

Unit by U.S. History Teachers in Chicago Public Schools, part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project*
Education Network

PBS Reconstruction: After the Civil War

Video Guide

Episode I

Episode 1 Background

The aftermath of the Civil War was bewildering, exhilarating...and terrifying. African Americans had played a crucial role in saving the Union and now, as the country grappled with the terms and implications of Reconstruction, they struggled to breathe life into their hard-won freedom. The result was a second American Revolution.

[Reconstruction - Part 1 Video](#)

Additional Info

Post-Civil War America was a new world. For African Americans, living in the former Confederacy, Reconstruction was what historian W. E. B. Du Bois once described it as their “brief moment in the sun.” Clothed with citizenship and voting rights, now for the first time they could begin to take charge of their own lives, families, and communities – the future seemed limitless. The first black men took seats in the U.S. Congress, in Southern state governments, and on juries; black colleges opened and the Southern states’ first public school systems were organized; newly created black institutions, from churches to mutual aid societies to the Fisk Jubilee Singers, began to flourish; and black families began buying land to farm and opened businesses to achieve a measure of independence from their former masters. But the progress did not last long. White reactionaries in the former Confederacy launched violent attacks to “redeem” their states, to re-establish the old order – a society built on white supremacy.

Over time, Northern support for Reconstruction and military intervention in the South faded, especially with the onset of a tumultuous economic depression in 1873 that led voters to cast ballots for the rival party the following year, leaving Democrats in control of Congress for the first time since the Civil War. By the 1876 Presidential election, both leading candidates – Democrat and Republican – pledged to bring an end to Reconstruction. Following a violent campaign and protracted electoral dispute, the incoming president, Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, made good on his promise to let Southern states control their own affairs. The South had been “redeemed” and the forces of white supremacy were ascendant.

Unit by U.S. History Teachers in Chicago Public Schools, part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project*
Education Network

Notes from Lecture:

--

Answer the Documentary Questions Below

1. What is Reconstruction?	
2. Did Lee, the General of the Southern army, believe he truly lost the war? Why is this important in Reconstruction?	
3. The 13 th Amendment abolished slavery. What legal and moral dilemmas did this lead to?	
4. The Black man's party stood for what at this time?	
5. What was the purpose of the Freedmen's Bureau?	
6. What did Johnson's plan of Reconstruction include? How did he pardon wealthy, powerful Southern planters? By doing this, how did the previously enslaved people remain enslaved?	
7. According to Reconstruction experts, what is the deepest legacy of slavery?	

Unit by U.S. History Teachers in Chicago Public Schools, part of the 2021 cohort of *The 1619 Project*
Education Network

8. Which state was the first state to pass Black Codes? What was their purpose?	
9. What was the purpose of The Civil Rights Act of 1866?	
10. How difficult was it for African American men to vote? What tactics did they use to get their ballots in?	

Debrief Questions:

1. How does this new information about the time period after the Civil War contribute to your understanding of the development of American democracy? Please explain in 4-5 sentences.
2. Could democracy be realized for all groups of people immediately following the Civil War? Why or why not? Please explain in 4-5 sentences.