

## Reconstruction Lesson 2: *Content Vocabulary*

**Radical Republican** – a Republican who believed that Congress should direct Reconstruction

**Ku Klux Klan** – a secret organization of white men formed after the Civil War that used violence against African Americans

**Carpetbaggers** – a Northerner in the South working for a Reconstruction government

**Scalawag** – a white Southerner who supported reconstruction

**Compulsory** – required

### Lesson 2

## Congressional Reconstruction

*It matters because-* In the final years of Reconstruction, Southerners were forced to accept new leaders and new political freedoms for African Americans. Many white Texans, like other white Southerners, tried to resist these changes.

### Congress Takes Control

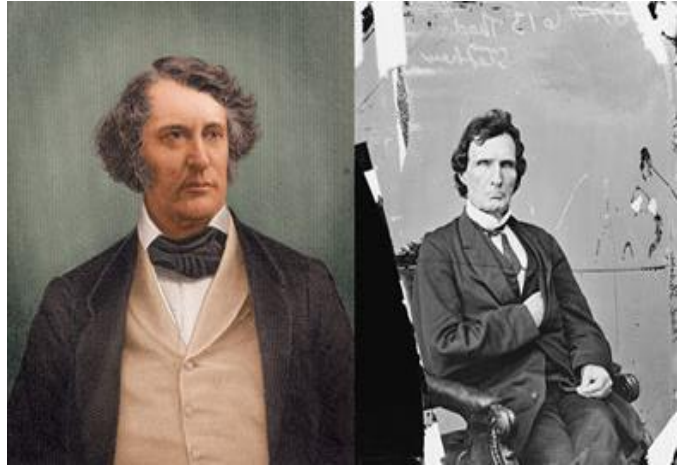
*How and why did Congress take control of Reconstruction from the president?*

Because the Southern states had seceded from the Union, many Northern leaders insisted that they had to reapply for admission to the Union. Since the U.S. Constitution gives Congress the power to admit new states, they argued that Congress, not the president, should control Reconstruction. This argument grew stronger when President Johnson's Reconstruction program produced few changes in the South.

Almost everywhere in the South, former Confederate officials and army officers filled top state government posts. Every Texan elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1866 had been either a secessionist or a Confederate army officer. The Texas legislature sent Oran Roberts, president of the Texas Secession Convention of 1861, to represent Texas in the U.S. Senate. The election of ex-Confederates angered the Northerners in Congress. They refused to seat most of these Southern senators and representatives.

## Radical Republicans Take Charge

The South's defiance of federal control, especially in their choices of political leaders and the enactment of the black codes, led many Northerners to attack President Johnson's Reconstruction plan for being too easy on the South. These acts of the former Confederate states strengthened a group of Republicans in Congress, known as the **Radical Republicans**. They wanted much tougher requirements for the Southern states to rejoin the Union.



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Senator Charles Sumner (left) of Massachusetts led the Radical Republicans in the U.S. Senate. Representative Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania led the Radical Republicans in the House of Representatives. Both championed giving rights to freed people.

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The Radical Republicans also wanted to protect the rights of freed people and to reshape Southern society.

Many of these Republicans cared about the freed people. They also realized that protecting the rights of freed people would help the Republican Party stay in power. Freed people who had the right to vote would likely vote for Republicans.

## President Johnson Resists Radical Republicans

President Johnson did not want to give up control of Reconstruction. He also believed that some measures Congress passed to protect freed people were unnecessary and unconstitutional. As a result, he vetoed them.

In late 1866, however, the congressional elections gave the Radical Republicans two-thirds control of both houses of Congress. With the power to override any veto, they launched their own Reconstruction plan.

## Radical Reconstruction Begins

*How did Congressional Reconstruction in Texas differ from Presidential Reconstruction?*

The Radical Republicans' plan for Reconstruction, also known as the Congressional Reconstruction plan, was harsher than the plans of presidents Lincoln and Johnson. The congressional plan declared that the existing governments in the South were illegal. In March 1867, Congress divided the South into five military districts and put an army general in charge of each. Texas and Louisiana made up the Fifth District, which was controlled by General Philip Sheridan.

