slogan “Forward to Richmond” and with expectations of an easy victory. But when he encountered the Confederate armies of Generals Pierre G. T. Beauregard and Joseph E. Johnston at Manassas Junction (the first battle of Bull Run), he was defeated. His army, which was too green to absorb a defeat, lost all organization and retreated in panic to Washington. McDowell was replaced by George Brinton McClellan, who had campaigned successfully in West Virginia—a little man of supremely self-confident manner who was inevitably compared with Napoleon. McClellan possessed real ability as an organizer, and he had the good sense to realize that he must make his troops into an army before he took them campaigning. Consequently, there was no more major fighting on the Virginia front for almost a year. When McClellan did at last move in April 1862, he persuaded President Lincoln to let him transport his troops by ship to Fort Monroe, a point on the Virginia coast within striking distance of Richmond. From this point he proposed to move up the peninsula between the York and the James Rivers (hence called the Peninsula Campaign) to capture the Confederate capital.

McClellan’s plan was a brilliant solution to the difficult problem of supply, for he could now bring provisions for his army by ship without fear of Confederate raiders getting to his rear and cutting his lines. But the plan had one important drawback. It left, or appeared to leave, Washington exposed to the Confederates. Therefore, for the defense of the capital, President Lincoln insisted on withholding part of the troops that McClellan wanted. So although McClellan launched his invasion from Fort Monroe toward Richmond, he failed to push his offensive with the vigor the North expected.

While these developments were in progress, the Confederate commander, Joseph E. Johnston, was badly wounded and was replaced by Robert E. Lee. Lee, a Virginia aristocrat, mild of speech and gentle of manner but gifted with a daring that was terrible to his adversaries, quickly perceived that he could play upon the Union’s fear that Washington was too exposed. Accordingly, he sent his brilliant subordinate, Thomas J. (“Stonewall”) Jackson, on a raid up the Shenandoah Valley, appearing to threaten Washington and causing the administration to hold there defensive troops that had previously been promised to McClellan.

When Jackson returned from his raid with phenomenal speed, Lee’s reunited forces took the offensive against McClellan’s original forces south and east of Richmond in a series of engagements known as the Seven Days’ Battles (June 25–July 1, 1862). McClellan fought hard and was not decisively defeated, but he lost his nerve, moved back to a base on the James River, and sent Washington a series of frantic messages that the government had deserted him. Lincoln, who had never fully accepted the basic idea of operating by sea, withdrew McClellan’s troops from the peninsula to northern Virginia and placed most of them under the command of General John Pope, who had gained a reputation in the West.

Pope promptly ran afoul of the Lee-Jackson combination at the Second Battle of Manassas (the second battle of Bull Run) in August 1862, and McClellan was restored to command and given a second chance. When Lee marched north, crossed the Potomac, and advanced into Maryland, McClellan shadowed him. Again Lee divided his forces, sending part of his army to
capture Harpers Ferry. But even when a copy of Lee’s secret orders fell into McClellan’s hands and he knew exactly what to expect, he still did not move quickly or decisively. After a supremely hard-fought engagement at Antietam (Sharpsburg), Lee withdrew, bloodied, but not crushed, to the south bank of the Potomac. Lincoln again replaced McClellan, this time with Ambrose E. Burnside.

In December 1862 Burnside made an unimaginative frontal attack across the Rappahannock at Fredericksburg, Virginia, against prepared Confederate defenses. Fighting the Confederates on ground of their own choosing, he sustained terrible losses and was replaced by Joseph Hooker. Hooker seemed a man of boldness and decision, but in May 1863, after executing an excellent flanking march to maneuver Lee into battle on unfavorable terms, Hooker lost his poise and allowed Jackson’s corps to roll up the Union right flank in a surprise attack that rocked the Federals and eventually drove them back across the Rappahannock. Although a great victory, the South paid a fearful price for Chancellorsville. Jackson was accidentally wounded by his own troops and died a few days later.

Hooker remained in command until Lee launched a second offensive against the North,
this time into Pennsylvania. When Lee escaped from Hooker on the northward march, Lincoln again changed commanders, turning this time to George Gordon Meade. Meade’s army and Lee’s army met at Gettysburg, though neither had planned it that way. On the first three days of July 1863 the South made its supreme effort. The little town in Pennsylvania became the scene of the greatest battle ever fought in North America. Lee, facing Meade across a valley, threw his troops against the Union positions in a series of bold attacks, the most famous of which was Pickett’s Charge. But Meade was too strong to be dislodged. Lee’s forces, which had been fearfully punished, waited for more than a day to receive a counterattack that never came and then marched south. Meade did not pursue until too late, and ten days after the battle Lee recrossed the Potomac unmolested. The Army of Northern Virginia had still never been driven from a battlefield, but its great offensive power was forever broken.

The War in the West

On July 4, 1863, the day on which Lee began his uncontested withdrawal, another Confederate general, John C. Pemberton, at Vicksburg, Mississippi, surrendered an army of about thirty thousand men—the largest that has ever been captured in North America. The man to whom he surrendered was Ulysses S. Grant, and the event marked the culmination of a series of campaigns in the West which had been much more decisive in their results than the eastern campaigns.

The whole region beyond the Alleghenies was far vaster and more broken up geographically than the Virginia theater, and the campaigns in the West never had a single focus as they did in Virginia. Operations along the Mississippi were scarcely coordinated with opera-

FREDRICKSBURG TO GETTYSBURG (1862-1863)
to the Ohio River. Control of these river highways gave Grant easy entry deep into the South.

On the Cumberland, Nashville, the capital of Tennessee, fell to the Union as soon as Fort Donelson was captured, and by April Grant had advanced up the Tennessee almost to the border of Mississippi. In that same month, when all was still very “quiet along the Potomac,” the Union army and navy, by skillful combined operations, captured New Orleans, the largest city of the Confederacy.

After these early successes, the Union forces found themselves blocked for some time. A Confederate army under Albert Sidney Johnston struck Grant unexpectedly at Shiloh, Tennessee, on April 6, 1862. In two days of fierce fighting that cost Johnston’s life, the Union forces blunted the Southern attack and with reinforcements on the second day Grant counterattacked and drove the Confederates back to Mississippi. The next six months saw inconclusive thrusts and counterthrusts by both sides in the Western theater.

During the winter of 1862–1863 Grant began a campaign against the Confederate stronghold at Vicksburg, where towering bluffs command the Mississippi. Deep in enemy country, Vicksburg was rendered almost impregnable by vast swamps, by a succession of steep hills, and by the river itself. After making a series of unsuccessful moves against this natural fortress, Grant at last hit on the bold and unorthodox plan of moving down the west side of the river, crossing below Vicksburg, abandoning his lines of communication, and living off the country during a final drive against the Confederate defenses. It was by this plan that he finally captured Pemberton’s entire army at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863, and gained complete control of the Mississippi artery.

**Grant Takes Command**

Grant confirmed his reputation as the North’s best general by taking command of the Union forces at Chattanooga after their bloody defeat in the Battle of Chickamauga (September 19–20, 1863) and launching a coordinated attack that drove General Braxton Bragg’s Confederate army all the way to Dalton, Georgia, in battles on November 23–25. In March 1864, Lincoln brought Grant east to serve as general-in-chief and to take personal charge of the Army of the Potomac (Meade was not removed but was under Grant’s command).

By this time the Confederacy, outnumbered from the beginning, was fearfully handicapped by losses of men that could not be replaced as Union losses could. Grant, recog-
nizing this handicap, settled upon a plan of operations that was far less brilliant than his operations in the West, but no less decisive. By steadily extending his flanks, he forced the Confederacy to extend also and to make its lines very thin. And by continuing pressure, he gave his adversaries no rest. Lee resisted with immense skill, while Grant sacrificed men so freely between May 5 and June 3 in the Virginia campaign that his losses almost equaled the total number of men in Lee’s army.

