

Johnson's Plan for Reconstruction

Freedmen's Bureau

After the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, a southern democrat, became the 17th president of the United States. His plan for reconstruction was for southern states to be admitted back into the Union as quickly as possible. Johnson's plan required states to end slavery by passing 13th amendment, declaring that **secession** (*to leave the Union*) was illegal and cancelling all war debts. For adult white males to be able to vote again, they would have to pledge an oath of **allegiance** (*loyalty*) to the United States. To lead Texas through this process, Johnson appointed Andrew J. Hamilton as the temporary governor of Texas. His job was to implement the provisions of Reconstruction and to organize a group of delegates to begin writing a new constitution. Reconstruction in Texas would not be as easy as Johnson's plan sounded, and it would eventually lead to his impeachment and the increased power of the "Radical Republicans."

Commonly called the Freedmen's Bureau, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was created by the U.S. Congress to help former slaves adjust to the transition from slavery to freedom. The Bureau opened its doors in Texas in September of 1865. The agency provided food, shelter, and medicine to former Texas slaves. It focused primarily on helping blacks get jobs. This was a difficult task for those working for the Freedmen's Bureau. Since most whites did not believe that former slaves should be treated as equals many times agents were threatened or killed. One aspect of the Freedmen's Bureau that was successful was the creation of schools for black children. Even though they did not receive much funding, over 100 schools were built in Texas during this time.

Ranches in Texas and the Chisholm Trail

Railroads

During the Civil War, Texas cattle herds were ignored and most cattle ran wild on the open range. This resulted in a large number of unclaimed cattle in Texas, specifically longhorns. When the war was over Texans were looking for a steady income and there was a great demand in the Northeast for beef. Texans realized if they could get these cattle to the railroad to be shipped to market, they could make a lot of money. In 1867, ranchers began rounding up cattle and driving them to Abilene on the Chisholm Trail. For almost two decades, hundreds of thousands of cattle would be sold in Abilene as well as in other markets like Cheyenne, Wyoming, and Dodge City, Kansas. Ranching and cattle drives would provide a steady income for Texans, especially African and Mexican Texans who had a difficult time finding jobs in other industries. It would also become part of the character of Texas.

Transportation in early Texas was not dependable. Most Texas rivers were too shallow or had a tendency to flood during the rainy season, and roads were poor or non-existent. These factors were the reason most of the population of Texas lived along the coast. During Reconstruction, Texas leaders knew that this would have to change for Texas to grow. Between 1850 and 1876, Texas began building railroads across the state. To finance railroads, the state constitution set aside land in the form of **land grants** (*assistance to acquire land*) to be given to companies to build railroads. Cities and counties also gave railroads cash and loans to build tracks through their area. If a railroad stopped in a city or town, it meant jobs, new businesses, and growth. If it did not stop, a town might not be able to survive economically. An example would be the town of Jefferson. By 1870, Jefferson was the sixth largest city in Texas. It was a large, successful cotton trading center that used its water connection (Big Cypress Creek) to transport goods. Jefferson's economic success at the time led its leaders to make the decision not to support a railroad line until the 1880s. This was not a good economic decision by Jefferson. The surrounding towns of Marshall and Dallas which had railroad **junctions** (*a point where roads and railroad tracks meet and a settlement is built*) would prosper whereas Jefferson did not. By the end of 1879, railroad mileage in Texas would be almost 2500 miles and by the 1880s, it would double.

Juneteenth

Freedmen's Towns

On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln **emancipated** (*freed*) the slaves in the United States which included the southern states. Since Texas was part of the Confederacy, they ignored this **proclamation** (*public statement*). After the southern states surrendered, the U.S. government had to go throughout the country to announce that slaves were free. General Gordon Granger arrived in Galveston on Juneteenth 19, 1865, and declared that all slaves were free. Since then, Juneteenth has been celebrated by African Americans in Texas often with church-centered celebrations featuring food and fun with a focus on self-improvement and education. Today, Juneteenth is a state holiday in Texas.

