

The Soldiers' National Cemetery at Gettysburg marks the final resting place for many soldiers, mostly Union, killed during the battle. Many of the Confederate dead were moved to cemeteries in Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina in the 1870s. (Courtesy of Kenneth L. Alford)



The death of President Abraham Lincoln on April 15, 1865, significantly altered the aftermath of the Civil War. (Library of Congress)



CHAPTER 17

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CIVIL WAR'S AFTERMATH

RECONSTRUCTION, ABOLITION, AND POLYGAMY

By late 1864, the physical fighting of the American Civil War was moving toward a final resolution. In December, General William T. Sherman (of “war is hell” fame) completed his infamous and devastating march to the sea in Georgia. In early April, the Confederate capital of Richmond, Virginia, fell to Union forces. On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee, commander of the army of Northern Virginia, surrendered his forces to Union general Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House, Virginia—the rebellion more “worn out rather than suppressed,” as Union artillery colonel Charles Wainwright put it.¹ Though skirmishes would continue for some weeks, the war was essentially over.

The period following the Civil War (1861–65) is known in U.S. history as Reconstruction. It lasted from 1865 to 1877 and has been called “one long referendum on the meaning and memory of the verdict reached at Appomattox.”² That is to say, the Union had won the war on the battlefield. But what would be the long-term meaning of victory in the face of the abolition of slavery and the

nature of future government in the Southern states? Reconstruction was marked by efforts to rebuild the war-torn nation, to readmit the Confederate states into the Union, to help those states in particular to rebuild in the face of the war’s near-total destruction of certain areas, to facilitate the reenfranchisement of white voters in the eleven secessionist states, to determine and guarantee the rights of the approximately four million freed slaves in the South, and to somehow try to help ease human suffering.

These were challenges of which President Abraham Lincoln was well aware. On April 11, just two days after Lee’s surrender at Appomattox Court House, Lincoln gave a speech from a second-story window of the White House to the assembled crowds below, who were in a celebratory mood. But the president “was not interested in gloating or cheering about the victory, as perhaps many in the crowd would have wanted.” Rather, “he wanted to caution people to think carefully about how the Union would be rebuilt—reconstructed—peacefully, how



The war left much of the South in ruins. This photograph shows the Norfolk Navy Yard in December 1864. (National Archives)

North and South could come back together again and be one friendly nation. He knew people disagreed about how to proceed and talked about how difficult it would be to rebuild the nation. Lincoln also put forth the idea of giving African Americans the right to vote.”³

But such noble and important goals as Lincoln and other reconstructionists contemplated were easier said than done. The shooting may have ended by late spring of 1865, but the suffering and destruction were just beginning to be realized. Six months after the surrender at Appomattox, Confederate vice president Alexander H. Stephens was released from prison in Boston. As he

rode a slow train southward toward his home in Georgia, he witnessed a landscape everywhere in ruin. Of northern Virginia he said the “desolation of the country . . . was horrible to behold.” And in northern Georgia he lamented the “desolation [to be] . . . heart-sickening. Fences gone, fields all a waste, houses burnt.”⁴ In many regions of the South, ex-Confederates faced not just crushing material poverty but “spiritual hopelessness.”⁵

The most costly aspect of the Civil War, by far, was the human life taken and the suffering inflicted—the greatest, in fact, that the United States has *ever* seen. This was also the most tragic dimension of this massive and

wrenching conflict. The estimated number of soldiers alone who died between 1861 and 1865, both North and South, is over 620,000. This is “approximately equal to the total American fatalities in the Revolution, the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, and the Korean War combined.”⁶ Furthermore, the percentage of the U.S. population killed during the Civil War is the equivalent of six million lives in our day.

CIVIL WAR SHAPED THE NATION

In one sense, it is impossible to comprehend the suffering that this human destruction generated and therefore monotonous to continue describing it; yet, in another sense, it is impossible to speak too much about it because of the way it has shaped the United States. Professor Drew Faust has written:

In the Civil War the United States, North and South, reaped what many participants described as a “harvest of death.” By the midpoint of the conflict, it seemed that in the South, “nearly every household mourns some loved one lost.” Loss became commonplace; death was no longer encountered individually; death’s threat, its proximity, and its actuality became the most widely shared of the war’s experiences. As a Confederate soldier observed, death “reigned with universal sway,” ruling homes and lives, demanding attention and response. The Civil War matters to us today because it ended slavery and helped to define the meanings of freedom, citizenship, and equality. It established a newly centralized nation-state and launched

it on a trajectory of economic expansion and world influence. But for those Americans who lived in and through the Civil War, the texture of the experience, its warp and woof, was the presence of death. At war’s end this shared suffering would override persisting differences about the meanings of race, citizenship, and nationhood to establish sacrifice and its memorialization as the ground on which North and South would ultimately reunite.⁷

