

B. Political Turbulence

1. New Political Groupings

a) Populism 1867 - 1896

- (i) Agricultural Depression in the 1890s triggered an outburst of political radicalism, the Alliance movement
- (ii) Farmers Alliance spread throughout the South and into the Midwest
- (iii) The farm groups entered politics in the elections of 1890
- (iv) 1892, these farm groups combined with representatives of the Knights of Labor and various professional reformers to organize the People's, or Populist, party
- (v) The convention adopted a sweeping platform calling for a graduated income tax; the nationalization of rail, telegraph, and telephone systems; the "sub treasury" plan, and the unlimited coinage of silver
- (vi) The party also called for the adoption of the initiative and referendum, popular election of United States senators, and eight-hour workday, and immigration restrictions
- (vii) In the presidential election, Cleveland defeated Harrison
- (viii) The Populist candidate, James B. Weaver, attracted over a million votes, but results in congressional and state races were disappointing
- (ix) Opponents of the Populists in the South played on racial fears, and the Populists failed to attract the support of urban workers

2. Extent of Reuniting of the Nation Following the Civil War

a) Reconstruction 1865 - 1877

- (i) After John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, the national mood hardened
- (ii) However, in spite of the amount of bloodshed, the Civil War caused less intersectional hatred than might have been expected; animosity quickly subsided, and most Confederate leaders were only mildly punished
- (iii) The status of the southern states raised complex legal questions about the process of readmitting them to the Union
- (iv) The process of readmission began in 1862, when Lincoln appointed provisional governors for those areas of South occupied by federal troops

- (v) In December 1863, he issued a proclamation that provided that southerners, with the exception of high Confederate officials, could reinstate themselves as United States citizens by taking a loyalty oath
- (vi) A state could set up a government when a number equal to 10 percent of those who voted in 1860 took the oath
- (vii) The Radicals disliked Lincoln's plan and passed the Wade-Davis Bill, which required a majority of voters in a state to take the loyalty oath before a constitutional convention could be convened
- (viii) The bill further required that the states prohibit slavery and repudiate Confederate debts. Lincoln pocket-vetoed the bill
- (ix) After Johnson became president, he issued an amnesty proclamation only slightly more rigorous than Lincoln's
- (x) By the time Congress reconvened in December 1865, all of the southern states had organized governments, ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, and elected senators and representatives. Johnson submitted the new governments to Congress
- (xi) Both radical and moderate Republicans wanted to protect ex-slaves from exploitation and to guarantee their basic rights
- (xii) Radicals, however, demanded full political equality; moderates were unwilling to go so far
- (xiii) Their agreement on a minimum set of demands doomed Johnsonian Reconstruction
- (xiv) Republicans feared that the balance of power in Congress might swing to the Democrats because the 13th Amendment increased the South's congressional representation by negating the Three-Fifths Compromise
- (xv) Southern voters provoked northern resentment by electing former Confederate leaders to office
- (xvi) Black Codes passed by southern governments to control ex-slaves further alarmed the North
- (xvii) Congressional Republicans rejected Johnsonian Reconstruction and created a committee on Reconstruction to study the question of readmitting southern states
- (xviii) Johnson further alienated Republicans in Congress by vetoing an extension of the Freedman's Bureau and the Civil Rights Act
- (xix) Congress overrode the veto of the Civil Rights Act, and thereafter Congress, not the president, controlled Reconstruction
- (xx) In June 1866, Congress submitted the Fourteenth Amendment to the states
- (xxi) This truly radical measure granted blacks political rights and, in doing so, expanded the power of the federal government at the expense of the states

- (xxii) In addition, it broadened the definition of citizenship and struck at discriminatory legislation, such as the Black Codes, by guaranteeing all citizens due process and equal protection of the law
- (xxiii) It attempted to force southern states to permit blacks to vote; those states that did not faced a reduction of their congressional representation
- (xxiv) The amendment also barred former federal officials who had served the Confederacy from holding state or federal office unless they received a pardon from Congress
- (xxv) Finally, it repudiated the Confederate debt
- (xxvi) Johnson made the choice between the Fourteenth Amendment and his own policy the main issue of the 1866 elections
- (xxvii) This strategy failed dismally; the Republicans won veto-proof majorities in both houses of Congress and control of all the northern state governments
- (xxviii) The refusal of southern states to accept the 14th Amendment led to the passage, over Johnson's veto, of First Reconstruction Act in March 1867
- (xxix) This law divided the South into five military districts commanded by a military officer with extensive powers to protect the civil rights of "all persons" and to maintain order
- (xxx) To end military rule, states had to adopt new constitutions that both guaranteed blacks the right to vote and disenfranchised many ex-Confederates
- (xxxi) The new state governments also had to ratify the 14th Amendment
- (xxxii) Congress passed two more Reconstruction Acts to tighten and clarify procedures
- (xxxiii) Arkansas became first state to gain readmission in June 1868, and by July enough states had ratified the 14th Amendment to make it part of the Constitution
- (xxxiv) Last southern state to qualify for readmission, Georgia, did so in July 1870
- (xxxv) The South's refusal to accept the spirit of even the mild Reconstruction designed by Johnson goaded the North to ever more strident measures to bring the ex-Confederates to heel
- (xxxvi) Johnson's intractability also influenced the Republicans, and they became obsessed with the need to defeat him
- (xxxvii) A series of measures passed between 1866 and 1868 increased the authority of Congress over many areas of government
- (xxxviii) Still not satisfied, the Republicans finally attempted to remove Johnson from office
- (xxxix) Although a poor president, Johnson had really done nothing to merit ejection from office

