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| <p><b>Reconstruction Begins</b><br/>After the Civil War ended in 1865, the U.S. government faced the problem of dealing with the defeated southern states. The challenges of <b>Reconstruction, the process of readmitting the former Confederate states to the Union.</b> lasted from 1865 to 1877.</p> <p><b>Damaged South</b><br/>Tired southern soldiers returned home to find that the world they had known before the war was gone. Cities, towns, and farms had been ruined. Because of high food prices and widespread crop failures, many southerners faced starvation. The Confederate money held by most southerners was now worthless. Banks failed, and merchants had gone bankrupt because people could not pay their debts.</p> <p>Former Confederate general Braxton Bragg was one of many southerners who faced economic hardship. He found that “<i>all, all</i> was lost, except my debts.” In South Carolina, Mary Boykin Chesnut wrote in her diary about the isolation she experienced after the war. “We are shut in here.... All RR’s [railroads] destroyed—bridges gone. We are cut off from the world.”</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Lincoln’s Plan</b><br/>President Abraham Lincoln wanted to reunite the nation as quickly and painlessly as possible. He had proposed a plan for readmitting the southern states even before the war ended. Called the <b>Ten Percent Plan, it offered southerners amnesty, or official pardon, for all illegal acts supporting the rebellion.</b> To receive amnesty, southerners had to do two things. They had to swear an oath of loyalty to the United States. They also had to agree that slavery was illegal. Once 10 percent of voters in a state made these pledges, they could form a new government. The state then could be readmitted to the Union.</p> <p>Louisiana quickly elected a new state legislature under the Ten Percent Plan. Other southern states that had been occupied by Union troops soon followed Louisiana back into the United States.</p>   |  |
| <p><b>Wade-Davis Bill</b><br/>Some politicians argued that Congress, not the president, should control the southern states’ return to the Union. They believed that Congress had the power to admit new states. Also, many Republican members of Congress thought the Ten Percent Plan did not go far enough. A senator from Michigan expressed their views.</p> <p>“The people of the North are not such fools as to... turn around and say to the traitors, all you have to do [to return] is...take an oath that henceforth you will be true to the Government.” – Senator Jacob Howard, quoted in <i>Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–</i></p> <p>Two Republicans—Senator Benjamin Wade and Representative Henry Davis—had an alternative to Lincoln’s plan. Following <b>procedure</b> of the Wade-Davis bill, a state had to meet two conditions before it could rejoin the Union. First, it had to ban slavery. Second, a majority of adult males in the state had to take the loyalty oath.</p> <p>Under the Wade-Davis bill, only southerners who swore that they had never supported the Confederacy could vote or hold office. In general, the bill was much stricter than the Ten Percent Plan. Its provisions would make it harder for southern states to rejoin the</p> |  |

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| <p>Union quickly.</p> <p>President Lincoln therefore refused to sign the bill into law. He thought that few southern states would agree to meet its requirements. He believed that his plan would help restore order more quickly.</p>  |  |
| <p><b>Freedom for African Americans</b></p> <p>One thing Republicans agreed on was abolishing slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation had freed slaves only in areas that had not been occupied by Union forces, not in the border states. Many people feared that the federal courts might someday declare the proclamation unconstitutional.</p> <p><b>Slavery Ends</b></p> <p>On January 31, 1865, at President Lincoln’s urging, Congress proposed the <b>Thirteenth Amendment</b>. <b>This amendment made slavery illegal throughout the United States.</b></p> <p>The amendment was ratified and took effect on December 18, 1865. When abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison heard the news, he declared that his work was now finished. He called for the American Anti-Slavery Society to break up. Not all abolitionists agreed that their work was done, however. Frederick Douglass insisted that “slavery is not abolished until the black man has the ballot [vote].”</p> <p>Freedom brought important changes to newly freed slaves. Many couples held ceremonies to legalize marriages that had not been recognized under slavery. Many freedpeople searched for relatives who had been sold away from their families years earlier. Others placed newspaper ads seeking information about their children. Many women began to work at home instead of in the fields. Still others adopted children of dead relatives to keep families together. Church members established voluntary associations and mutualaid societies to help those in need.</p> <p>Now that they could travel without a pass, many freedpeople moved from mostly white counties to places with more African Americans. Other freedpeople traveled simply to test their new freedom of movement. A South Carolina woman explained this need. “I must go, if I stay here I’ll never know I’m free.”</p> <p>For most former slaves, freedom to travel was just the first step on a long road toward equal rights and new ways of life. Adults took new last names and began to insist on being called Mr. or Mrs. as a sign of respect, rather than by their first names or by nicknames. Freedpeople began to demand the same economic and political rights as white citizens. Henry Adams, a former slave, argued that “if I cannot do like a white man I am not free.”</p> |  |
| <p><b>Forty Acres to Farm?</b></p> <p>Many former slaves wanted their own land to farm. Near the end of the Civil War, Union general William Tecumseh Sherman had issued an order to break up plantations in coastal South Carolina and Georgia. He wanted to divide the land into 40-acre plots and give them to former slaves as compensation for their forced labor before the war.</p> <p>Many white planters refused to surrender their land. Some freedpeople pointed out that it was only fair that they receive some of this land because their labor had made the plantations prosper. In the end, the U.S. government returned the land to its original owners. At this time, many freedpeople were unsure about where they would live, what kind of work they would do, and what rights they had. Many freedoms that were theirs by law were difficult to enforce.</p>   |  |