Indeed, “death transformed the American nation as well as the hundreds of thousands of individuals directly affected by loss.”⁸ The effect of death resulting directly from the Civil War on the psyche of individuals and the whole nation was monumental. Death, as well as the maiming that resulted from the horrendous fighting that occurred in gargantuan battles of the war, “created a veritable ‘republic of suffering,’ in the words that Frederick Law Olmsted chose to describe the wounded and dying arriving at Union hospital ships on the Virginia Peninsula.”⁹ As if to emphasize this point, only days after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Abraham Lincoln was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth the evening of April 14, 1865, and the Union was plunged into a grief more profound than could have been imagined beforehand. “On April 19, 1865, an estimated twenty-five million people attended memorial services around the country for the slain leader.”¹⁰ Southern reaction to Lincoln’s death varied according to geographical region as well as the social and political position of individuals. Though some were genuinely saddened, many hated Lincoln and were glad for his death.¹¹ Of course, the irony was that



The Civil War left hundreds of thousands of men sick and wounded. This is probably Carver Hospital near Washington, DC. (National Archives)

with the assassination of President Lincoln, the South lost one of its best, most thoughtful allies in the arduous tasks of Reconstruction—rebuilding life in the South.

When word of the president's murder reached Utah, citizens of the territory felt a genuine sense of loss and joined the nation in mourning the death of the great man. The *Union Vedette*, a newspaper started by soldiers at Camp Douglas, Utah, in order to provide an opposing voice to the Mormon-controlled *Deseret News*, announced the tragedy on April 17, 1865: "The wing of the Death angel broods over the Capitol and his shadow has fallen upon all the land. There

is consternation in the public places and the hearts of the people are appalled with a sadness that is something more than sorrow. Our banners droop low and the cities are clothed in the habiliments of woe. Nature herself is hushed to silence as though in sympathy with the National bereavement."¹² By the events of April 14, 1865, Utah became part of the republic of suffering, even though the territory's involvement in the war was minimal by design. As Brigham Young once indicated, one of the very reasons the Church had moved west was to enjoy insulation against the growing storms of war: "The whispering of the Spirit to us have [sic] invariably been . . . to

depart, to go hence, to flee into the mountains . . . that we may be secure in the visitation of the Judgments that must pass upon this land . . . while the guilty land of our fathers is purifying by the overwhelming scourge.”¹³

On April 18, the *Vedette* reported that the theater as well as businesses in Salt Lake City had been closed, flags flown at half-mast, and many houses outfitted with emblems of mourning. It then paid a sincere compliment aimed at the Latter-day Saints: “The citizens have done themselves lasting honor on this sad occasion, and we acknowledge the display of deep feeling on their part with the gratitude it deserves.”¹⁴ On April 21, the same newspaper described the ceremonies held at the old Salt Lake Tabernacle, whose pulpit had been draped in black, where a large congregation had gathered, and where “religious differences for the time were ignored and soldiers and civilians all united as fellow citizens in common observance of the solemn occasion.”¹⁵

This significant turn of events, which saw Abraham Lincoln elevated to a place of respect and then veneration among the Latter-day Saints, came about during the war itself. The majority of Utahns (Latter-day Saints) started out being both suspicious and critical of Lincoln during the earliest days of his presidency. In fact, one historian notes that “it is possible that they held him in even greater disfavor than remaining written documents indicate.”¹⁶ However, a change in attitude seems to have occurred and accelerated after a reported favorable comment made by Lincoln gained circulation in the Utah Territory. Apparently, when asked by T. B. H. Stenhouse about the policy he intended to pursue in regard to the Mormons, Lincoln replied, “I propose to let them alone.” He further illustrated what he meant: “Stenhouse,

when I was a boy on the farm in Illinois there was a great deal of timber on the farms which we had to clear away. Occasionally we would come to a log which had fallen down. It was too hard to split, too wet to burn and too heavy to move, so we ploughed around it. That’s what I intend to do with the Mormons. You go back and tell Brigham Young that if he will let me alone I will let him alone.”¹⁷

It is also probable that as time went on, the noble character of Lincoln, his genuine selfless concern over preserving the United States, his act of ultimately freeing millions of human beings from the bondage of slavery, and his helping the country heal from the wounds of war through a program of Reconstruction began to distill upon the Latter-day Saints. That is, through his speeches and actions, they saw the righteous intent of the president’s desires. After all, had the Lord not said through his inspired servant that “it is not right that any man should be in bondage one to another” (D&C 101:79), and was it not the case that the Civil War was fought, at least in part, to prevent the institution of slavery from continuing unabated on this chosen land which had been redeemed by the shedding of blood (D&C 101:80)?

LINCOLN, SLAVERY, AND RECONSTRUCTION

President Lincoln’s personal views on slavery were a matter of public record. In April 1864, he came out with his clearest articulation: “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel.”¹⁸ One of Lincoln’s leading biographers called him “colorblind.” Personally, he “thought of the black man first of all as a man.”¹⁹ But as the president, he knew that he could not govern simply by personal

preference or fiat; he could not free the slaves and expect their immediate and unimpeded assimilation into the fabric of society. Declarations of freedom alone would not solve their problems. He was president not just of “antislavery forces but of a disunited and divided people,” and he had to “serve the general welfare.”²⁰ Therefore, “he approached the difficult problems of reconstruction with an open mind and an absence of commitment”²¹ as his own views changed and different pressures influenced him.