- (xl) The Republicans accused Johnson of violating the Tenure of Office Act by dismissing Secretary of War Stanton without obtaining the Senate's approval
- (xli) The House promptly impeached Johnson, but the Radicals failed to secure a conviction in the Senate by a single vote
- (xlii) The Republican candidate, Ulysses Grant, defeated the Democratic nominee, Horatio Seymour, for the presidency in 1868
- (xliii) Southern blacks enfranchised under the Reconstruction Acts provided Grant's narrow margin of victory in the popular vote
- (xliv) The Fourteenth Amendment and Reconstruction Acts enabled southern blacks to vote, but the Radicals wanted to guarantee blacks the right in all states, despite the unpopularity of the idea in the North
- (xlv) Congress passed the Fifteenth Amendment, which forbade states to deny the right to vote on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude
- (xlvi) The amendment became part of the Constitution in March 1870
- (xlvii) During Reconstruction, former slaves had real political influence; they voted, held office, and exercised the rights guaranteed them by 14th Amendment
- (xlviii) However, black officeholders were neither numerous nor inordinately influential
- (xlix) Real rulers of "black Republican" governments were "scalawags," southern whites who cooperated with the Republicans, and "carpetbaggers"
- (l) "Carpetbaggers" were northerners who went to the South for idealistic reasons or in search of opportunities
- (li) Blacks failed to dominate southern governments because they generally lacked political experience, were often poor and uneducated, and were nearly everywhere a minority
- (lii) Those blacks who held office tended to be better educated and more prosperous than most southern blacks; many had been free before the war
- (liii) Most black officeholders proved to be able and conscientious public servants
- (liv) Others were incompetent and corrupt
- (lv) In this regard, little distinguished them from their white counterparts
- (lvi) Corruption in northern cities dwarfed that in the South
- (lvii) Radical southern governments, in conjunction with the Freedman's Bureau and philanthropic organizations, did much to rebuild the South and to expand social services and educational opportunities for whites and blacks
- (lviii) The South's economic problems complicated the rebuilding of its political system
- (lix) Although in the long run the abolition of slavery released immeasurable quantities of human energy, the immediate effect was chaos

- (lx) Thaddeus Stevens was the leading proponent of confiscating the property of southern planters and distributing it among blacks
- (lxi) Establishing ex-slaves on small farms without adequate tools, seeds, and other necessities, however, would have done them little good
- (lxii) Yet, without a redistribution of land, former slaves were confined to the established framework of southern agriculture
- (lxiii) Southern whites considered blacks incapable of providing for themselves as independent farmers
- (lxiv) Southern productivity did decline, but not because blacks could not work independently
- (lxv) Blacks chose no longer to work like slaves; for example, they did not force their children into the fields at very early ages
- (lxvi) Immediately after the Civil War, southern planters attempted to farm their lands by gang labor consisting of ex-slaves working for wages
- (lxvii) This system did not work because it reminded blacks of slavery and because capital was scarce
- (lxviii) Sharecropping emerged as an alternative. Sharecropping gave blacks more control over their lives and the hope of earning enough to buy a small farm
- (lxix) However, few managed to buy their own farms, in part because of white resistance to blacks owning land
- (lxx) Many white farmers in the South were also trapped by the sharecropping system
- (lxxi) Scarcity of capital led to the development of the crop-lien system, which locked southern agriculture into the cultivation of cash crops
- (lxxii) The South's economy grew slowly after the Civil War, and its share of the national output of manufactured goods declined sharply during the Reconstruction era
- (lxxiii) To check black political power, dissident southerners formed secret terrorist societies, the most notorious of which was the Ku Klux Klan
- (lxxiv) Formed in 1866 as a social club, the Klan soon became a vigilante group dedicated to driving blacks out of politics; the Klan spread rapidly throughout the South
- (lxxv) Congress attacked Klan with three Force Acts (1870-1871), which placed elections under federal jurisdiction and punished those convicted of interfering with any citizen's right to vote
- (lxxvi) By 1872, federal authorities had broken the power of the Klan, but the experience of Klan, however, demonstrated the effectiveness of terrorism in keeping blacks away from polls, and paramilitary organizations adopted the tactics the Klan had been forced to abandon
- (lxxvii) "Conservative" parties (Democratic in national affairs) took over southern governments

