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Reconstruction and the Changing South

Name: _____

Period: _____

Directions: Read the text, then answer the questions that follow. You must use proper grammar and spelling. Your answers must be typed and at least six sentences long. Include both the question and the answer on your assignment. The assignment will be collected and will count as two homework assignment grades

At the end of the Civil War, the future looked bleak to many Southerners. Across the South, cities and farms lay in ruins. Two thirds of the South's railroad tracks had been turned into twisted heaps of scrap. After the war, Confederate money was worthless and many people lost their savings. Almost overnight, there was a new class of nearly four million people known as **freedmen—men and women who had once been slaves.**

President Lincoln outlined his **Ten Percent Plan where a southern state could form a new government after 10 percent of its voters swore an oath of loyalty to the United States.** However, the Republicans disliked Lincoln's plan and passed the **Wade-Davis Bill which required a majority of voters in a state to take a loyalty oath before the state could be readmitted to the Union.** Lincoln refused to sign this bill because he thought it was too harsh. Eventually the Congress and the President agreed on the **Freedmen's Bureau, a government agency to help former slaves.** The Freedmen's Bureau gave food, clothing, medical care and found jobs for former slaves and poor whites. One of its most important jobs was to set up schools for freedmen which laid the foundation for the South's public school system.

After John Wilkes Booth assassinated Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865 in Ford's Theatre, the nation plunged into grief. Vice President Andrew Johnson then became President. Johnson asked for a majority of voters in each southern state to pledge loyalty to the United States in order to rejoin the Union. Each state also had to ratify the **Thirteenth Amendment which banned slavery throughout the nation.** The southern states agreed with Johnson's requirements and as a result he allowed them to have representation in Congress. However, the southern states also created the **black codes which forbade freedmen to vote, own guns, or serve on juries.**

Without African Americans being allowed to vote, many southerners elected into Congress had held office in the Confederacy. The Republicans became outraged by this. When the new Congress met, Republicans refused to let southern representatives take their seats. Instead they set up a Joint Committee on Reconstruction. This Joint Committee accused the South of trying to "preserve slavery...as long as possible." President Johnson ignored the Committee and soon **Radical Republicans vowed to break the power of wealthy planters who had ruled the South and ensure that freedmen received the right to vote.** The Radical Republicans quickly passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, giving citizenship to African Americans.

Congress was concerned the Supreme Court would call the Civil Rights Act unconstitutional. They then proposed the **Fourteenth Amendment defining citizens as "all persons born or naturalized in the United States." It guaranteed citizens "equal protection of the laws" and forbade states to "deprive any person of life, liberty or prosperity without due process of law."** Thus, states could not legally discriminate against a citizen for their race. Under the Fourteenth Amendment, any state that denied any male citizen 21 years or older the right to vote would have its representation in Congress reduced.

During the elections of 1866 Johnson urged voters to reject the Radicals. In July, white mobs killed 34 African Americans in New Orleans. This convinced many northerners that stronger measures needed to be taken and the Republicans won majorities in both houses of Congress. They were then prepared to take charge of Reconstruction and passed the first **Reconstruction Act in 1867, which divided the south into five military districts and forced any Confederate state to write a new State Constitution and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment.** Now protected by the army, freedmen were allowed to vote and Republicans gained control of all of the new southern state governments.

In 1870, Congress ratified the Fifteenth Amendment. The **Fifteenth Amendment forbade any state to deny citizens the right to vote because of "race, color, or previous condition of servitude."** This Amendment ensured that African Americans would be able to vote in both the North and South.

Some white southerners, mostly businessmen, supported the new Republican government. Many whites felt that any southerner who helped the Republicans was a traitor. They called the white southern Republicans **scalawags.** White northerners also traveled south for various reasons. However, white southerners accused the new arrivals of hoping to get rich from the South's misery. The southerners claimed that the northerners were in such a hurry to exploit the south that they tossed a few clothes into cheap suitcases, called carpetbags. As a result, they became known as **carpetbaggers.** In fact, many Union soldiers had grown to love the South's rich land and decided to stay in the South after the war. Other northerners went south in hopes to profit as the South was being rebuilt and others wanted to help the freedmen.

Some white southerners formed secret societies to help them regain power. The most dangerous was the **Ku Klux Klan, or KKK** which wanted to keep African Americans and white Republicans out of office. Dressed in white robes and hoods to hide their identities, Klansmen ride at night to the homes of African American voters shouting threats and burning wooden crosses.

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Klan members murdered hundreds of African Americans and their white allies. In 1870, Congress made it a crime to use force to keep people from voting and used the military forces to ensure African Americans and Republicans continued to vote and hold office.

During reconstruction, many freedmen and poor whites returned to work on plantations. These **sharecroppers** rented and farmed a plot of land. However most sharecroppers became locked into a cycle of poverty. First, they received supplies on credit. Then, when the harvest was ready in the fall, they had to repay what they had borrowed. Often their crop did not cover what they owed and they sank deeper into debt. Many farmers also lost their land.

In 1870, Radical Republicans began losing power. Reconstruction was costing a lot of money and many northerners were tired of trying to reform the South. In 1872 the Congress passed the Amnesty Act which allowed nearly all white southerners (previously prevented from voting) to again return to the ballot box. The south voted solidly Democratic. Overtime, many southern states passed **poll taxes**, requiring voters to pay a fee each time they voted. As a result, poor freedmen could rarely afford to vote. States also imposed **literacy tests** that required voters to read and explain a section of the Constitution however many poor whites as well as African Americans could not pass the literacy test. To increase the number of white voters, states passed the **grandfather clause**. If a voters father or grandfather had been eligible to vote, the voter did not have to take a literacy test.

Reconstruction officially ended with the election of 1876. The Democrats nominated Samuel Tilden and the Republicans chose Rutherford B. Hayes. Tilden won the popular vote but was one electoral vote short of winning the election. Congress set up a commission which decided that Hayes would win the Presidency and would remove federal troops from many Southern states, thus ending Reconstruction.

Reconstruction had a deep and lasting impact on southern politics. White southerners had bitter memories of Radical Republican policies and military rule. For the next hundred years, the South remained a stronghold of the Democratic party. At the same time, black southerners steadily lost most of their political rights.

Questions:

1. Explain in detail what is meant by the term Reconstruction? Why was Reconstruction important in the history of the United States?
2. Whose plan for reconstruction is harsher on the South, Lincoln's or Congress's? Explain why?
3. Explain how the Fourteenth Amendment limited the states ability in the South to take away the civil rights of African Americans? In addition, how does it define citizenship in the United States?
4. What effect did military districts in the south have on the efforts of Reconstruction? Did the South like or dislike these districts? Explain why.
5. Describe the system of sharecropping. Why was it so bad economically for African Americans?
6. Explain the effect of poll taxes, literacy tests and grandfather clauses on African Americans in the South.
7. After the election of 1876 President Hayes removed the troops from the South? Explain how this effected Reconstruction and the lives of African Americans.