The first comprehensive effort at reconstruction is generally regarded as Lincoln’s Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, issued on December 8, 1863. It was a carefully crafted plan that would begin to ease the nation into repair, unification, and healing. He had worked on it during a period of recuperation from smallpox after returning in November from Gettysburg, where he had delivered one of the most powerful addresses in American history using only 272 words! Though the proclamation was issued only halfway through the war, it is clear the president wanted the conflict to be over. Indeed, the “republic of suffering” was taking its toll on Lincoln and making him more sensitive, not less, to the increasing carnage. For example, as the war entered its final phase under the Union command of General Grant and the losses became ever more devastating, “Lincoln was horrified. He remembered his childhood days of hating even to see an animal killed.” At one point he exclaimed, “Could we have avoided this terrible, bloody war! . . . Is it ever to end!”²²

The Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction required residents of the South, rebels and Confederates, to take an oath to faithfully support, protect, and defend the

Constitution and the Union. In addition, they had to accept the abolition of slavery. They could resume rights of property, except as pertaining to slaves. The proclamation provided for Southern state governments to be reconstituted and established by only one-tenth of the number of voters that had participated in the 1860 presidential election. The states’ constitutions had to abolish slavery, but not all states were required to give free blacks the right to vote (Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee were exempted for a time).²³

Lincoln’s plan stirred up controversy. Some wanted him to drop emancipation in exchange for immediate peace with the Confederacy. Others—the Radical Reconstructionists—considered the plan to be too lenient on the rebels. In 1864, Congress proposed that Reconstruction not be inaugurated until 50 percent of a state’s voters had sworn the oath of loyalty. A national debate ensued over who should establish Reconstruction policies.²⁴ In the meantime, the Senate approved the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, abolishing slavery throughout the Union: “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime . . . shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”²⁵ Sometimes the Civil War is referred to as the Second American Revolution because, with the abolition of slavery formalized in the Thirteenth Amendment, America began to fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.”²⁶ On January 30, 1865, the amendment was approved by the House of Representatives and forwarded to the states for ratification. Antislavery Congressman Cornelius Cole subsequently declared, “The one question of the age is *settled*.”²⁷ But,



Weapons introduced during the Civil War caused death and destruction of property on a scale previously unseen in the United States.
(National Archives)

like so much else about the Civil War, new questions arose—among them was the question of what a new president might do.

However, on March 4, 1865, once more under heavy guard, the newly reelected Abraham Lincoln walked out onto the inaugural platform at the east face of the Capitol. He delivered the address which, more than any other, both captured the essence of his feeling toward all citizens, North and South, and expressed his earnest desire to repair the nation. The last paragraph stands as Lincoln's watchwords of Reconstruction: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we

are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."²⁸

Unfortunately, John Wilkes Booth was among the onlookers to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address that day. But so was Frederick Douglass, black abolitionist. That evening, Douglass came to the White House reception to offer his congratulations to the president. Ironically, he was first refused admittance but subsequently let in upon Lincoln's order. When asked by the president what he thought of the speech earlier

that day, “Douglass described it as a ‘sacred effort.’”²⁹ Indeed!

For Lincoln, there should be no more slaves, no subhumans, no more North versus South, no unbound wounds, no more second-class citizens, no united states in the plural. Rather, his vision, as God gave him “to see the right,” contemplated a United States—a single entity succoring those in need of help and guaranteeing inalienable rights to all. In parallel fashion, another president—of a different kind—two years earlier had summarized his view of those engaged in the great national conflict. In October 1863, Brigham Young said:

I care for the North and the South and if I had sufficient power with the Lord, I would save every innocent man, woman and child from being slaughtered in this unnatural and almost universal destruction of life and property. . . . I care for the North and South more than I do for gold, and I would do a great deal, if I had the power, to ameliorate the condition of suffering thousands. I care enough for them to pray that righteous men may hold the reins of the government, and that wicked, tyrannical despotism may be wiped away from the land.³⁰

RECONSTRUCTION CONTINUES

In March 1865, Congress created the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (simply called the Freedmen’s Bureau), “an unprecedented agency of social uplift”³¹ to look out for the interests of Southern blacks. With the abolition of slavery, most of them had no homes, no money, and no education. The Bureau sought to obtain jobs, set up schools, and create hospitals for blacks.

It also helped to protect white interests by providing services to blacks in a structured way and thus curtailing the outright clash of white landowners and black farmers, many of whom were eager to test the parameters of their newly bestowed freedom.

The following provides an example:

In Appomattox County itself, Freedmen’s Bureau agents, as well as Union officers, confronted problems of social disorder in the immediate wake of the surrender. A horseman passing through the country on April 29, 1865, described “one eternal scene of desolation & destruction” along a 13-mile route. The armies had left hundreds of dead horses and mules and burned every fence rail for miles. A Freedmen’s Bureau post was established in Lynchburg to try to settle disputes over remaining livestock, to stop plundering and marauding in the countryside, and especially to try to establish new labor arrangements for the freedmen.³²

How blacks could acquire land remained one of the great unanswered questions of the Reconstruction period.