In June 1864, after being terribly punished at the Battle of Cold Harbor, Grant decided to move his base to the James River (as McClellan had done two years earlier), to attack from the south. He succeeded in this maneuver and thus pinned Lee’s forces at Petersburg, which is actually south of Richmond. With Petersburg under siege and Lee no longer mobile, it was only a question of time, but Lee held on for nine long months while Richmond remained the Confederate capital.

**Sherman’s March**

While Grant and Lee faced each other across the trenches at Petersburg, the Confederacy was being cut to pieces from the rear. Grant had first cut it at Vicksburg on the Mississippi, and the next cut was to take place from eastern Tennessee into Georgia. When Grant left for Virginia, William T. Sherman, a trusted subordinate, remained to face the Confederate forces under Joseph E. Johnston in the mountains of north Georgia.

Johnston, a “retreating general” but a resourceful obstructionist, blocked and delayed Sherman at every step, all the way to Atlanta. There he was removed because of his unwillingness to take the offensive, and John B. Hood was put in his place. Hood made the mistake of challenging Sherman in a series of direct attacks and was so badly defeated that Sherman, after taking Atlanta on September 2, 1864, was able to march unopposed across Georgia to the sea. Sherman reached the port of Savannah on Christmas, 1864, while Grant was still outside Petersburg.

Of all the Civil War generals, Grant and especially Sherman had the most “modern” conception of warfare. They were pioneers in the practice of total war. Sherman had become convinced that “we are not only fighting hostile armies, but a hostile people.” Defeat of the Southern armies would not be enough to win this war. The railroads, farms, and factories that fed and supplied the armies must also be destroyed and the will of the civilian population that sustained the armies must be crushed. “We cannot change the hearts of those people of the South,” said Sherman in 1864, “but we can make war so terrible…and make them so sick of war that generations would pass away before they would again appeal to it.” The march of his army from Atlanta to the sea not only destroyed
Confederate resources but also functioned as a form of psychological warfare.

“It is a demonstration to the world,” wrote Sherman, “that we have a power which Jefferson Davis cannot resist. This may not be war but rather statesmanship.”

**Appomattox**

From this time, the South was completely fragmented and the Confederacy’s cause was hopeless. But Johnston, having returned to his command in the Southeast, held together a force that retreated across the Carolinas, with Sherman pursuing and wreaking havoc in South Carolina as he pursued. Lee, meanwhile, held against steadily increasing odds at Petersburg. By April 1865, however, the inevitable defeat could be put off no longer. Petersburg fell and Richmond was evacuated. Lee met Grant on April 9 at a farmhouse near Appomattox Court House, and in a moving scene surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia to Grant, who accorded generous terms and told his troops not to cheer because, he said, “the rebels are our countrymen again.” Johnston also surrendered at Greensboro, North Carolina, before the end of the month, and the Confederate government, which had fled south after the fall of Petersburg, simply evaporated.

**THE WAR BEHIND THE LINES**

**The Problems of the Confederacy**

Writers on the Civil War have piled up a vast literature—one of the largest bodies of literature on any historical subject—detailing the military aspects of the war: the battles and leaders, the
campaigns and maneuvers, the strategy and tactics. This military record, however, does not fully explain the outcome of the war. For, in terms of strategy and tactics, the Confederate performance equaled that of the Union and, on the Virginia front, surpassed it until the last year of the war. The final result was registered on the battlefield, but the basic factors that caused Confederate defeat lay behind the lines. Essentially, the Confederacy failed to solve the problems of organizing its society and its economy for war. It faced these problems in a particularly difficult form, and when it proved unable to solve them, it went down to defeat.

One basic handicap of the Confederacy lay in the fact that while the North had a balanced agricultural and industrial economy that was invigorated by war, the Southern economy was based primarily on cotton production, which was dislocated and almost paralyzed by the war. In the North, war stimulated employment, and while wages failed to keep pace with inflation, civilian morale was generally high except among the underpaid urban poor. In the South, economic conditions deteriorated so badly that what may be called economic morale declined even while fighting morale remained good. During the spring of 1863 “bread riots” occurred in Richmond and several other Southern cities. Indeed, Drew Gilpin Faust has argued that because Southern women’s interests were so little represented in the way the South publicly defined the war’s meaning, therefore the women lost heart and in so doing contributed substantially to the collapse of morale.

Essentially, the Confederacy, with its rural and agricultural society, needed two things. First, it needed access to the products of European—especially British—industry. Second, it needed to stimulate production of food, of horses, and of strategic supplies within the South. Ultimately, it was unable to meet most of those needs.

In order to be able to draw on British industry, the Confederacy needed to have buying power in the European market and to be able to ship goods freely to and from across the Atlantic. But once war broke out, Lincoln proclaimed a blockade, which meant that federal naval vessels would try to seize the merchant vessels of any neutral country bringing goods to Confederate ports.

Southerners thought that the blockade would not work, partly because there were not enough Union ships to enforce it and even more because they believed in what has been called the “King Cotton delusion.” They were firmly convinced that cotton was an absolute economic necessity to Britain, because textiles were the heart of British industry. Without cotton this industry would be prostrated. Britain’s factories would stand idle, and its workers would be unemployed and would literally starve. When this started happening, the British government would decide to intervene to get cotton. The British navy, which still dominated the seas, would break the blockade.

Southerners were so confident of this idea that they were quite willing to see the British supply of cotton cut off for a while. In the first months of the blockade, while it was still largely ineffective, they deliberately kept their cotton at home instead of sending a part of it abroad to be held in British warehouses for later sale to give them funds for the purchase of supplies. But the bumper crops of the previous two years had produced such a surplus that British manufacturers were able to operate without interruption for nearly a year after the war broke out.

The Importance of Sea Power

For this and other reasons, the faith in cotton ultimately proved to be a fallacy. Britain got increased supplies of cotton from Egypt and India.
Also, British antislavery sentiment generated a strong resistance to taking steps that would help the Confederacy. And Britain was pleased to see America adopting a doctrine of international law concerning the right of blockade which she had always advocated and which was bound to be favorable to a nation with large naval power. But most of all, British industry was not paralyzed because Northern wartime purchase stimulated it. Britain, as a neutral, enjoyed an economic boom from supplying war materials to the Union—a boom very similar to the booms the United States later enjoyed in 1914–1917 and 1939–1941 as a neutral supplying war materials to Britain.

Consequently, Britain and France, which was following Britain’s lead, never did give diplomatic recognition to the Confederate government, although they did recognize the existence of a state of war in which they would be neutral. This meant that they would treat Confederate naval vessels as warships and not as pirates.

The British recognition of belligerency was much resented in the United States, but in fact the real danger for the Union cause lay in the possibility of diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy, which would probably have resulted in efforts by the British to break the blockade. Such efforts would, in turn, have led to war with Britain. But this recognition, for which the Confederacy waited so anxiously, never came.

In November 1861 Confederate hopes were high when an eager Union naval officer, Charles Wilkes, stopped the British ship *Trent* on the high seas and took off two Confederate envoys to Britain, James Mason and John Slidell. Britain, at this point, actually prepared to fight, but President Lincoln wisely admitted the error and set the envoys free. Meanwhile, the blockade steadily grew tighter. One Confederate port after another was sealed off. Small Confederate vessels, built for speed and based in the Bahama Islands, continued to delight the South by running the blockade and bringing in cargoes of goods with high value in proportion to their bulk. But their volume was small, and they did not in any sense provide the flow of goods that the Confederacy so vitally needed.

