

# The reconstruction era



Courtney Gehring

The Reconstruction Era followed the abolishment of slavery and gave hope to reconnect families and become political, social, and economic equals with the white men who once enslaved them. Sadly, this was all false hope. The freedmen and freedwomen in the South became sucked back into a slavery by a different name type of servitude for the same plantation owners that once owned them with no hope of becoming an equal.

During the time of Reconstruction there were three phases of reform, presidential, congressional, and radical. Presidential Reconstruction was led by President Johnson after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Johnson followed the same Reconstruction Plan that Lincoln had laid out: return all confiscated property, political rights to all except for the highest ranking Confederate soldiers, pardon the South on all wrongdoing, and to readmit states with 10% of its voting public. <sup>[1]</sup> Congressional Reconstruction began with the authorization of the Freedman's Bureau. This bureau was established to help and aid the freedmen after the war. Congress also nullified the Black Codes which Southern states put into law after the war to restrict African American rights and force them to work for low wages and in debt. <sup>[2]</sup> Although the Black Codes were nullified, the South created the Jim Crow laws which reenacted many of the same laws as the Black Codes and didn't officially disappear until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. The last phase of Reconstruction was the Radical Reconstruction. During this time, radicals were elected into power. Due to this, Union troops were sent into the South to help protect the freedmen and to help keep the peace. All freedmen could legally register to vote as the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed <https://assignbuster.com/the-reconstruction-era/>

granting African American males suffrage as it would provide them a voice and supply the freedmen with the best opportunity to fight against the “oppressive class-legislation, as well as against individual persecution”. [3] During this Radical Reconstruction, 400 freedmen were elected into higher office and 16 freedmen were elected into Congress.

Former slave owners became infuriated by African Americans in political offices and as a result founded the Ku Klux Klan and eradicated the Southern GOP coalition. They accomplished this by accusing the carpetbaggers and poor white southerners, of having relations with freedwomen as interracial relations were illegal at this time and heavily looked down on in society. The former slave owners also convinced the poor white southerners that the freedmen were taking resources from them. Also talked them into putting racial needs before economical needs when voting. The Ku Klux Klan increased violence to discourage freedmen from voting. Another way to prevent freedmen from voting was by imposing poll taxes and by enforcing that the voter needs to know the State Constitution before they can register to vote. [4]

The Southern economy was thrown into confusion by the end of the way and the former slave owners now needed to re-establish a work force and the freedmen needed jobs as the government failed to provide them with an economical plan. This complication led to sharecropping, in which freedmen would rent a place to live from the plantation owner and would work for them and in return the freedmen get to keep a portion of the crops they grow. [5] This forced the freedmen and women into a never ending cycle of

debt as they do not have the money to pay for rent, their own tools, or for their own food; this prevented them from obtaining any economic equality or freedom. The Southerners have endorsed a racial and gender hierarchy in the South. At the top are the wealthy white men and the wealthy white women, then the poor white men and poor white women, and at the bottom are the black men and black women. This hierarchy helps to prevent a Radical Reconstruction from happening again as the freedmen and freedwomen have learned their place in southern society and possess no political or economic power.

With the 1876 Presidential Election closing in, the Republican Presidential candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, promised the Democratic House of Representatives to remove the troops in the South. Hayes promised to do this in order to win the election with the help of the South. He truly didn't care about the South and the freedmen, Hayes cared more about the industrial revolution in the North. This became the official end of the Reconstruction Era in the United States.

Question 2:

From the late 1870's until the early 1930's there had been a massive struggle between the farmers/laborers and the big businesses of the U. S. Most businesses demanded long hours and paid their workers pennies. The workers also had to endure small cramped workspaces overfilled with people and machines. Most businesses were dirty with smoke filled air and unsanitary conditions. Many families made so little that everyone, including children, had to work. For example, at the Hickory Colliery in Pennsylvania, it

was very common for boys who worked in the mines for \$1-\$3 a week, to end up being indebted to the company by the end of the month as he had to pay more to get to work than he got paid for the work he actually did. [6]

Farmers, the original backbone to the economy, were now at the mercy of big corporations as well. They felt as though corporations were chipping away at their profit as they had no control of larger necessities they needed to make a living out of farming. Businesses like equipment dealers now controlled item costs such as harvesters and plows while other businesses like the railroads and grain elevators could charge them more to move and store their crops. This caused farmers who were already in debt from the war to lose even more money.

The first major attempt to organize workers on a national scale was the Knights of Labor in 1869. Originally a secret organization created by garment factory workers, the Knights of Labor became open to all workers, which included women, African Americans, and farmers. The Knights grew slowly until after the massive railroad strike in 1885 against Jay Gould, when workers walked out on the job due to pay cuts. [7] Within a year, 500, 000 more people joined. The Knights of labor took a political stand as they sought an eight-hour work day, the elimination of child labor, better sanitary conditions, higher wages to match their hard work, and other reforms. The Knights of Labor fell apart after a violent incident in the Haymarket Square in Chicago. Local anarchists got together for a protest meeting to discuss the strike at the McCormick Harvester Company, but soon police showed up to

disband the meeting causing someone to throw a bomb that killed multiple policemen. [8]

Despite the fall of the Knights of Labor, the labor movement continued and was taken over by the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Unlike the Knights of Labor, the AFL, under Samuel Gompers, only supported skilled workers. Gompers' key goals were similar to the Knights of Labor's as they wanted increased wages, reducing working hours and improved working conditions. Gompers helped the labor movement to turn away from the socialist ideals that earlier labor groups had embraced, and turned it into an apolitical movement.