In May 1865, Lincoln’s successor, President Andrew Johnson, announced his Reconstruction plan. Being a Southerner and a “thoroughgoing white supremacist,”³³ he attempted to institute policies that would help the South recover as quickly as possible and not punish it for its stance on slavery or its secession. Reaction among very conservative or radical elements of the Republicans in Congress was outrage toward Johnson’s perceived lenient approach to Reconstruction. Even before he was killed, Lincoln himself had to deal with these “Radicals” in his own party. Led in the

Senate by Charles Sumner of Massachusetts, and in the House of Representatives by Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, the Radical Reconstructionists saw an opportunity in the post-Civil War era “to convert black freedom into genuine citizenship, economic self-reliance, and political liberty. They viewed the former Confederate states as ‘conquered provinces,’ which had to be re-invented as states and readmitted to the Union by Congress.”³⁴ They also conceived of greatly expanded federal power—which Andrew Johnson did not! And they wanted to wield that power.

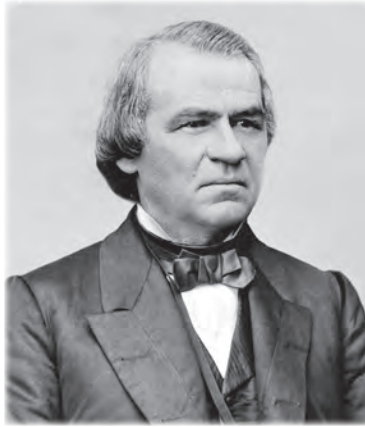
Johnson’s plan of Reconstruction offered amnesty to all but the main Confederate leaders. Southern states had to abolish slavery and take a loyalty oath to the United States (much like Lincoln’s earlier plan) in order to be readmitted to the Union. The plan offered no legislative role to blacks to work out Reconstruction policy. The Southern states themselves, under white leadership, were to determine what role blacks would play in Reconstruction. Thus, toward the end of 1865, Southern states, Mississippi and South Carolina being the first, began to enact a series of laws called the Black Codes. In some cases, blacks were treated little differently than when slavery was in full operation:

Mississippi required all blacks to possess, each January, written evidence

of employment for the coming year. Laborers leaving their jobs before the contract expired would forfeit wages already earned, and, as under slavery,

be subject to arrest by any white citizen. A person offering work to a laborer already under contract risked imprisonment or a fine of \$500. To limit the freedmen’s economic opportunities, they were forbidden to rent land in urban areas. Vagrancy—a crime whose definition included the idle, disorderly, and those who “mispend what they earn”—could be punished by fines or involuntary plantation labor; other criminal offenses included “insulting” ges-

tures or language, “malicious mischief,” and preaching the Gospel without a license. . . . Florida’s code, drawn up by a commission whose report praised slavery as a “benign” institution deficient only in its inadequate regulation of black sexual behavior, made disobedience, impudence, and even “disrespect” to the employer a crime. Blacks who broke labor contracts could be whipped, placed in the pillory, and sold for up to one year’s labor, while whites who violated contracts faced only the threat of civil suits.³⁵



Prior to becoming Abraham Lincoln’s running mate in the 1864 presidential election, Andrew Johnson (1808–75) had served as a mayor, U.S. congressman, and governor (winning all his elections as a Democrat). His political background and views caused tremendous friction with the Republican-controlled Congress, who impeached him in 1868. (Library of Congress)

Again, reaction by Radical Reconstructionists to these measures was outrage. In



Two guards stand in Jefferson Davis's cell, in Fort Monroe, Virginia, while the prisoner sits on his bed. (Library of Congress)

December 1865, the Republican leadership of Congress refused to readmit Southern states to the Union. For two years, the executive and legislative branches of the U.S. government engaged in an epic struggle over Reconstruction policy. The Radicals won but in the process fueled a backlash of Southern white resentment that took a toll on blacks. In 1865 and 1866, whites murdered about five thousand blacks in the South. In 1866, the Ku Klux Klan was founded in Tennessee, motivated by opposition toward Radical Reconstruction. Ostensibly organized as a "social club," it spread rapidly in nearly every Southern state, launching a "reign of terror" against blacks as well as white sympathizers and supporters of Republican policies. By 1870, the Klan and kindred organizations such as the White Brotherhood and the

Knights of the White Camelia had become deeply entrenched in every Southern state.³⁶

Congressional response to violence against blacks and their supporters did not really appear until 1870. It came in the form of a series of Enforcement Acts, which forbade discrimination toward voters and outlawed fraud, bribery, intimidation, or conspiracies that prevented citizens from exercising their constitutional rights. When violence persisted, the Ku Klux Klan Act of April 1871 was enacted, which designated crimes that deprived citizens of the right to vote, hold office, or enjoy the equal protection of the law as punishable by federal law. States failing to act effectively against perpetrators could be subject to military intervention and the suspension of the writ of habeas corpus.³⁷

RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION

By 1866, the Republican-dominated Congress was certain President Johnson's plan was a failure. Led by the Radicals, they took the extraordinary step of passing the nation's first Civil Rights Act and then overriding the president's veto to make it the law of the land. This gave certain legal rights to former slaves. In June of that year, they proposed the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which conferred citizenship upon "all persons born or naturalized in the United States."³⁸ This included black Americans. Since none of the defeated Southern states had yet been readmitted into the Union, Congress declared that no state could be readmitted until it ratified the amendment. President Johnson actually encouraged the states to reject it. All did so at first, except for Tennessee, which became the first of the former Confederate states to ratify the amendment and be readmitted to the Union. The Fourteenth Amendment officially became law in 1868.³⁹

This was monumental. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* that "African Americans, free or slave, could never be citizens of the United States. The Fourteenth Amendment overturned this decision by defining citizenship in the Constitution for the first time."⁴⁰

In 1867, Congress increasingly challenged President Johnson's authority. First, they enacted a series of laws called the Reconstruction Acts, which abolished Southern state governments formed or proposed under Johnson's plan, divided the South into five military districts, and outlined the "approved" steps by which former Confederate states could be joined to the Union. Next, Congress passed laws forbidding the president from firing certain government officials or dismissing

any commander of one of the Southern military districts without the approval of the Senate. When the president defied Congress and the recently passed Tenure of Office Act by dismissing Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, a supporter of Radical Reconstruction, the Radical Republicans began to demand Johnson's removal from office.⁴¹ On February 24, 1868, the House of Representatives voted to impeach him (126 to 47)—a first in American history. He was tried in the Senate, but their vote fell one short (35 to 19) of removing him from office, and Andrew Johnson remained president until 1869, when Ulysses S. Grant succeeded him.

In 1869, other significant developments affected the course of Reconstruction. In February, Congress approved the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which prohibited federal and state governments from depriving any citizen of voting because of their race: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude."⁴² It became part of the Constitution a little over a year later.⁴³ However, the practical implementation of the terms of this amendment, as well as those of the Fourteenth, was a long time in coming. One Southern newspaper declared in 1875 that these amendments "may stand forever; but we intend . . . to make them dead letters on the statute-book."⁴⁴ Such sentiments could openly bubble to the surface at that time because Southern Democrats began to regain control of the South beginning in 1869.

New state governments had begun to form under the provisions of the Reconstruction Acts of 1867. Southern whites protested the terms of the acts by refusing to vote in new



Libby Prison, shown here, was a Confederate prison at Richmond, Virginia. It became infamous for the poor living conditions provided for the Union prisoners. (National Archives)

elections. This allowed Republicans to take control of these state governments. But economic problems, coupled with corruption among legislators in the South, plagued these governments. Agriculture, the economic backbone of the South, was slow to recover after the devastation of the Civil War. In addition, Reconstruction governments immediately opened the political process to former slaves. Therefore, most Southern whites refused to support the Reconstruction governments. Republicans were eventually defeated in the South: first in Tennessee and Virginia in 1869; then in North Carolina in 1870; in Georgia in 1871; in Alabama, Arkansas, and Texas in 1874; and in Mississippi in 1876.

Latter-day Saints were not unaffected by these developments. Indeed, the end of

the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction elevated the visibility of the Mormons on the stage of American religion and politics.

RECONSTRUCTION AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

A significant consequence of the Civil War and Reconstruction was that the government of the United States became more centralized, and more intrusive, affecting the lives of individual Americans as never before. "The expanded role of the federal government to fight a total war brought similar expansion in its control over . . . a centralized monetary system, agricultural policy, the creation of land-grant colleges, homesteading on federal lands, immigration laws, and the building of the transcontinental railroad."⁴⁵ The authority

of the government to affect so many aspects of life was solidified under, but not limited to, the era of the Radical Reconstructionists.

While the nation worked to rebuild the Southern states and restructure and expand the federal government, the Latter-day Saints, by contrast, sought to retrench and strengthen themselves without federal interference. They sought ways to insulate themselves against expanding government in general. For example, Church leaders were initially very interested to see how the railroad could aid in building up the kingdom of God and bringing more Saints to Utah. But they seem to have become increasingly worried that the expanding railroad system would bring more “gentiles” into their territory and eventually undermine their way of life. The completion of the transcontinental railroad system was not a deliberate, calculated assault on LDS culture, but rather a natural consequence of the ending of the Civil War and subsequent Reconstruction. The nation could, and really had to, turn its energies to other endeavors after four years of total war—the transcontinental railroad being one. Among its main workers were army veterans. Many of its engineers were ex-army men who had learned their trade keeping the trains operating during the Civil War. The first transcontinental railroad system was officially connected on May 10, 1869, with the ceremonial driving of the last rail spike at Promontory Summit in Utah.