In addition to depending on British naval might, the Confederacy made two important efforts to establish sea power of its own. To begin with, it fitted out the first large ironclad vessel ever to put to sea. A powerful steam frigate, the U.S.S. *Merrimac*, which the federals had scuttled in the Norfolk Navy Yard, was raised, renamed the *Virginia*, covered with armor plate, and sent out in March 1862—an iron giant against the wooden vessels of the Union navy. In its first day at sea it destroyed two large Union vessels with ease.

The entire Union navy appeared to be in acute danger, and there was panic in Northern coastal cities. But the Union had been preparing a metal-clad vessel of its own—a small craft that lay low in the water, with a revolving gun turret. This *Monitor*, as it was called, challenged the *Virginia* on March 9, 1862. The battle ended in a draw, but with Monitor-type vessels the Union navy was again safe.

The Confederacy’s second major endeavor at sea was to buy vessels and equipment in England. Under the technicalities of British law, these could be combined on the high seas to produce fighting ships without violating Britain’s neutrality. Such vessels could then raid merchant vessels flying the Union flag.

There were several of these raiders, most famous of which was the *Alabama*. This great marauder, commanded by Admiral Raphael Semmes, roamed the seas for two years, from Newfoundland to Singapore, capturing sixty-two merchant ships (most of which were burned, after careful attention to the safety of
their crews and passengers). It also sank the U.S.S. Hatteras in a major naval battle. It was at last cornered and sunk off Cherbourg, France, by the U.S.S. Kearsarge, but its career had made the American flag so unsafe on the high seas that prohibitive insurance costs caused more than 700 American vessels to transfer to British registry. The American merchant marine never again attained the place in the world’s carrying trade that it had held before the Alabama put to sea.

The Confederacy sought to have additional raiders built in British shipyards, and two immensely formidable vessels—the Laird rams—were actually constructed. But there were vigorous protests from Charles Francis Adams, the American minister to England, and the British were aware that in spite of technicalities this was really a violation of neutrality. So the British government stopped their delivery in September 1863. After this the Confederate cause was lost at sea as well as on land, and the federal blockade tightened like a noose to strangle the Confederacy economically.

**Economic Failures of the South**

Meanwhile, on the home front, the Confederacy failed economically because it was caught between the need to stimulate production and the need to keep down prices and control inflation. The Southern government began with few financial assets other than land and slaves, neither of which could be readily transformed into negotiable currency. It faced a dilemma. It could either encourage production by buying goods in the open market at an uncontrolled price, in which case inflation would mushroom. Or it could control inflation by a system of requisitioning goods for its armies at arbitrarily fixed prices, in which case production would be discouraged rather than stimulated. Help in reducing this problem would have required a program of heavy taxation, by which the government would take back the inflationary dollars that had been spent. But the Confederacy was afraid to use its taxing power. It raised less than 5 percent of its revenue from taxes—a smaller proportion than any other nation in a modern war. Its bond drives to raise funds by borrowing also fell short of hopes.

The South’s main source of money was the printing press—the most inflationary method of all. Prices rose by 9,000 percent in the four years of war. Goods grew scarcer while money grew more plentiful. It was grimly said that at the beginning of the war people took their money to market in a purse and brought their goods home in a basket, but that by the end they took the money in a basket and brought their purchases home in a purse.

In short, the Confederacy died of economic starvation—an insufficiency of goods. Its government was too weak to cope with the nearly insoluble economic problems the war had caused. President Jefferson Davis was a bureaucrat who thought in legalistic rather than in dynamic terms. He was not an innovator but a conservative miscast as a revolutionary. The state governments also competed against the Confederate government for the control of manpower and supplies. They insisted upon their sovereign status so strenuously that it has been said that the Confederacy was born of states’ rights and died of states’ rights.

The only chance the Confederacy ever had—and it was perhaps a fairly good one—was to win a short war before the results of economic malnutrition set in. Once that failed, the cause was hopeless. A few Confederates, like Josiah Gorgas in the Ordinance Department, improvised brilliantly, and others did so desperately. But in a country where a vitally necessary rail line could be laid only by tearing up the
rails somewhere else and re-laying them, a long war against a dynamic adversary could have but one end.

**Northern Industrialism and Republican Ascendancy**

The problems and limitations of the Confederacy—problems of localism and decentralization, of an agricultural economy and of small-scale economic activities—were characteristic features of the kind of folk society the Confederacy was defending. But while the South was making a last stand against the forces of the modern mechanized world, the war was rushing the North along the path toward industrial domination. Before the Southern states withdrew from the Union, they had blocked some of the governmental measures most conducive to the new industrial economy. Southern secession, however, left the new Republican party in control. The Republicans combined a free-soil, antislavery ideology with the traditional Whig policy of using the government to stimulate economic growth. While this program was designed to promote the mutual interests of capital and free labor, Republican economic legislation in practice usually helped the former more than the latter.

Thus secession and the war enabled the Republicans to enact what one historian has called their “blueprint for modern America.” In February 1861, while the empty seats of the departing Southern congressmen were still warm, and even before President Lincoln took office, Congress adopted the Morrill Tariff, which, though not very high, was higher than the existing tariff of 1857. This was the first of many tariff in-
creases. There was not another perceptible re-
duction until 1913. Meanwhile Congress re-
peatedly strengthened the measures by which it
gave American industrial producers more exclu-
sive control in the American market, even if this
forced American consumers to pay higher
prices than they would have had to pay on the
world market.

The Transcontinental Railroad

In 1862 Congress broke the long deadlock the
sectional conflict had created over the building
of a railroad to the Pacific. For a decade, advo-
cates of a southern route and supporters of a
northern route had blocked each other. Now,
with the Southerners absent, Congress created
the Union Pacific Railroad Company, incorpo-
rated with a federal charter, to build westward
from Omaha and to meet another road, the
Central Pacific, a California corporation, build-
ing eastward from Sacramento. To encourage
this enterprise, Congress placed very large re-
sources at the disposal of the railroads. For each
mile of track built it gave to the roads ten square
miles of land, running back in alternate blocks
from the tracks. And it granted loans (not gifts)
of between $16,000 and $48,000 a mile—ac-
cording to the difficulty of the terrain where
construction took place.

The value of the lands at that time was not
great, and the munificence of this largesse has
often been exaggerated. But the point is that the
government was paying most of the costs of con-
struction, whereas it might well have controlled
or even owned the railroad. Instead, it placed
these resources in the hands of private operators,
who, if they succeeded, would become owners
of the world’s greatest railroad. And if they lost,
they would be losing the government’s money
rather than their own. It was “venture capital-
ism,” as it is now called, but the government was
doing most of the venturing and the private in-
terests that constructed the road were getting
most of the capital.

In 1869, four years after the war ended, the
Union Pacific and the Central Pacific met at
Promontory Point in Utah, and a golden spike
was driven to mark the event. Travelers to Cali-
ifornia no longer were obliged to go by wagon
train or by a lengthy sea voyage. The United
States was a long step closer to being a transcon-
tinental, two-ocean republic in an operative
sense as well as in a purely geographical one.

The National Banking System

One other major economic measure resulting
from Republican ascendancy was the creation
of a new and far more centralized system of
banking and money. Ever since Andrew Jack-
son’s overthrow of the Bank of the United
States in 1832, the country had had a decen-
tralized, loose-jointed financial system—one
that today it is difficult even to imagine. The
United States, of course, issued coins and also
bills. For each bill in circulation, a correspon-
ding value of precious metal was held in the
Treasury and could be claimed by the holder of
the bill. The government handled all its own
transactions in such currency and was thus on a
“hard money” basis.