- (lxxviii) Terrorism and intimidation account only in part for this development
- (lxxix) Sectional reconciliation and waning interest in policing the South made the North unwilling to intervene
- (lxxx) Grant failed to live up to expectations as president
- (lxxx1) The general was a poor executive; his honest naiveté made him the dupe of unscrupulous friends and schemers
- (lxxxii) He failed to deal effectively with economic and social problems, and corruption plagued his administration
- (lxxxiii) Grant did not cause or participate in the scandals that disgraced his administration, but he did nothing to prevent them
- (lxxxiv) In 1872, Republican reformers, alarmed by rumors of corruption in Grant's administration and by his failure to press for civil service reform, formed the Liberal Republican party and nominated Horace Greeley for president
- (lxxxv) Democrats also nominated Greeley, but Grant easily defeated him
- (lxxxvi) In 1876, Republicans nominated Rutherford B. Hayes, and Democrats chose Samuel J. Tilden
- (lxxxvii) In Florida, South Carolina, and Louisiana, where Republican regimes still held power, Republicans used their control of the election machinery to invalidate Democratic votes and declare Hayes the winner in those states
- (lxxxviii) In January 1877, Congress created an electoral commission to decide the disputed elections
- (lxxxix) The Republican majority on the commission awarded the disputed votes to Hayes
- (xc) Many southern Democrats were willing to accept Hayes if he would promise to remove federal troops from South and to allow southern states to manage their own internal affairs
- (xci) Once in office, Hayes honored most elements of the compromise
- (xcii) He removed the last troops from South Carolina and Louisiana in April 1877 and appointed a former Confederate general, David M. Key, as Postmaster General
- (xciii) The alliance of ex-Whigs and northern Republicans that produced the compromise did not last
- (xciv) The South remained solidly Democratic
- (xcv) The Compromise of 1877 did, however, mark the end of the Reconstruction era and the recognition of a new regime in the South

3. Limited Influence of Presidents Before 1916

a) Strength of Congress

- (i) A succession of weak presidents following the founding fathers occupied the White House, and Congress dominated government as a result
- (ii) Within Congress, the Senate generally overshadowed the House
- (iii) Critics called the Senate a rich man's club, but its real source of influence derived from the long tenure of many of its members and the small number of senators
- (iv) Then, too, the House of Representatives was one of the most disorderly and inefficient legislative bodies in the world
- (v) Although the Democrats and Republicans competed fiercely, they seldom took clearly opposing positions on issues
- (vi) Fundamental division between Democrats and Republicans was sectional, result of Civil War
- (vii) The South was heavily Democrat; New England remained solidly Republican; and the rest of the country was split, although Republicans tended to have the advantage
- (viii) Wealth northerners and blacks tended to be Republicans, immigrants and Catholics tended to be Democrats
- (ix) Even though Democrats won presidency only twice, most presidential elections in the late 19th century were extremely close, and congressional majorities fluctuated continually

4. Complacency of Administrations during the Roaring 20's and Great Depression

a) "Normalcy" in the 1920's

- (i) After the horrors of WWI, the country was looking for "peace and quiet."
- (ii) Harding gained Republican nomination largely because of genial nature and lack of convictions
- (iii) Hard working and politically astute, Harding was also indecisive and unwilling to offend
- (iv) Harding appointed able and reputable men to the major cabinet posts including Charles Evans Hughes, Herbert Hoover, Andrew Mellon, and Henry C. Wallace
- (v) However, many lesser offices, and a few major ones, went to his Ohio cronies

- (vi) Both Harding and his successor Calvin Coolidge used appointments to convert regulatory bodies, such as the interstate Commerce Commission and the Federal Reserve Board, into pro-business agencies that ceased almost entirely to restrict the activities of the industries over which they had control.
- (vii) Disillusion with the results of WWI led Americans to withdraw from foreign involvements but American economic interests made complete withdrawal impossible.

b) Response of Government to the Wall Street Crash 1929

- (i) The Stock Market raced ahead beginning early 1928
- (ii) Prices climbed still higher during the first half of 1929
- (iii) The market wavered in September, but few saw cause for serious concern
- (iv) On October 29th, 1929, the stock market collapsed and the economic boom ended
- (v) The Stock market collapse was more a symptom of economic woe than the cause of the depression
- (vi) The Great Depression was a worldwide phenomenon caused primarily by economic imbalances resulting from WWI
- (vii) In the United States, concentration of wealth, speculative investment, and under consumption contributed to the severity of the depression
- (viii) Hoover relied upon voluntarism and mutual self-interest to cure the economic ills
- (ix) He rejected classical economics and proposed a number of measures to combat the depression
- (x) However, he overestimated the willingness of citizens to act in the public interest without legal compulsion and relied too much on voluntary cooperation
- (xi) Private charities soon ran out of money
- (xii) As the depression deepened, Hoover placed more emphasis on balancing the budget, which further decreased the supply of money
- (xiii) The Hawley-Smoot Tariff (1930) imposed high rates on manufactured goods, which contracted trade
- (xiv) Congress rejected the appeal of 20,000 WWI veterans who marched on Washington to seek immediate payment of their war bonuses