But well before the event, the anticipated completion of the transcontinental rail system constituted a significant rationale for the organization or reestablishment of the School of the Prophets by Church leaders in 1867. This was “a confidential forum of leading high priests” who met to discuss religious ideas, economic

policies, and political problems impacting the Church.⁴⁶ The expanding rail system was an important and vital issue for discussion because of its expected effect. Then, in the October 1868 general conference, President Brigham Young delivered a forceful address committing the Saints who met in the new Tabernacle to ameliorate the potential threat of outsiders by a renewed movement of cooperation and self-sufficiency. Among other things, President Young said, “If this is the Kingdom of God and if we are the Saints of God . . . are we not required to sustain ourselves and to manufacture that which we consume, to cease our bartering, trading, mingling, drinking, smoking, chewing and joining with all the filth of Babylon? . . . We want you henceforth to be a self-sustaining people. . . . What do you say brethren and sisters? All of you who say that we will be a self-sustaining people signify it by the show of your right hands.” Everyone in the new Tabernacle raised his or her hand. “Let us govern our wants by our necessities, and we shall find that we are not compelled to spend our money for nought. Let us save our money to enter and pay for our land, to buy flocks of sheep and improve them, and to buy machinery and start more woolen factories. We have a good many now, and the people will sustain them.”⁴⁷ President George Q. Cannon also warned the Saints of the outside threat to their institutions.⁴⁸

The ultimate purpose of this new movement, largely directed by the School of the Prophets, was to curtail, as much as possible, contact with worldly elements; to avoid trade with outsiders; and even to boycott non-Mormon establishments—which Church leaders encouraged the Saints to do from 1868 until 1882. As James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard explained:

The most controversial part of the plan was the proposition that Latter-day Saints should not trade with outsiders. If they were to keep the kingdom from being too strongly influenced or controlled by non-Mormon merchants, they must support their own cooperative institutions, and from 1868 until 1882 Church leaders encouraged the Saints to boycott “gentile” merchants and trade only with Mormon-owned establishments. In retrospect this may seem harsh and unfriendly, but most Latter-day Saints genuinely felt that incoming non-Mormons posed a threat to their economic well-being, and there was evidence that some outside merchants actually were trying to undermine the Church.⁴⁹

Such plans and behavior on the part of Church leaders and members caused non-Latter-day Saints to become even more suspicious of and antagonistic toward the Mormons. These circumstances, combined with the expanding and controlling role of central government in the United States, impacted the Latter-day Saints in even more direct and severe ways than just the influx of “gentiles” resulting from the construction of the trans-continental railroad.

RADICAL RECONSTRUCTION AND POLYGAMY

Early in the Church’s history, polygamy became a contentious issue with non-Latter-day Saints. It intensified after the Civil War. In 1856, the first platform of the new Republican party adopted at the National Convention declared that it was the duty of Congress to “prohibit in the Territories those twin relics

of barbarism, polygamy and slavery.”⁵⁰ During the Civil War, the Latter-day Saints were not treasonous or rebellious or proslavery, but they were polygamous and remained so. This was a major reason they were not only harassed but also denied statehood. As one historian put it, had the Church disavowed the institution of plural marriage when federal antipolygamy legislation was passed in 1862, “Utah would have become a state during the war; with polygamy intact statehood was impossible.”⁵¹ Perhaps. Certainly after the war, individuals both in and out of the federal government, from the North and the South, again turned their attention to Utah, the Latter-day Saints, and polygamy.

The renewed campaign to eradicate polygamy from society after the Civil War seems to have been part of the general reform plan inaugurated by the Radical Republicans who were working so hard to establish civil and political rights for blacks. These Radical Republicans and Reconstructionists sought to reform not only the South but also the social structure of Utah. In the late 1860s, these reformers introduced into Congress three bills that show both the level of hostility the federal government possessed toward plural marriage and the Church as well as the power they believed it had acquired under Radical Republican leadership. These three legislative measures have been summarized: “In 1866 Senator Wade introduced a bill designed to destroy not only plural marriage but, in fact, the very strength of the Church in Utah. It was unsuccessful but was soon followed by the Cragin Bill, which would have eliminated trial by jury in Utah in cases involving polygamy. In 1869 a different approach was tried in the House of Representatives through the Ashley Bill,

which proposed completely dismembering the Territory of Utah and dividing the area among surrounding states and territories.”⁵²

Antipolygamy sentiment intensified in 1870 owing to several developments. First was the publication of J. H. Beadle’s book *Polygamy; or, the Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*.⁵³ The title says it all. In addition, that same year new legislation was proposed: the Cullom Bill, which would have required all cases involving plural marriage to be prosecuted exclusively by federal judges with juries selected by federally appointed marshals and attorneys. A huge protest by three thousand women in Salt Lake City caused legislators in Washington, DC, to think twice about this proposed law. It seems that such protest, plus the fear of another civil war now involving the Mormons, caused the bill to be defeated.

Sadly, the newly elected president of the United States who succeeded Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant, was no friend to the Latter-day Saints. He, along with his vice president, Schuyler Colfax, denounced Mormon practices and then appointed General John Wilson Shaffer as governor of the Utah Territory in 1870. Shaffer, an ally of the Radical Republicans in Congress, helped establish harsh federal rule in the Southern states as Radical Reconstruction unfolded. Known as an ardent foe of rebellion against the U.S. federal government, his appointment increased anxiety among Utah residents and antagonism against the administration in Washington.⁵⁴ He died unexpectedly before the year was out, but his home had become “virtual headquarters for the anti-Mormon group that conspired to destroy the Church’s power.”⁵⁵

Shaffer helped to get the Utah territorial chief justice, Charles C. Wilson, removed from office so that President Grant could

appoint James B. McKean in Wilson’s place. He became chief justice of the Superior Court of the Utah Territory in 1870 and served until 1875. McKean, a Republican, had worked as a teacher and a judge, served in Congress, and fought in the Civil War as a colonel in the 77th Regiment of the New York Volunteers. President Grant sent McKean to Utah with instructions to root out polygamy. Both men believed this practice to be wrong. By contrast, the Latter-day Saints believed antipolygamy legislation to be wrong since it violated freedom of religion and was, therefore, unconstitutional.⁵⁶ When a showdown came, it centered on the person of Brigham Young.