Actually, however, this kind of money was
not nearly sufficient to meet the economic needs
of the country for a circulating medium. The
principal circulating medium, therefore, had
been provided by notes issued by banks operat-
ing under charters from the various states. State
laws governing the incorporation of banks natu-
really varied, which meant that the financial
soundness of the various banks also varied. This
in turn meant that some of the notes circulated
at face value, while others circulated at various
degrees of discount from face value. So although
the government was on a hard money basis, the economy of the country was not, and the federal government exercised no control whatever over the principal component in the monetary system of the country.

The Legal Tender Act of 1862 and the National Banking Act of 1863 changed all this. They grew out of the government’s need to raise the immense sums required to fight the war. The Legal Tender Act authorized the issuance of Treasury notes—the famous greenbacks—that circulated as authorized money without a backing in metal held in the Treasury.

But primarily the Treasury relied upon borrowing—that is, upon selling bonds. To borrow it had to make the bonds attractive as holdings for the banks. Accordingly, the National Banking Act provided that a bank which purchased government bonds to the amount of one third of its paid-in capital might issue federally guaranteed notes, known as national bank notes, in an amount equal to 90 percent of its bond holdings.

In 1865 a tax was laid on the notes issued under state authority by state-chartered banks. The tax had the effect of making these notes unprofitable and thus driving them out of circulation. As a result of government borrowing policy, therefore, the United States acquired a new, uniform, federally sanctioned circulating medium of national bank notes.

These notes became the principal form of money for the next fifty years, but they had a great defect—they made the amount of money dependent upon the volume of federal debt rather than upon the economic needs of the country. They were inflexible, and in 1913 they were largely replaced by Federal Reserve notes as a result of the establishment of the Federal Reserve System. But the principles that the United States should have a uniform currency in use throughout the nation, and that the federal government should be responsible for this currency, had come to stay.

### Women and the War

Although the Civil War brought suffering and loss to hundreds of thousands of American women, the war meant progress toward independence and equality for women as a group. It meant new opportunities for employment, broadened social and political interests, and demonstrations of competence in activities previously reserved for men. Some women went to war—as nurses, spies, even as soldiers. But the vast majority who served at home—including those who stayed in the home—did most damage to the myth of the helpless female.

As in earlier wars, but in much greater numbers, women had to take their husbands’ places as heads of households, running shops, managing farms and plantations, finding jobs to earn food for their families. In the South, many had to do housework—and field work—for the first time. Some had to face armed, hostile blacks as well as enemy soldiers. In Minnesota and elsewhere on the frontier, women had to survive Indian uprisings.

Job opportunities for women multiplied as men went off to fight or quit old occupations for better-paying ones. The war quickened the movement of women into school teaching, a profession once dominated by men. Many Northern women also went South to teach in schools for freed slaves. In both the Union and the Confederacy women also went to work for the government. By the end of the war thousands held government office jobs. Here, too, the change was permanent: Washington, D.C., would never again be without its corps of women workers. Many were employed, and some were killed, in government arsenals.
When the war began, women dominated the work force in the mills and factories of New England, while in the South women industrial workers were a small minority—another situation that favored the Union war effort. As men joined the service, women took their places in industry and helped produce military equipment and supplies. The demand for what was considered women's work also expanded: Sewing women were hired by the thousands, and brutally exploited. In self-protection, the women organized, protested, and went out on strikes.

In addition to work for pay, there was a tremendous amount of unpaid activity by women in both South and North—though there was more in the North, because women in that region had a tradition of public activism lacking in the more conservative South. Women volunteered to nurse, and some of them, above all Clara Barton, became famous. They joined aid societies. They organized activities to raise funds. They wrote and spoke for the causes they believed in. They even, in a few cases, comprised part of the attendance at riots, North and South. But overall, many women demonstrated talents of efficiency and leadership.

In the North women took the initiative to found an organization, the United States Sanitary Commission, that did valuable work in raising money and gathering materials for wounded soldiers. Their initial enthusiasm was somewhat alarming to the military authorities—the fear was of good-natured busybodies—hence men were officially in charge of the organization. But women supplied much of the energy. And over time the women did so much good work that even the doubters came around. In an era when married women could not sign contracts (owing to the tenets of coverture), women raised hundreds of thousands of much-needed dollars for humanitarian relief.

The Civil War gave American women a chance to enter many new areas and prove themselves quite as capable as men. When the war ended, many lost their jobs to returning veterans. Some returned gratefully to domesticity. But there was no turning back the clock.

**EMANCIPATION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

**The Road to Reunion**

Wars always bring results not intended by those who fight them. The Civil War accelerated the growth of mass production and economic centralization in the North while it destroyed much of the economic plant in the South and convinced the rising generation of Southern leaders that future regional prosperity would depend upon industrialization. The war also caused an increase in federal power at the expense of the states, for no government could spend the funds, organize the forces, and wield the strength the federal government did, without increasing its power. But the main purpose of the war was to reunite a broken union of states, and there was a question whether the abolition of slavery was necessary to the objective of reunion. Some Republicans wanted to make emancipation one of the objects of the war, simply because they deplored slavery and did not believe that a Union which had slavery in it was worth saving. Others, who were relatively indifferent to the welfare of the blacks, believed that the slaveholding class, which they called the “slave power,” was guilty of causing disunion, that to make the Union safe this power must be destroyed, and that the way to destroy it was to abolish slavery. Still others, including many of the “War Democrats” and the Unionists in the border states, regarded the war as one against secession, having nothing to do with slavery.
Emancipation

For his part, Abraham Lincoln had stated his belief, long before he became President, that the Union could not endure permanently half-slave and half-free. He knew, however, that he could not free any slaves unless he won the war and that he could not win the war if he antagonized all the Unionists in the slave states of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky (his own birthplace), and Missouri. As a result, he moved very slowly on the slavery question, and when two of his generals tried to move more quickly by emancipating slaves in the areas they had occupied, he countermanded their orders.

Few people realize it today, but the war had raged for seventeen months and was more than a third over before Lincoln moved to free the slaves in the Confederacy. In July 1862 he made up his mind to proclaim the freedom of slaves in the insurrectionary states, but he decided to wait for a victory before doing so. The Battle of Antietam (Sharpsburg) in September was not a great victory, but it sufficed. In that month Lincoln issued a proclamation that after January 1, 1863, all slaves in areas that were at that time in rebellion should be “forever free.” This still did nothing about slaves in places like New Orleans, which was occupied by federal forces or in the border slave states. It also gave all the states of the Confederacy one hundred days during which they could save slavery by coming back into the Union.

Strongly believing in persuasion rather than force, Lincoln in December 1862 proposed a constitutional amendment for the gradual emancipation of slaves in the border states by the year 1900, with compensation to the owners. But this proposal was overtaken by events as the escalating impact of the war accelerated the destruction of slavery. On January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, to apply in all areas under Confederate control. Although it would require Northern victory to become a reality, this Proclamation announced a new Union war aim—freedom for the slaves as well as restoration of the Union.

The caution with which Lincoln had proceeded with emancipation reflects his own scruples about the Constitution and the prudence of his own temperament, but it also reflects the fierceness of the divisions within the North and the dangers that these divisions held for the administration. On one flank, Lincoln was assailed by the Democrats. A minority of War Democrats gave him vigorous support, but a majority of the Democrats, known as “Copperheads,” constantly called for a negotiated peace, and especially assailed any move against slavery. Democratic propagandists helped convince white workingmen that they were being used in a war to free blacks who would take their jobs away. It was this conviction that turned the “draft riots” in New York in July 1863 into mob assaults on blacks. More than a hundred people were killed in these assaults, most of them white rioters shot down by police and troops.