Under Congress's Reconstruction plan, the military would rule the districts until the states met certain requirements. The Southern states had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Some states, including Texas, were also required to ratify the Fifteenth Amendment. This amendment guaranteed African American men the right to vote. States had to write new constitutions that gave African American men the right to vote and to hold public office. They also had to repeal their black codes.



Finally, Congress required many white Southerners to take what was called the Ironclad Oath. The oath pledged that the individual had not voluntarily served in the Confederate army or aided the Confederacy. This oath kept many white Southerners, including thousands in Texas, from voting, serving on juries, or holding public office.

### **Military Reconstruction in Texas**

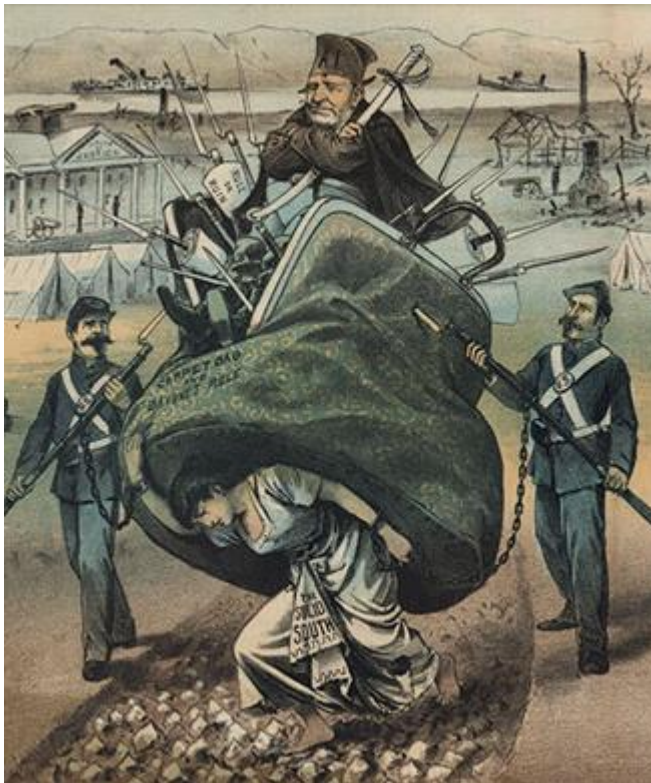
When General Sheridan took charge of the Fifth District, he assigned control over Texas to General Charles Griffin. Congress gave both generals authority over all state and local officials in Texas, including Governor Throckmorton.

Griffin used the army and the Freedmen's Bureau to register male freedmen to vote across the state. He also removed thousands of white, former Confederates from the voting rolls. When

Governor Throckmorton complained to President Johnson, Sheridan removed Throckmorton as governor and replaced him with former Texas governor and Unionist Elisha Pease. Griffin removed hundreds of other state and local officials who were viewed as opponents to Reconstruction. These officials were replaced by Republicans. Griffin then scheduled an election to select delegates to another constitutional convention.

## African Americans Exercise Their Rights

African Americans were determined to exercise the right to vote. In almost every Texas county, freedmen worked to register other freedmen to vote. By 1868, nearly 50,000 freedmen had been registered. This figure represented nearly one-half of all Texas voters. The Freedmen's Bureau and an organization called the Union League held meetings to help new voters learn about voting and citizenship. African Americans led many of these meetings.



Some white Texans tried to prevent the freedmen from exercising their rights. Some whites joined an organization called the **Ku Klux Klan** (KKK). The Klan was founded in Tennessee in 1866. By 1868, it had spread to Texas. The Klan used violence and terror in an effort to block Reconstruction and to prevent African Americans from voting. Wearing hoods to hide their identities, members of the Klan threatened and attacked freedmen and Freedmen's Bureau workers and teachers. They also attacked two other groups called carpetbaggers and scalawags. **Carpetbaggers** were Northerners who moved to the South with little more than what they could carry in carpetbags, or suitcases. Scalawags were white Southerners who supported Reconstruction.