Once in Utah, Judge McKean began denying citizenship to immigrants who practiced polygamy. He granted it only if applicants agreed to heed strictly the Anti-Bigamy Law of 1862. He even denied citizenship to those who expressed verbal support for the correctness of the right to practice polygamy though they themselves did not actually practice it. He then went after Mormonism’s greatest symbol of polygamy, Brigham Young, by indicting him on charges of adultery. He was arraigned in court on January 2, 1872, but released on bail to await trial. The trial was never held because ultimately the United States Supreme Court intervened and dismissed this indictment as well as other charges against President Young.⁵⁷ However, this episode did not diminish the federal government’s efforts to eliminate polygamy among the Latter-day Saints. Subsequent legislation against the Church and its members was enacted, and more immediate anti-Mormon activity in other parts of the country intensified.

As Radical Republicans began to lose power in the South, and Southern Democrats

gained control of their states in the mid-1870s, many Northerners began to lose interest in Reconstruction. Federal troops that were placed in Southern states to facilitate Reconstruction on Republican terms were eventually withdrawn, and in 1875 the LDS Church organized the Southern States Mission.⁵⁸ Ironically, this led to a new wave of anti-Mormon violence. Not surprisingly, its ultimate cause was rooted in a fear of and revulsion over polygamy.

It has been argued persuasively that virtually all Southerners during the post-Civil War era, including blacks, believed “that polygamy was a menace to Christian civilization and that Mormonism was a heretical and sensual imposter that required a united Christian response.”⁵⁹ Southern violence that had been leveled against blacks in the Reconstruction-era South was redirected against Church members, particularly missionaries.

Proselytizing efforts throughout the region by representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints stoked the fears of white southerners, who widely regarded Mormon missionaries as transient outsiders who imported heterodox religious beliefs and disrupted family ties and communities. Furthermore, southerners commonly saw missionaries as recruiting agents for Mormonism’s most infamous practice: polygamy. The most common portrayal of the Latter-day Saint (LDS) missionary in the postbellum South was as a scheming sexual predator who seduced young women and lured them away to his polygamous harem in the West. Although of a different type than the

so-called black beast rapist who forced himself on unwilling white women, the image of the Mormon seducer tapped into many of the same fears that captivated southern white men in the late nineteenth century and provided their rationale for lynching.⁶⁰

Vigilante violence was the most dramatic expression of Southern anti-Mormon sentiment. However, newspaper articles, pamphlets, sermons, and legislation also revealed how deep the bias against Mormons ran, and it almost always came back to the issue of polygamy. The *St. Louis Christian Advocate* of September 17, 1879, spoke of the “Mormon Question” as “one and the same thing” with polygamy.⁶¹ Perhaps it is difficult for modern readers to comprehend the pervasive nature of anti-Mormon sentiment, but when Elder Joseph Standing was seized in rural Georgia in 1879, along with his companion, Elder Rudger Clawson, one of their captors stated, “There is no law in Georgia for Mormons, and the Government is against you.”⁶² Sadly, this was profoundly true of the U.S. government as well.

THE “SECOND RECONSTRUCTION”

By 1876 only three Southern states were still operating under Reconstruction governments. The presidential election that year resulted in the victory of Republican candidate Rutherford B. Hayes, but only after a compromise was reached whereby the federal government promised to withdraw all remaining federal troops from the South. For all intents and purposes, Reconstruction ended after Hayes took office in 1877 and carried out the terms of the compromise. Unfortunately, anti-Mormon and antipolygamy activity did



Little of value was left standing in the heart of Columbia, South Carolina, by the end of the Civil War in 1865. (National Archives)

not end. In fact, the end of Reconstruction led directly to even greater anti-Mormon sentiment, and the Latter-day Saints had many rough years ahead of them.

The failure of Judge McKean's crusade against polygamy in the Utah Territory was followed by the passage of federal legislation in 1874 that strengthened the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862 and led to the prosecution of polygamy cases in federal courts. Named the Poland Bill for its sponsor, Luke P. Poland of Vermont, the new legislation emboldened the federal judiciary to reengage proceedings against polygamists. Church leaders believed antipolygamy legislation was unconstitutional—that it deprived them of their First Amendment right to practice their religion freely—and that a higher law, God's will, compelled them to violate federal law. It seems they designated George Reynolds, secretary to Brigham Young, to stand as a test case in order to

confirm the unconstitutionality of antipolygamy legislation as they saw it. Reynolds generally cooperated with the government prosecution, but he lost his case. He was convicted of bigamy, sentenced to two years of hard labor, and fined five hundred dollars. Through the appeals process, his case finally came before the U.S. Supreme Court. In the landmark decision of *Reynolds v. United States* in January 1879, the court ruled to uphold the lower court's decision. Antipolygamy law, specifically the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act of 1862, was affirmed as the constitutional law of the land.⁶³