On the other flank, pressure was coming from many sources, such as the black community. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized their fellow suffragists into the Women’s National Loyal League and gathered hundreds of thousands of signatures on an antislavery petition. Further, the more militant antislavery men in the Republican party denounced Lincoln because he did not instantly take drastic action to end slavery. These “radical Republicans” hoped to dominate the administration by forcing all moderates on the slavery question out of the cabinet, and in 1864 some of them sought to prevent Lincoln’s nomination for a second term. But by unrivaled political dexterity and skill Lincoln frustrated these attacks from both directions and maintained a broad base of support for the war.
As late as 1864 the House of Representatives defeated a constitutional amendment for the abolition of slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery, was not finally voted by Congress for submission to the states until January 31, 1865. Maryland, Tennessee, and Missouri abolished slavery by state action at about this same time, but slavery was still legal in Kentucky and Delaware when the Civil War ended, and the amendment was not ratified until eight months after Lincoln’s death.

**Lincoln as a War Leader**

Long after these events, people who had grown up with an oversimplified image of Lincoln as a Great Emancipator became disillusioned by this record, and in the ensuing century and a half,
some critics have sought to tear down his reputation. But he remains a figure of immense stature, and scholars and popular biographers continue to find nuances of his personality and achievements to explore.

Born in 1809 in a log cabin in Kentucky, Lincoln grew up on the frontier in Indiana and Illinois, doing rough work as a rail splitter and a plowboy and receiving only a meager education. Later he became a self-taught lawyer with a successful practice in Springfield, served in the state legislature as a Whig, and rode the circuit on horseback to follow the sessions of the court. Except for one term in Congress, 1847–1849, he rarely went East and was relatively unknown until the debates with Douglas gained him a reputation in 1858. In 1861, at a moment of crisis, this tall, gangling, plain-looking man, whose qualities of greatness were still unsuspected, became President.

Lincoln's relaxed and unpretentious manner masked remarkable powers of decision and qualities of leadership. Completely lacking in self-importance, he seemed humble to some observers. But he acted with the patience and forbearance of a man who was sure of what he was doing. He refused to let the abolitionists push him into an antislavery war which would antagonize Union men who did not care about slavery, and refused to let the Union men separate him from the antislavery contingent by restricting war aims too narrowly. He saw that the causes of Union and emancipation must support each other instead of opposing each other, or both would be defeated.

Patiently he worked to fuse the idea of union with that of freedom and equality (“a new nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal”). Thus he reaffirmed for American nationalism the idealism of freedom and gave to the ideal of freedom the strength of an undivided union. Knowing that in a democracy a man must win political success in order to gain a chance for statesmanship, he moved patiently and indirectly to his goals. His
opportunism offended many abolitionists, but in the end he struck slavery the fatal blow.

**Black Americans and the War**

For black Americans, the Civil War years were a time of elation and rejoicing, frustration and despair. Black men and women alike worked hard for the Union cause. Black intellectuals wrote and lectured, at home and abroad. Blacks organized their own aid and relief societies for the great numbers of freed slaves and went to them as teachers. Black women volunteered their services as nurses and hospital aids. Black men by the
hundreds of thousands went to war for the Union as sailors in the navy and as servants, cooks, and laborers with the army. When they were finally allowed to, they also went as soldiers.

But for a long time blacks were not allowed to serve in the army. Not until the autumn of 1862 were blacks officially permitted to enlist, and it was another year before the bravery of black regiments in battle began to change the scornful attitude of whites, in and out of the service. Most instrumental in this shift was the heroic, if doomed, assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina by a black regiment, the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Infantry, in July 1863. Overall, black servicemen established an admirable record, and twenty-one received the Congressional Medal of Honor. But the officers in black regiments were mostly white men. Only a handful of black soldiers were promoted to the rank of lieutenant or captain. Not until June 1864 was the pay of black and white soldiers equalized.

Throughout the war, then, blacks continued to face injustice and discrimination, despite their major contribution to the Union cause. From the beginning, their most influential spokesman, Frederick Douglass, looked on Lincoln as much too conservative, and when the President delayed taking decisive steps toward freeing the slaves, Douglass was outspoken in his criticism.

Although Lincoln had his black supporters, including the beloved Harriet Tubman, he also gave offense by his continuing interest in some programs to move blacks out of the country to a colony in the tropics. In fact, there were some blacks who were so embittered that they welcomed the possibility of such separation. Martin R. Delany, who later joined with Douglass in working for black recruitment, favored the migration of American blacks to Haiti, a project that was tried unsuccessfully early in the war. After the rejection of black volunteers by the army, the subsequent mistreatment of black soldiers, and attacks on both black soldiers and black civilians in several Northern cities, there were blacks who agreed with white racists that the Civil War was indeed a white man’s war in a white man’s country, to which blacks owed no allegiance.

Nevertheless, there was progress. The Emancipation Proclamation was finally issued. The Thirteenth Amendment was adopted. The great slave population (which, as Douglass had repeatedly pointed out, enabled the Confederacy to put so large a proportion of its whites into uniform) was finally freed. Many blacks, Union soldiers as well as former slaves, were also freed from the bonds of illiteracy by dedicated teachers—both black and white—and through their own efforts.

After the war blacks were recognized as full citizens by the federal government and campaigns against discrimination in the law courts, the polling places, the schools, and public conveyances won victories in several states. In 1864 black representatives from eighteen states formed the National Equal Rights League. The long, agonizingly slow march toward equality had begun.

**Lincoln’s Plan of Reconstruction**

Although he had always opposed slavery on moral as well as political grounds, Lincoln was skeptical about the prospects for racial equality in the United States. The legacy of slavery and race prejudice, he believed, would prevent blacks from rising to the level of whites or prevent whites from allowing blacks to rise to their level. This was why Lincoln had supported the colonization abroad of freed slaves as a possible solution of the race problem.

By 1864, however, the President was convinced of the impracticality if not the injustice of this policy. The contribution of blacks to the Union war effort and the growing strength of
Northern antislavery convictions also made him more hopeful about the chances for eventual black advancement and racial adjustment. On this question, though, Lincoln remained a moderate and a gradualist to the end of his life.

Lincoln and the Northern moderates also believed that victory in war could not really restore the Union. It could only prevent secession. After that, the Union would be really restored only if the Southern people again accepted the Union and gave their loyalty to it. To bring them back, Lincoln wanted a conciliatory policy. So when in 1864 Congress adopted a measure known as the Wade-Davis Bill, imposing stringent terms for the restoration of the former Confederates, Lincoln vetoed it. When people raised technical questions about the legal status of the Confederate states (Were they still states, or conquered territories? Had they committed “state suicide”?), he was impatient about such “pernicious abstractions.” All that mattered was whether the states could be brought back into their proper relationship with the Union.

By 1864 the Union had regained enough control in Louisiana, Tennessee, and Arkansas to start a process of restoring these states to the Union, and Lincoln laid down generous terms on which this could be done. He would grant amnesty to former Confederates who took an oath of allegiance, and when as many as one tenth of the number who had been citizens in 1860 did so, he would permit them to form a new state government. When this government accepted the abolition of slavery and repudiated the principle of secession, Lincoln would receive it back into the Union. It did not have to recognize the rights of blacks or give a single one the vote.

Louisiana was the first state reorganized on this basis, and despite its denial of black suffrage, Lincoln accepted it, though he did ask the governor “whether some of the colored people may not be let in, as for instance the very intelligent, and especially those who have fought gallantly in our ranks.” In Virginia, Tennessee, and Arkansas, also, Lincoln recognized state governments that did not enfranchise the black Americans.