The emancipation of Texas slaves left them with few opportunities after the Civil War. Most slaves lacked an education and opportunities for employment and to buy land. This forced many former slaves to return to the plantations that they had left behind, but some freemen in Texas decided to band together and buy land to create "Freedmen's Towns" and "Freedom Colonies." In these communities, former slaves lived in independence, freedom, and on their own land with the church being the center of the community. These communities were found in all parts of Texas in both urban and rural areas. In Austin, the area known as "Clarksville" was originally a Freedom Colony bought by the slaves owned by Governor Elisha M. Pease. Initially, part of it was given to them by Governor Pease in the hope that they would continue to work for him. The slaveholders in Houston thought the same thing and sold land to their former slaves to keep them there, creating the area known today as the "The Fourth Ward." By the 20th century, this area would be known for its blues and jazz music. Today, these areas no longer exist as black communities but have become part of the cities and counties that had surrounded them.

Ku Klux Klan

Reconstruction Amendments

The Ku Klux Klan was a loosely organized group spreading across the South during the period of Reconstruction. The Ku Klan spread into Texas during 1868. The ideas of the Ku Klux Klan were based on **vigilantism** (*one who takes the law into his own hands*) and opposition to Republican rule. At first their activities consisted of parades, publications in newspapers, and midnight meetings in graveyards, but then they turned to acts of intimidation and murder. These actions were directed at freemen and white Republicans who supported the actions of the Freedmen's Bureau and the ideas of the Radical Republicans. They wanted to keep these people from gaining economic and political power. The actions of the Klan were primarily centered in Northeast Texas from Houston to the Red River. The Klan died down some with the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1871 also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act but it regained strength in Texas after World War I.

At the end of the Civil War, the goal was to reunite the nation by quickly readmitting the southern states into the Union and to rid the nation of slavery. Reconstruction Plans presented by Lincoln, Johnson and the Republicans all stated that states had to adopt the 13th amendment to be readmitted into the Union. The 13th amendment (1865) made slavery illegal in the U.S. It was not until the Radical Republicans refused to admit southern states back into the Union that the southern states, including Texas **ratified** (*approved*) the 13th amendment as well as the 14th amendment (1868) which declared all persons born or naturalized in the United States (except Native Americans) to be citizens. Before Reconstruction came to an end, the Radical Republicans wanted to pass one more amendment that would guarantee all free men the right to vote. This was the 15th amendment (1870). Southern states wanted Reconstruction to come to an end. They along with Texas approved this law but they still found ways to prevent blacks from voting. They would intimidate voters, pass poll taxes, and include voting requirements. It would not be until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that all citizens were guaranteed full voting rights.

Constitution of 1866

Constitution of 1869

President Andrew Johnson's reconstruction plan required southern states to write new state constitutions if they were to be readmitted to the Union. So, in 1866 Texans wrote and approved a new state constitution. It was very similar to the one they used before they decided to **secede** (*leave*) from the Union. There was a major problem, though. It did not ratify the 13th amendment, which abolished slavery, or the 14th Amendment, which granted citizenship to African Americans. **Ratification** (*approval*) of these amendments was a very important step in being readmitted into the Union. The new constitution was not approved by the U.S. Congress. Texans would have to start the process of writing a new state constitution all over again. This time it would be with the help of Radical Republicans in the U.S. Congress who had taken control of Reconstruction. They would decide whether southern states would be readmitted into the Union.

The Constitution of 1869 sparked controversy in Texas. It was a constitution that was forced on Texans by the Radical Republicans who controlled the U.S. Congress. The U.S. Congress had decided to organize the southern states into five military districts. Each district was to hold a convention to frame a new constitution that would **ratify** (*approve*) all males the right to vote and the 14th Amendment which guaranteed citizenship to African Americans. Only then could a state be readmitted to the Union. The constitution took a long time to complete. When finished, it did declare that the U.S. Constitution was the law of the land and it addressed issues about education, law enforcement and terms of office. Most Texans did not agree with this constitution, but they wanted Texas to be readmitted back into the Union and their lives to return to normal. The political abuse of Republican governor Edmund J. Davis left no good feelings about Texas government. With the end of Reconstruction, Texas would write another constitution that limited the power of the governor and removed any political influences of the Radical Republicans.

Black Codes

Native Americans

The newly reconstructed government of Texas under the Johnson Plan agreed to follow the laws of the Union, but they did not support the goals of Reconstruction. In 1866, southern states began to pass laws called "Black Codes" which would define the rights of free blacks and former slaves in society. These laws created a separation between blacks and whites regarding labor, transportation, public facilities, education, and owning land. They also prevented blacks from voting, holding public office, and serving on a jury. The passage of the Black Codes would convince the Republicans in Congress that Texas and other states had not changed and should not be readmitted into the Union. It also made them believe that the southern states should be punished for seceding from the Union. As a result, the Texas Constitution of 1866 was not approved by the U.S. Congress, and Texas was not admitted back into the Union. The ideas of **segregation** (*separation*) would still continue until the 1960s.