Most Klan violence took place in northeast Texas. People were beaten, shot, and murdered. Homes, schools, and crops were burned. The army had little success in stopping the terror.

## Writing a New Constitution

In 1868 Texans elected delegates to a new constitutional convention. This election was an opportunity for many of the freedmen who had registered to vote to exercise their right to vote for the first time. Republicans won 78 of 90 seats. Ten of those delegates were African Americans.



In February 1869, the convention completed its work. The Constitution of 1869 declared that no one could be prevented from voting because of race or color. It gave freedmen the rights to hold office and to attend public schools. It also strengthened public education, increased the governor's power, and protected public lands.

In December of that year, Texas voters approved this constitution and elected a new governor and other state officials. Eleven African Americans were elected to the state legislature.

## **Texas Rejoins the Union**

The Radical Republicans' candidate for Texas governor, Edmund J. Davis, won the 1869 election. Radical Republicans also controlled the new state legislature, which quickly ratified the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments. Texas now had met all the Reconstruction requirements set by Congress. On March 30, 1870, President Ulysses S. Grant signed an act declaring that Congressional Reconstruction in Texas was ended.



## The End of Reconstruction

*How did Reconstruction in Texas come to an end?*

Reconstruction in Texas officially ceased in March 1870. However, many white Texans believed it would not truly end as long as Radical Republicans remained in power.

## **The Republicans in Charge**

Governor Davis exercised great power while in office. He and the legislature improved Texas roads and set up a system of state-controlled free public schools; the schools, for both African American and white children, had compulsory attendance. A state police force was created and placed under Davis's control. Davis claimed that the state police were needed to maintain law and order. Opponents, however, claimed that the state police were used to threaten anyone who opposed the governor.

Government spending increased to fund these new policies, resulting in higher taxes. In 1865 Texans had paid 15 cents on every \$100 worth of property. By 1872, the tax rate had increased to more than \$2. Many Texans protested the higher taxes, and many white Texans also disliked the state police. Most of the officers were Republicans, and some were African Americans and Tejanos. Some white Texans resented that these officers had authority over them.

## **Freed People During Reconstruction**

After the Civil War, most freed people continued to live in rural areas. Many continued to work for white landowners, but many others set out to own their own land. They formed hundreds of small communities along creek and river bottoms, in wilderness areas, and on other unused land. The first buildings that arose in most settlements were a church and a school.

Other freed people settled near towns, taking jobs in the homes and businesses of white Texans. However, some freed people started successful businesses of their own, and others worked on ranches or in the state's lumber industry.

For the nearly 25,000 Tejanos of Texas, Reconstruction changed nothing. They remained mostly along the Rio Grande and were culturally and geographically removed from events in the rest of the state.

## **The Democrats Regain Control**

In 1872 Democrats won a majority of the seats in the state legislature. They immediately took steps to reduce the governor's power, and they abolished the state police force.

In the election for governor in 1873, Davis ran for reelection against Democrat Richard Coke, a former Confederate army officer from Waco. The campaign was bitter. Davis focused on the programs he had begun. Coke talked about overthrowing the Republicans and returning Texas to the days before Radical Reconstruction. Some Democrats used threats and violence to keep freedmen from the polls. Coke easily won the election, and Democrats won all other state offices.

Some Republicans, contending that the election had been unfair, appealed to the Texas Supreme Court. When the Court nullified the election results, Davis refused to step down. Democrats were determined to put Coke in office and remove Davis by force. Davis telegraphed President Grant to send troops to keep him in power. When Grant refused, Davis ended a tense, four-day standoff by resigning on January 19, 1874. Republican control of Texas was over. The Democrats would control Texas state government for the next 105 years.