But it was clear that Republicans in Congress were suspicious of these states—more because of their leniency toward the former Confederates than because of their treatment of the blacks. It was also clear that Congress might deny them recognition by refusing to seat their newly elected senators and representatives.

In 1864, when the time came for a new presidential election, the Democrats nominated General McClellan to run against Lincoln. Some of the so-called Radical Republicans, who were dissatisfied with Lincoln’s leniency, tried to block his renomination and put up the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, in his stead. But this effort failed, and Lincoln was renominated. In an effort to put the ticket on a broad, bipartisan basis, the party dropped the name Republican, called itself the Union party, and nominated for the vice-presidency a Southern Democrat who had stood firmly for the Union, Andrew Johnson of Tennessee.

In November 1864 Lincoln and Johnson were elected, carrying all but three Union states (New Jersey, Delaware, and Kentucky). In the following March, the new term began, and Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address, calling for “malice toward none and charity for all,” in order “to bind up the nation’s wounds.” On April 9, Lee surrendered the Army of Northern Virginia. It was clear that the work of Reconstruction must now begin in earnest. On April 14, Lincoln attended a performance at Ford’s Theater, where he was shot by an assassin, John Wilkes Booth. He died the next morning, without ever recovering consciousness, and Andrew Johnson became President of the United States.
**Johnson’s Policy of Reconstruction**

Although a Southerner, Johnson was expected to be more severe in his Reconstruction policy than Lincoln. Johnson was a former tailor who had been illiterate until his wife taught him to write. He was a man of strong emotions and he hated both aristocrats and secessionists. But when his policy developed, it turned out that he disliked abolitionists and radicals even more. In the end, Johnson proved more lenient toward former Confederates than Lincoln had been.

On May 29, 1865, he issued a broad amnesty to all who would take an oath of allegiance, though men with property valued at more than $20,000 (in other words, planters) were required to ask special pardon, which was freely given. In the six weeks after May 29 he appointed provisional governors in each of the remaining Southern states to reorganize governments for these states. Only men who had been voters in 1860 and who had taken the oath of allegiance could participate in these reorganizations. This meant, of course, that blacks were excluded. When the new governments disavowed secession, accepted the abolition of slavery, and repudiated the Confederate debt, Johnson would accept them. As to what policy should be followed toward the freedmen, that was to be determined by the states themselves.

The Southern states moved swiftly under this easy formula. Before the end of the year, every state except Texas, which followed soon after, had set up a new government that met the President’s terms. But two conspicuous features of these governments were deeply disturbing to many Republicans.

First, these Southern states had adopted a series of laws known as “Black Codes,” which denied to blacks many of the rights of citizenship—including the right to vote and to serve on juries—and that also excluded them from certain types of property ownership and certain occupations. Unemployed Negroes might be arrested as vagrants and bound out to labor in a new form of involuntary servitude.

Second, the former Confederates were in complete control. Between them, the newly organized states elected to Congress no fewer than nine Confederate congressmen, seven Confederate state officials, four generals, four colonels, and Confederate Vice-President Alexander Stephens.

**Congressional Radicals**

When Congress met at the end of 1865, it was confronted by presidential Reconstruction as a *fait accompli*. At this point, the Republicans were far from ready for the kind of all-out fight against Johnson that later developed, but they were not willing to accept the reorganized states. They were especially resentful because these states could now claim a larger representation in Congress with the free black population (only three fifths of the blacks had been counted when they were slaves), without actually allowing the blacks any voice in the government. It would be ironical indeed if the overthrow of slavery should increase the representation of the South in Congress and if the Rebels should come back into the Union stronger than when they went out.

For some months, the Republicans in Congress moved slowly, unwilling to face a break with a President of their own party, and far from ready to make a vigorous stand for the rights of blacks. But they would not seat the Southern congressman-elect, and they set up a Joint Committee of the Senate and the House to assert their claim to a voice in the formulation of Reconstruction policy. They also passed a bill to extend the life and increase the activi-
ties of the Freedmen’s Bureau—an agency created to aid blacks in their transition from slavery to freedom.

When Johnson vetoed this measure and also vetoed a Civil Rights bill, tensions increased, and in June 1866, Congress voted a proposed Fourteenth Amendment. This amendment clearly asserted the citizenship of blacks. It also asserted that they were entitled to the “privileges and immunities of citizens,” to the “equal protection of the laws,” and to protection against being deprived of “life, liberty, and property without due process of law.”

Lawyers have been kept busy for more than a century determining exactly what these terms meant, but one thing was clear. The amendment did not specify a right of black suffrage. It did, however, provide that states that disfranchised a part of their adult male population would have their representation in Congress proportionately reduced. It almost seemed that Congress was offering the Southerners a choice. They might disfranchise the blacks if they were willing to pay the price of reduced representation, or they might have increased representation if they were willing to pay the price of black suffrage. This might not help the blacks, but it was certain to help the Republicans. It would either reduce the strength of Southern white Democrats or give the Republicans black political allies in the South.

The Fourteenth Amendment also provisionally excluded from federal office any person who had held any important public office before the Civil War and had then gone over to the Confederacy. This sweeping move to disqualify almost the entire leadership of the South led the Southern states to make the serious mistake of following President Johnson’s advice to reject the amendment. During the latter half of 1866 and the first months of 1867, ten Southern states voted not to ratify.

**Radical Reconstruction**

Southern rejection of the Fourteenth Amendment precipitated the bitter fight that had been brewing for almost two years. Congress now moved to replace the Johnson governments in the South with new governments of its own creation. Between March and July 1867, it adopted a series of Reconstruction Acts that divided ten Southern states into five military districts under five military governors. These governors were to hold elections for conventions to frame new state constitutions.

In these elections adult males, including blacks, were to vote, but many whites, disqualified by their support of the Confederacy, were not to vote. The constitutions these conventions adopted must establish black suffrage, and the governments they established must ratify the Fourteenth Amendment. Then and only then might they be readmitted to the Union. Thus, two years after the war was over, when the South supposed that the postwar adjustment had been completed, the process of Reconstruction actually began.

The period that followed has been the subject of more bitter feeling and more controversy than perhaps any other period in American history, and the intensity of the bitterness has made it hard to get at the realities. During 1867 the military governors conducted elections. In late 1867 and early 1868 the new constitutional conventions met in the Southern states. They complied with the terms Congress had laid down, including enfranchisement of the black men, and within a year after the third Reconstruction Act (of July 1867), seven states had adopted new constitutions, organized new governments, ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, and been readmitted to the Union. In Virginia, Mississippi, and Texas the process was for one reason or another not completed until 1870.

All of these new governments, except the one in Virginia, began under Republican con-
control, with more or less black representation in the legislatures. In one state after another, however, the Democrats, supporting a policy of white supremacy, soon gained the ascendancy. Military and “Radical” rule lasted for three years in North Carolina; four years in Tennessee (never under military government) and Georgia; six years in Texas; seven years in Alabama and Arkansas; eight years in Mississippi; and ten years in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina.

The experience of this so-called “carpetbag” rule has been interpreted in completely different terms by historians of the past and those of the present. The earlier interpretation reflected the feelings of the Southern whites, who resented this regime bitterly, seeing it as one of “military despotism” and “Negro rule.” According to this version, later elaborated by a pro-Southern school of historians, the South was at the outset the victim of military occupation in which a brutal soldiery maintained bayonet rule. Then came the “carpetbaggers”—unscrupulous Northern adventurers whose only purpose was to enrich themselves by plundering the prostrate South.