George Pullman, founder and president of the Pullman Palace Car Company, required his workers live in Pullman City and pay him rent to live there. Due to the depression at the time, Pullman cut workers' pay while still expecting the workers to pay the same price as before in rent. Three thousands of Pullman's workers went on a wildcat strike. A majority of the workers on strike belonged to the American Railroad Union (ARU), which was founded by Eugene Debs. Debs, a railroad fireman, created the union as he witnessed the poor working conditions of fellow railroad workers. The men all worked for low wages and some became injured or killed because of unsafe equipment. As a result of the cut wages, ARU members refused to let any train with a Pullman car to move. Hordes of ARU supporters wanted to aid in the strike and began stopping trains. Quickly, there was no trains moving west of Chicago. Railroad companies tried spreading lies about Deb and the ARU. This only angered strikers. and Many of those supporting the strike stopped trains, smashed switches, and started to set fire to whatever would <https://assignbuster.com/the-reconstruction-era/>

burn. Another crowd of rioters stopped soldiers accompanying a train. This caused a lot of casualties and well as people injured from bullets. Soon President Cleveland sent in Federal troops to put an end to the strike. This is a major part of history as it was the first time the federal army was sent in to break up a strike.

The most belligerent union of the labor movement was the International Workers of the World (IWW). They represented a more radical approach to the unions and they supported the Marxist class struggle. <sup>[9]</sup> It formed from a mixture of smaller unions fighting for better working conditions out west in the mining industry. The IWW, or Wobblies, gained notability from the Colorado Mine Clashes of 1903. The major issue in Colorado was the fight over the eight-hour workday. The Legislature had passed a statute limiting the workday to eight hours in hazardous industries, such as mining and smelting. But, the Colorado Supreme Court declared it unconstitutional. Voters of Colorado passed a vote to approve the eight-hour workday, but the smelter owners fought any efforts to pass it. This led to the smelters going on strike. At first it appeared that they were going to win their demands without a fight, but then one of the smelter operators refused the deal given to them by the Governor of Colorado. The Governor that called in the National Guard who began arresting union leaders and strikers. The violence escalated after a mine exploded on November 21, 1903, which killed a superintendent and a foreman. The commanding officer of the National Guard announced a vagrancy order, it required the strikers to go back to work or be deported from the district. The IWW continued on to help fight for more rights in places like textile mills of Massachusetts, railcar builders in

Pennsylvania, and rubber workers in Ohio. <sup>[10]</sup> Sadly, the greatest motivation for action against the IWW was their success in organizing industries, who were crucial to the war effort, in their call for work stoppages in the midst of the war, and their refusal to stop strikes during the war time. Many of the IWW leaders were arrested under the Espionage Act.

Originally the government did not intervene in these ongoing struggles between the working class and the big corporations as the government was in support of a Laissez Faire style economy. The workers were allowed to strike peacefully as it is a first amendment freedom. Most businesses and factories ignored the workers on strike and instead hired new immigrants off the boats to work in their factories as unskilled laborers. Many companies also would deny workers the ability to become members of unions as a way of forcing their ideas that companies control who they fire, who they hire, and what they chose to pay. <sup>[11]</sup>

A tremendous amount of reform was accomplished at the local and state level. In the tristate area, Progressives attempted to find a middle ground between the big businesses and the working class and created the NY/NJ Port Authority. This was created as a private public service to help regulate the tolls and fees when crossing between New York and New Jersey.

Although the government did enact the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890, it did not accomplish much as many companies avoided the law by converting their monopolies into holding companies. Congress also passed the Pure Food and Drug Act and created the Food and Drug Administration in 1906 to improve food and medicine safety for the public. This came after Upton



Sinclair's book, *The Jungle*, which highlighted that due to lack of government policies, the meat packing industry was packaging and selling rotten meat to the consumer as well as how dirty the facilities was as the owners only cared to make money. <sup>[12]</sup> While president, Wilson in 1912, created the national banking system. He also prohibited unfair business practices and outlawed full time employment of children under the age of 16. In the midst of entering World War I, the War Industry Board redirected industry in America to help produce and provide necessities for the war. In doing this, the board granted higher wages, eight hour workdays, and minimum wage to the workers. <sup>[13]</sup>

During the 1920's, President Coolidge raised international tariffs and gave big businesses tax cuts. He hoped that by giving businesses tax breaks that they would use to money to create more jobs in order to help encourage people of the working class to buy more. Sadly, most businesses created a few jobs and pocketed the rest of the money they saved from the tax cuts. At this time, U. S. businesses had learned how to use better technology in order to increase productivity. Unfortunately, they needed more of a demand for the amount of products they were producing. Government and businesses at this time introduce credit as a way to help stimulate the economy while engulfing people in consumerism. Companies, like Listerine, created ads targeted at everyday insecurities to convince more of the public that they needed their product. <sup>[14]</sup>