With almost two-thirds of the Texas men fighting in the Civil War, the Native Americans in Texas were able to attack settlers and push the frontier line further and further east. These attacks increased during Reconstruction and led the government to take action. Texas requested the U.S. government to send troops to protect the frontier, but the U.S. troops spent most of their time enforcing Reconstruction, and the attacks continued. Comanches and Kiowas were causing most of the problems on the frontier. They were raiding settlements, burning homes, killing settlers, and kidnapping women and small children. At first, the policy of the U.S. government was to not wage war and to deal with the problem by negotiating peace treaties and relocating the Indians to reservations. Neither of these solutions was successful. As Reconstruction came to an end, the U.S. Government would have more soldiers to deal with the Indian problem, and they would deal with it by **exterminating** (*total destruction*) the buffalo and waging war.

Edmund J. Davis



Agriculture



Edmund J. Davis was a Union soldier during the Civil War. He supported the beliefs of the "Radical Republicans" serving in the Constitution Convention of 1866 and 1868-69. In 1869, he was elected governor of Texas in a close race full of corruption and wrongdoing. As governor, he supported a State Police and militia. In fact, the legislature gave him the power to declare **martial law** (*rule by an army instead of elected officials*), which he used often. He did support public education, protecting the frontier, and expanding the rights of blacks. During his administration, twenty-four African Americans were elected to the Texas Legislature. In the end, Davis' programs were referred to as the "Obnoxious Acts." All these issues divided the state. Davis was not reelected in 1874. He lost to Richard Coke, a democrat, but Davis refused to **vacate** (*leave*) the Texas State Capitol barricading himself into his office. He began writing to President Grant to help him maintain his position as governor. President Grant refused, and Richard Coke was sworn in as governor. Edmund J. Davis continued to be active in Republican politics until his death, but a Republican governor was not elected again in Texas until 1979 with the election of Bill Clements.

After the Civil War, Texas soldiers returned home to their families and to their farms but with them came other settlers ready to make Texas their home. Very little of the Civil War was fought in Texas and because of this, Texas was a land of opportunity especially in agriculture. The most important crop in Texas after the Civil War was cotton. With new farming techniques and new technology like the windmill, cotton could be grown in the dry areas of West Texas and the Rio Grande Valley as well as the lush fields of East Texas. Other important crops were wheat, corn, rice, and sugarcane. Also with the growth of the railroad, farmers now had an easier way to get their crops to market. This opportunity also led to a new system of farming that would affect Texas well into the 20th century, the tenant system. After the war, many of the large plantations were replaced by smaller farms. These small farms were either sold or rented by **tenant farmers** (*farmers who rent land to farm and pay in cash or in shares of their crop*). If a farmer had to rent along with land, farming tools, seeds, and supplies, they were known as **sharecroppers** (*tenant farmers who were provided land, tools, and seeds in return for a share of the value of the crop*). The tenant system was very strong in Texas because of the lack of **capital** (*money*) after the Civil War. Swapping labor for crops was a strong incentive for most Texans who were poor or were former slaves who had little to nothing after the Civil War. By 1870, one-third of all farmers in Texas were tenant farmers and most were very much in debt. Droughts, financial panics, overproduction of crops, problems with pests and high rent by landlords, would keep the tenant system strong in Texas. But farming did one thing other industries did not do after the war, and that was to bring people to Texas.

Constitution of 1876



The end of Reconstruction left most Texans with a lack of trust for any political ideas influenced by the "Radical Republicans" and with a fear of too much power in the hands of the government. In 1875, Governor Richard Coke organized a constitutional convention to write another constitution. Texans would have a new constitution a year later, in 1876. The Constitution of 1876 would become the one that still governs us today. This constitution limited the powers given to the three branches of government, severely limited the power of those elected to office and a more local control to citizens. This process was effective for awhile, but by the 20th century these provisions made it very difficult to conduct government business, and the amendment process has made it a very long document. Presently, the constitution has been amended more than 400 times.