The Church and its leaders were stunned. "Mormons could no longer claim shelter for their alternative marriage system as a form of religious expression protected under the First Amendment."⁶⁴ But more than that, just when Radical Republicans, Reconstructionists, and moral reformers had grown weary of their efforts to reform and rebuild the American

South, the decision of the U.S. Supreme Court breathed new life into the underlying impulse to restructure and rebuild society. This new antipolygamy crusade sparked what legal historian Sarah Barringer Gordon has called “a second ‘Reconstruction’ in the West.”⁶⁵

Antipolygamy sentiments specifically, and Anti-Mormonism sentiments generally, took on “a decidedly bipartisan and national character from the 1870s” onward. Significantly, “it was precisely because of the end of Reconstruction in the South that the federal government could turn its gaze—and direct its increased regulatory powers—toward problems in the West, including Indians and Mormons.”⁶⁶ But Americans from every economic strata and political persuasion joined the campaign against Mormon polygamy. The “anti-polygamy movement cut across political, religious, and sectional lines” after Reconstruction in the South wound down.⁶⁷

Ironically, Southern white participation in the national antipolygamy movement of the 1870s and 1880s served to soften somewhat the strained, even antagonistic, relationship between Southerners and Northern Republicans “by giving them common cause as moral and legislative reformers.”⁶⁸ African Americans felt similar distaste toward polygamy, but their own problems, namely civil rights, kept them from participation in organized antipolygamy activities. Furthermore, many blacks “were quick to point out the hypocrisy of those who called for moral reform [among Mormons] while countenancing Jim Crow,”⁶⁹ a reference to laws enacted in the South to discriminate against African Americans.

CONCLUSION

Reconstruction proved to be a mixed “blessing.” It produced the Thirteenth,

Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution—landmark legislation to be sure. But on many counts, Reconstruction was a failure. It failed to solve the economic disasters engulfing the South after the Civil War. It failed to ease suffering, as President Lincoln seemed to envision. And it failed to bring racial harmony to the South and real equality to black Americans. Many blacks continued to work the land owned by whites. Most blacks in the South were prohibited from going to schools, attending churches, or entering hospitals where whites participated. Indeed, after Reconstruction ended, black Americans gradually lost all the rights they had gained during Reconstruction. This regression laid the foundation for the modern Civil Rights Movement one hundred years later, in the 1960s. Truly, Reconstruction was, in the words of Eric Foner, “America’s unfinished revolution.”⁷⁰

Neither did Latter-day Saints fare so well after the Civil War as a result of what historians have called the “Second Reconstruction.” They struggled to find what they regarded as fair treatment under an originally inspired Constitution. For a long time it seemed as though even friendly association beyond their Rocky Mountain home was out of the question. The “Second Reconstruction”—the national antipolygamy campaign of the 1870s and 1880s—treated them worse than they thought probable or possible. President Hayes did all he could to strengthen antipolygamy legislation, to recommend “more comprehensive and more searching methods for preventing as well as punishing” polygamy, as well as stripping its Mormon practitioners of their civil rights and privileges under U.S. citizenship.⁷¹

President Hayes’s immediate successor, James A. Garfield, was no more conciliatory

toward the Latter-day Saints than Hayes had been, nor any more realistic about the achievements of Reconstruction. As Garfield congratulated the government in his inaugural address for elevating “the negro race from slavery to the full rights of citizenship,” he also declared that “the Mormon Church not only offends the moral sense of manhood by sanctioning polygamy, but prevents the administration of justice through ordinary instrumentalities of law.”⁷² Thus the national consciousness was led to embrace the notion that the Latter-day Saints were less than those possessing real manhood and that they obstructed justice to boot. They were, ironically, regarded as “that class which destroy the family relations and endanger social order.”⁷³ In other words, now that blacks could no longer be held culpable by constitutional amendment of endangering the social order, the Latter-day Saints filled that role.

The agendas of Presidents Hayes and Garfield laid the foundation for the Edmunds Acts of 1882, which declared the practice of polygamy a felony and disenfranchised convicted polygamists. Five years later, the

Edmunds-Tucker Act enacted even harsher measures to eliminate polygamy. While the legal maneuvering was occurring, individual Latter-day Saints, especially in the South, were enduring the physical indignities, insults, trauma, and violence perpetrated against them by an American public caught up in a national crusade against their religious beliefs.

Blessed with hindsight, the parallels between two groups of people targeted by two eras of Reconstruction are not lost on us. Though their trials were not nearly as profound, pervasive, or longlasting as the injustices and the travesties experienced by black Americans, the Latter-day Saints have endured experiences that make them more appreciative of the trials and tribulations of blacks living in the South after the Civil War. Such histories of mistreatment ought to make all of us more vigilant to injustice in our day and more willing to combat it. To an extent, there are some Americans who have never gotten over the “barbarism” of Mormonism. It remains one of the last great biases existing in this country.

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NOTES

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