To maintain their ascendancy, the carpetbaggers incited the blacks, who were essentially well disposed, to assert themselves in swaggering insolence. Thereupon, majorities made up of illiterate blacks swarmed into the legislatures, where they were manipulated by the carpetbaggers. A carnival of riotous corruption and looting followed, until at last the outraged whites, excluded from all voice in public affairs, could endure these conditions no longer and arose to drive the vandals away and to redeem their dishonored states.

This picture of Reconstruction has a very real importance, for it has undoubtedly influenced subsequent Southern attitudes, but it is an extreme distortion of the realities. Historical treatments since 1950 have presented quite a different version, stressing the brief nature of the military rule and the constructive measures of the “carpet-

---

**Reconstruction**

![Reconstruction Map](image-url)

**Means of Abolition of Slavery:**
- Emancipation Proclamation 1863
- Thirteenth Amendment 1865
- State Action

**Dates:**
- Date of Readmission to the Union
- Date of Reestablishment of Conservative Government

**1866**
- Date of Readmission to the Union
**1869**
- Date of Reestablishment of Conservative Government
"bag" governments. As for bayonet rule, the number of troops in the "Army of Occupation" was absurdly small. In November 1869 there were 1000 federal soldiers scattered over the state of Virginia and 716 over Mississippi, with hardly more than a corporal's guard in any one place.
As for the carpetbaggers, there were indeed looters among the newcomers who moved into the South, but there were also idealists. Many Northern women came to teach the freed slaves. Many men came to develop needed industry. Many others worked with integrity and self-sacrifice to find a constructive solution for the problems of a society devastated by war and left with a huge population of former slaves to absorb and provide for. Many native Southerners, who joined with the “carpetbaggers” in their programs and who were therefore denounced as “scalawags,” were equally public-spirited and high-minded.

As for “Negro rule,” the fact is that the blacks were in a majority only in the convention and the first three legislatures of South Carolina. Elsewhere they were a minority, even in Mississippi and Louisiana, where they constituted a majority of the population. In view of their illiteracy and their political inexperience, the blacks handled their new responsibilities well. They tended to choose educated men for public office.

Thus many of the black legislators, congressmen, and state officials they chose were well qualified. They were, on the whole, moderate and self-restrained in their demands, and they gave major support to certain policies of long-range value, including notably the establishment of public school systems, which the South had not had in any broad sense before the Civil War.

As for the “carnival of corruption,” the post-Civil War era was marked by corruption throughout the country. All the Southern states combined did not manage to steal as much money from the public treasury as did the Tweed Ring in New York City. It was true, however, that the impoverished South could ill afford dishonesty in government. Nevertheless, much that was charged to “corruption” really stemmed from increased costs necessary to provide new social services such as public schools and to rebuild the Southern economy laid waste by war.

Finally, it should be noted that the Southern whites were never reduced to abject helplessness, as is sometimes imagined. From the outset they were present in all of the Reconstruction conventions and legislatures—always vocal, frequently aggressive, and sometimes dominating the proceedings.

The Fall of Radical Reconstruction

For an average of six years, then, the regimes of Radical Republican Reconstruction continued. After that they gave way to the Democratic Redeemers—those who wanted to “redeem” the South to white rule—delaying until the twentieth century further progress toward equal rights for blacks.

When one considers that the South had just been badly defeated in war, that Radical Reconstruction was the policy of the dominant party in Washington, and that black and white Republicans constituted a majority of the voters in a half-dozen Southern states, it is difficult to understand why the Radical regimes were so promptly—almost easily—overthrown. Several contributing factors must be recognized.

First, the former slaves lacked experience in political participation and leadership. Largely illiterate and conditioned for many decades to defer to white people, they grasped the new opportunities with uncertain hands. Very often they seemed to wish, quite realistically, for security of land tenure and for education more than for political rights. At the same time, however, a number of articulate and able blacks, some of them former slaves, came to the fore and might have provided effective leadership for their race if Reconstruction had not been abandoned so soon.

Second, and more important, one must recognize the importance of the grim resistance offered by the Southern whites. With their deep belief in the superiority of their own race, these
Southerners were convinced that civilization itself was at stake. They fought with proportionate desperation, not hesitating to resort to violence and terror. In 1866 a half-whimsical secret society was formed in Tennessee. Known as the Ku Klux Klan, it began to take on a more purposeful character and to spread across the South. Soon every Southern state had its organization of masked and robed riders, either as part of the Klan or under some other name. By use of threat, horsewhip, and even rope, gun, and fire, they spread fear not only among blacks but perhaps even more among the Republican leaders. The states and even Congress passed laws to break up this activity, but after 1873 the laws proved almost impossible to enforce. The Klan-like organizations ceased to operate only when their purposes had been accomplished.

The dramatic quality of the Klan has given it a prominent place in the public’s mental picture of Reconstruction. But though violence played a prominent role, the white South had other, less spectacular weapons that were no less powerful. Southern whites owned almost all of the land. They controlled virtually all employment. They dominated the small supply of money and credit that was to be found in the South. And in unspectacular ways they could make life very hard for individuals who did not comply with the system. These factors, perhaps more than the acts of night riders and violent men, made the pressure against Radical rule almost irresistible.

Another important reason for the downfall of “Radical” Reconstruction was that it was not really very radical. It did not confiscate the land of plantation owners and distribute that land among the freed slaves, as radicals and abolitionists such as Thaddeus Stevens and Wendell Phillips had urged. It did not reduce the former Confederate states to the status of territories for a probationary period, as many Radicals also advocated. It did not permanently disfranchise the South’s former ruling class, nor did it permanently disqualify more than a handful of ex-Confederate leaders from holding office. It did not enact Charles Sumner’s bill to require universal public education in the South and to provide federal aid for schools there. These would have been genuinely radical measures, but they went beyond what a majority of Northern voters were willing to support.

Indeed, even the limited radicalism of the Fourteenth Amendment and the Reconstruction Acts strained the convictions of most Northerners to the utmost. The North was not a racially equalitarian society. Black men did not have the right to vote in most Northern states at the time the Reconstruction Acts of 1867 enfranchised them in the South. The enactment of Negro suffrage in the South was accomplished not because of a widespread conviction that it was right in principle but because it seemed to be the only alternative to Confederate rule.

Later, Republicans found that many Northern voters cared little about black suffrage in the South. They also found that the white South would not consent to a real reunion on this basis and that the restoration of former Confederates to political power did not threaten Northern or national interests. As a result, the Republicans let the existing forces in the South find their own resolution, which was one of white supremacy.

Yet Reconstruction was far from a total failure. It established public schools in the South that gradually brought literacy to the children of freed slaves. It brought abolitionists and missionaries from the North to found such colleges as Howard, Fisk, Morehouse, Talladega, and many others. These colleges trained future generations of black leaders who in turn led the black protest movements of the twentieth century.

And although Reconstruction did not confiscate and redistribute land, many freed slaves became landowners through their own hard
work and savings. In 1865 scarcely any black farmers owned their farms. By 1880, one fifth of them did. Finally, reconstruction also left as a permanent legacy the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, which formed the constitutional basis for the civil-rights movements of the post-World War II generation.

**Johnson Versus the Radicals**

The Republicans did not abandon their program all at once. Rather, it faded out gradually although the Radicals remained militant while Johnson remained President.

Johnson had used his administrative powers to evade or modify the enforcement of some Republican Reconstruction measures. This convinced most Republicans that his removal was necessary if their policy was to be carried out in the South, and in 1868 they tried to remove him by impeachment. The immediate pretext for impeachment was Johnson’s dismissal of Secretary of War Stanton in February 1868.