Question 3:

On November 2, 1920 women were first able to legally vote in a presidential election. Women and activists have fought for woman's suffrage for over a century and finally, in August of 1920, the women of the United States won suffrage and were finally granted equality in the public sphere. Women have fought to leave the private sphere of the home and enter into the politics of the public sphere through the practice of maternalism, also known as public mothering. Women, such as Jane Addams and other upper class women, used the male's idea that women belong in the home as a way to gain access into the public sphere. Maternalism was women's way of participating in politics by using their natural maternal talent as mothers such as cleaning, looking after others, and providing care. <sup>[15]</sup>

Men, like Theodore Roosevelt, believed that women belong in the home as a housewife and focus on raising the children. <sup>[16]</sup> Women agreed with this male ideal that they belonged in the private sphere, but as a mother they would be good at government housekeeping as politics were a mess at the time. Cities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century ran on corruption and that created dirty politics. Chicago itself was literally dirty, skies filled with smoke and dirt while the streets piled up with garbage and human waste. Jane Addams herself reached out to city hall to develop a public sewer system and reform the system of garbage collecting to help clean up the city. <sup>[17]</sup> Addams also contributed to her social work in Chicago by creating the Hull-House, a settlement house to help the immigrants in the city to teach them English, educate them in how to safely care for their children in cities. Settlement houses started popping up around the country as a safe way to help

immigrants inside of the major cities, and defend this major non-profit as public mothering of the immigrants.

Women also used maternalism to create the Children's Bureau (1912), the first federal agency in the United States. <sup>[18]</sup> Their reasoning behind needing this federal agency was to administer birth certificates to help track of mother and infant mortality rates among the working class. Compared birth certificates and death certificates to produce and show statistics showing the high mortality rate among mothers and infants among the poor. Margaret Sanger, founder of Planned Parenthood, used these statistics to rationalize why they needed to make birth control legal and accessible. Many mothers died from having too many births as they become more dangerous the more women have. Advertised that they needed birth control in order to stay alive and to be a better mother to the children they already had.

Maternalism was exceedingly successful as it got a lot of women out into the public sphere and into politics alongside of the men. Sadly, these reforms mostly only reached out to the local and state levels. The biggest downside of maternalism was that women had to agree with men and admit that they belonged in the private sphere of the home. In other terms, these women said they know that women are not equal to men. In many ways, maternalism can be seen a big success for what they accomplished but also as a failure as they reinforced the idea that women are not equal.

## Bibliography

Addams, Jane. *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes*. 1910.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-reconstruction-era/>

*Advertisement for Listerine* . 1923.

Baruch, Bernard M. *American Industry in the War: A Report of the War Industries Board* . Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1921.

Henretta, James A., and Rebecca Edwards, and Robert O. Self. *America's History 7th ed* . Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011.

*Laws of Mississippi* . 1865.

*On Child Labor* . Labor Standard, 1877.

Roosevelt, Theodore. *The Strenuous Life* . New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1919.

Thorpe, Francis N., ed. *The Federal and State Constitutions... of the United States* . Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1909.

U. S. Congress, Senate. 39th Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess. Washington, D. C.: 1865.

U. S. Strike Commission. *Report on the Chicago Strike of June-July, 1894 ...*  
Senate, Executive Document No. 7, 53<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session. Washington,  
D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1895.

---

[1] James A. Henretta, and Rebecca Edwards, and Robert O. Self, *America's History 7th ed*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011), 464.

[2] *Laws of Mississippi* , 1865, 82.

[3] U. S. Congress, Senate, 39th Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1865, ex. doc. No. 2, 1-5, 8, 36-39, 41-44.

[4] Francis N. Thorpe, ed., *The Federal and State Constitutions... of the United States* (Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1909), 4: 2120-2121.

[5] Henretta, *America's History 7th ed.* , 476.

[6] *On Child Labor* (Labor Standard, 1877).

[7] Henretta, *America's History 7th ed.*, 551.

[8] *Ibid.*, 552.

[9] *Ibid.*, 644.

[10] *Ibid.*, 644.

[11] U. S. Strike Commission, *Report on the Chicago Strike of June-July, 1894* ...Senate, Executive Document No. 7, 53<sup>rd</sup> Congress, 3<sup>rd</sup> Session (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1895), 621-622.

[12] Henretta, *America's History 7th ed.* , 610.

[13] Bernard M. Baruch, *American Industry in the War: A Report of the War Industries Board* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1921), 65-67, 69, 100.

[14] *Advertisement for Listerine* (1923).

<https://assignbuster.com/the-reconstruction-era/>

[15] Henretta, *America's History 7th ed.* , 572.

[16] Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life* (New York: Review of Reviews Company, 1919), 3-22.

[17] Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes* (1910), 200-204.

[18] Henretta, *America's History 7th ed.* , 640.