

# Reconstruction (1863-1877)

Moderators – Bob Romer & Jay Russell

Bob – rhromer@amherst.edu 253-7748

Jay – j7m4russell@gmail.com 586-0033

Day & Time – Tuesdays, 10:00 - noon

Location – UMass “University Without Walls”, 100 Venture Way, Hadley  
(off North Maple Street – very convenient parking)

Reconstruction (roughly the period from 1863 to 1877) was one of the most important periods in American history, and at the same time one of the least understood and probably the period in our history that has been most often and most seriously misrepresented – by professors as well as by politicians and by the “media”. (Think about “Birth of a Nation” (1915) and “Gone With the Wind” (1939).) It was a time that saw the end of the Civil War, the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment, which ended slavery, as well as the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> amendments, amendments that promised federal support of civil rights as well as voting rights for blacks. The same years that saw the newly freed slaves enjoying freedom for the first time also saw the creation of the KKK and violence throughout the former Confederate states. There were hopeful signs with the creation of hospitals and schools but also the gradual “redemption” of the southern states by former rebels and, with the contested election of 1876 and the resulting “Compromise of 1877”, the withdrawal of northern support for black rights and the beginning of a century in which blacks were denied human and civil rights, not just in the South, but throughout the nation.

Each member of the seminar is expected to prepare a presentation on some topic related to reconstruction, choosing a topic in consultation with the moderators. Some possible topics are listed below. Please note that presentation topics are *not* limited to these suggestions. (Note also that the moderators have exercised their prerogative by reserving their own presentation topics.)

We ask presenters to limit their presentations to no more than approximately 30 minutes, so as to maximize the opportunities for everyone to participate in the time for questions and discussion.

Resources – We ask all seminar members to read ***Eric Foner’s A Short History of Reconstruction***, an excellent overview. (Either the 1990 or 2014 edition. The “updated” edition is identical to the 1990 edition except for the Introduction.) This book is a condensation of Foner’s 690-page *Reconstruction*, long considered the “Bible of Reconstruction Scholarship”. (As with his *Short History*, the 1988 and 2014 editions of the “Bible” are identical except for the Introduction.)

There is a vast (and still growing) literature on the subject. A few of the many other resources are –

W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (An important 1935 work that was largely ignored for decades by the history profession.)

David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion, The Civil War in American Memory*, 2001. (A recent book by a former Amherst College professor that goes well beyond our chosen time period, 1863-1877.)

Brooks D. Simpson (ed.), *Reconstruction – Voices from America’s First Great Struggle for Racial*

*Equality* (2018). An anthology of writings by Frederic Douglass, Charles Sumner, Susan B. Anthony, Thaddeus Stevens, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Mark Twain, William Lloyd Garrison, Presidents Lincoln, Johnson, Grant, and Hayes, and many others – with a useful chronology of the period.

National Park Service Handbook, *The Reconstruction Era* (2016) (Available from [www.eparks.com](http://www.eparks.com) for \$12.95.)

And, of course, the Internet (including Wikipedia), always useful but always to be used with caution.

### **Presentation topics – Some suggestions**

The Port Royal Experiment (Port Royal, SC 1862-1865) (reserved by a moderator)

Reconstruction in South Carolina (reserved by a moderator)

The “Reconstruction Amendments” (Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth) – [choose one]:  
proponents, opponents, Congressional and ratification debates

Civil Rights Act of 1866

Impeachment of Andrew Johnson

Elections: 1866 & 1874 Congressional & 1868 Presidential

Frederick Douglass

Black political figures during Reconstruction at Federal and state levels

Origins and rise of the KKK (& White League & Red Shirts)

Reconstruction in a Deep South state of your choice (e.g., for Mississippi, see Nicholas Lemann, *Redemption: The Last Battle of the Civil War*)

Impact of the Panic of 1873 on Reconstruction

1876 Presidential election, the Compromise of 1877 and the end of Reconstruction

Health and medical care for the newly freed slaves (see Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African-American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (2012))

Post-war labor system (e.g., sharecropping, labor contracts, use of vagrancy laws)

Land redistribution (promises/dreams of “40 acres and a mule”)

Newly freed slaves searching for their relatives (see Heather Andrea Williams, *Help Me to Find My People: The African American Search for Family Lost in Slavery* (2012))

Schools and hospitals created during Reconstruction. Who started and staffed them (tell the story of

one or more teachers or medical personnel)? What happened to these schools and hospitals after 1877?

Davis Bend cooperative community (all-black town near Vicksburg, MS established in 1865 on a plantation site)