A year earlier Congress had passed a law, the Tenure of Office Act, which forbade such removals without senatorial consent and which has since been held by the courts to be unconstitutional. But when Johnson removed Stanton, who was reporting to the Radicals what went on in administration councils, there had been no judicial ruling, and the House of Representatives voted to impeach Johnson, which meant that he must be tried by the Senate on the articles of impeachment.

The trial was conducted in a tense atmosphere and scarcely in a judicial way. Immense pressure was put on all Republican senators to vote for conviction. When a vote was finally taken on May 16, 1868, conviction failed by one vote of the two thirds required. Seven Republicans had stood out against the party. Johnson was permitted to serve out his term, and the balance between executive and legislative power in the American political system, which had almost been destroyed, was preserved.

The determination of Republicans to achieve congressional domination of the Reconstruction process also manifested itself in restrictions on the judiciary. When a Mississippi editor named McCardle appealed to the Supreme Court to rule on the constitutionality of one of the Reconstruction Acts, under which he had been arrested by the military, Congress in March 1868 passed an act changing the appellate jurisdiction of the Court so that it could not pass judgment on McCardle’s case.

**The Grant Administration**

In 1868 the country faced another election, and the Republicans turned to General Grant as their nominee. He was elected over the Democratic candidate, Governor Horatio Seymour of New York, by a popular majority of only 310,000—a surprisingly close vote. Without the votes of the newly enfranchised blacks in the seven reconstructed Southern states, Grant might have had no edge in popular votes at all.

To implant Negro suffrage permanently in the Constitution—for the North as well as the South—Congress in 1869 passed the Fifteenth Amendment, forbidding the states to deny any citizen his right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.” The Amendment was ratified in 1870.

President Grant supported the measures of the Radicals and in some ways gave his backing to their policies. Like the good military man he was, he believed that where violence broke out, it should be put down uncompromisingly. Accordingly, he favored the adoption of Enforcement Acts for the use of federal troops to break up the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. When
these laws were passed, he did not hesitate to invoke them, and troops were sent in on a number of occasions.

Fundamentally, however, Grant was not a Radical. He wanted to see tranquility restored, and this meant reuniting North and South on any basis both would be willing to accept. Accordingly, he urged a broader extension of amnesty to all former Confederates, and he grew to resent the frequent appeals of Republican governments in the South for troops to uphold their authority. Though he realized that the tactics of the Redeemers were very bad—“blood-thirsty butchery,” “scarcely a credit to savages”—he became convinced that constant federal military intervention was worse in the long run.

During the eight years of Grant’s presidency, Republican governments were overthrown in eight of the Southern states. As Grant’s second term neared its end, only three states—Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina—remained in the Republican ranks. The program of Radical Reconstruction still remained official policy in the Republican party, but it had lost its steam. The country was concerned about other things.

In foreign affairs, Secretary of State Hamilton Fish was busy putting through an important settlement by which Great Britain and the United States adopted the principle of international arbitration as a means of settling American claims that had grown out of the raiding activities of the Alabama and other ships which British shipyards had built for the Confederacy.

In financial circles there was a controversy over what to do about the greenback dollars issued during the war. Since greenbacks were not backed by gold, people had saved the more valuable gold dollars and spent the less valu-

---

**THE ELECTION OF 1876**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Popular Vote</th>
<th>Electoral Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Republican</td>
<td>Hayes</td>
<td>4,036,572</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democrat</td>
<td>Tilden</td>
<td>4,284,020</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Candidates</td>
<td>93,895</td>
<td>None</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
able greenback dollars, thus driving gold out of circulation. The government was willing to give gold for greenbacks even though such a policy would tend to increase the value of the dollar. Debtor interests (such as farmers), who wanted a cheap dollar, fought hard against the policy of redemption, but the policy was adopted in 1875.

In politics, public confidence in the government was shaken by a series of disclosures concerning government corruption. In 1872 it was revealed that several congressmen had accepted gifts of stock in a construction company, the Crédit Mobilier, which was found to be diverting the funds of the Union Pacific Railroad—including the funds the government had granted to it—with the knowledge of the officers of the road. In 1875 Grant’s private secretary was implicated in the operations of the “Whiskey Ring,” which, by evading taxes, had systematically defrauded the government of millions of dollars. The following year, the Secretary of War was caught selling appointments to Indian posts. Meanwhile, in the New York City government, the Tweed Ring, headed by Tammany boss William Marcy Tweed, was exposed as guilty of graft and thefts that have seldom been equaled in size and have never been surpassed in effrontery.

The epidemic of corruption inspired a revolt by reform Republicans, who bolted the party in 1872, organized the Liberal Republican party, and nominated Horace Greeley, editor of the New York Tribune, for President. Although the Democrats also nominated Greeley and formed a coalition with the Liberal Republicans, Grant easily won reelection because most
Northern voters were not yet prepared to trust the Democrats.

In the economic orbit, the country was trying to weather the financial depression that began with the panic of 1873. All in all, the problems posed by the South and the blacks seemed more and more distant, less and less important, to the people of the North.

**The Hayes-Tilden Election of 1876**

The election of 1876 brought to an end the program of Reconstruction, which probably would have ended soon in any case. In this election the Republicans, who were badly divided, turned to a Civil War veteran and governor of Ohio, Rutherford B. Hayes, as their nominee. Hayes was a conspicuously honest man, and so was his Democratic opponent, Samuel J. Tilden of New York, who owed his reputation to his part in breaking up the Tweed Ring.

When the votes were counted, Tilden had a popular majority (obtained partly by the suppression of black votes in some Southern states) and was within one vote of an electoral majority. But there were three states—Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina—in which the result was contested, and two sets of returns were filed by rival officials. To count the votes in such a case, the Constitution calls for a joint session of the Congress. But the House of Representatives, with a Democratic majority, was in a position to prevent an election by refusing to go into joint session with the Senate. Congress agreed to appoint an Electoral Commission to provide an impartial judgment, but the commission divided along party lines, voting eight to seven for Hayes. As late as two days before the inauguration it was doubtful whether the Democrats in the House would accept the decision.

Many Northern Democrats were prepared to fight to a finish against what they regarded as a stolen election, but the Southern Democrats had found that one civil war was enough. Moreover, various negotiations had been in progress behind the scenes. Important groups of Southern Democrats who had been left out when the government largesse of the Union Pacific-Central Pacific was distributed now hoped for a Texas and Pacific Railroad that would provide bountiful federal grants for Southern interests. They received assurances from friends of Governor Hayes that he would look with favor upon such programs of internal improvement. Moreover, they were assured that he would withdraw the last remaining federal troops from Louisiana and South Carolina, which meant that their Republican governments would collapse and the score of states would be: redeemed, eleven; reconstructed, none.

With these understandings, Southern congressmen voted to let the count proceed so that Hayes would be elected. Later, when they were explaining their conduct to their constituents, they thought it best to say quite a great deal about how they had ransomed South Carolina and Louisiana and very little about their hopes for the Texas and Pacific Railroad and other such enterprises. Thus a legend grew up that there had been a “compromise” by which Reconstruction was ended.

What had really happened was that Southern Democrats and Northern Republicans had discovered that there were many features of economic policy on which they were in close harmony. The slaves were emancipated, the Union was restored, and bygones were bygones. The harmony of their views made reconciliation natural and Reconstruction unnecessary. There was still the question of the blacks, but only a few whites had ever supported black suffrage or racial equality for its own sake. It had been an expedient, and now that the expedient was no longer needed, it could be laid aside. Such was the spirit of reconciliation.
Thus, the country ended a period of intense friction and entered upon a long era of sectional harmony and rapid economic growth. But this was done at the expense of leaving the question of racial relations still unattended to, even though slavery itself had, at immense cost, been removed.