Opposing Viewpoints in American History

VOLUME 1
FROM COLONIAL TIMES TO RECONSTRUCTION

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Part 1
REBUILDING AFTER THE CIVIL WAR
(1865–1895)

**CHRONOLOGY**

*1865*

March 3 Freedman’s Bureau established.

April 9 Robert E. Lee surrenders to Ulysses S. Grant, ending Civil War.

April 14 President Abraham Lincoln assassinated.

November Mississippi enacts Black Code.

December 18 Thirteenth Amendment, banning slavery, ratified.

December 24 Ku Klux Klan founded in Tennessee.

*1866*

April 9 Congress passes Civil Rights Act over President Andrew Johnson’s veto, nullifying state Black Codes.

July 24 Congress readmits the state of Tennessee to the Union.

July 30 Race riot in New Orleans results in 200 casualties.

*1867*

March 1 Nebraska enters the Union.

March 30 United States purchases Alaska from Russia.

*1868*

May President Andrew Johnson avoids impeachment by one vote.

June 22–24 Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, South Carolina, and North Carolina are readmitted to the Union.

July 21 Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing black civil rights, ratified.

November 3 Ulysses S. Grant elected president.

December 25 President Johnson grants amnesty for all Confederate leaders.

*1869*

March 15 Woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution proposed in Congress.

May 10 Nation’s first transcontinental railroad completed.

November 6 First intercollegiate football game played.

December 10 Wyoming Territory grants women the right to vote.

*1870*

January 10 Standard Oil Company incorporated in Cleveland, Ohio.

January 20 Virginia readmitted to the Union.

February 23 Mississippi readmitted to the Union.

February 25 Hiram R. Revels of Mississippi become nation’s first black senator.

March 30 Fifteenth Amendment, forbidding racial restrictions on suffrage, ratified.

*1871*

March 3 Congress nullifies past treaties and makes Indians wards of the federal government.

April 20 Ku Klux Klan Act passed by Congress.

October 8–11 Great Chicago fire destroys much of the city of Chicago.

*1872*

March 1 Yellowstone National Park established by Congress.
Part 1: Rebuilding After the Civil War (1865–1895)

June 19 Freedman’s Bureau abolished.
November 28 Susan B. Anthony arrested while attempting to vote.
November 5 Grant reelected president.

1873
March 3 Comstock law bars obscenity (including birth control information) from the federal mails.
September Wall Street Panic of 1873 occurs.

1875
March 1 Civil Rights Act of 1875 forbids racial segregation in public places.

1876
February 2 National League of baseball teams organized.
March Alexander Graham Bell invents the telephone.
May–November Centennial Exposition occurs at Philadelphia.
August 1 Colorado admitted to the Union.

1877
March 2 Rutherford B. Hayes declared winner of close and controversial presidential election.
April Remaining federal troops are withdrawn from the South.
June–October Nez Percé War occurs.
July Railway workers stage first national strike.

1878
August 21 American Bar Association founded.

1879
Winter Progress and Poverty by Henry George published.
February 15 Act of Congress permits women to argue cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.
October 21 Thomas Edison invents the first practical incandescent light.

1880
November 2 James A. Garfield elected president.

1881
February 19 Kansas adopts statewide prohibition.
May 21 American Red Cross founded.
July 2 President Garfield shot.
July 4 Booker T. Washington founds the Tuskegee Institute.
September 19 Garfield dies; Vice President Chester A. Arthur becomes president.

1882
January 2 Standard Oil Trust founded.
May 6 Chinese Exclusion Act passed.

1883
January 16 Pendleton Act sets up Civil Service Commission.
May 24 Brooklyn Bridge opens.
July 4 Debut of “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show.”
October 15 Supreme Court in Civil Rights Cases declares Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional.
November 18 Standard railway time zones adopted in United States.

1884
December Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain published.
November 4 Grover Cleveland elected president.

1886
February 7 Anti-Chinese riots engulf Seattle.
May Haymarket Square bombing and riot occurs.
September 4 Apache chief Geronimo captured, ending last major Indian war.
October 28 Statue of Liberty dedicated.

1888
February 4 Interstate Commerce Commission established by Congress.
February 8 Dawes Severalty Act converts Indian tribal lands to individual ownership.

1889
February First use of secret ballot in the United States public election occurs in Louisville, Kentucky.
November 6 Benjamin Harrison elected president.

1890
June Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth” article published.
November North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana reach statehood.

1891
November Census Bureau declares the end of the frontier.
July Idaho and Wyoming made states.
July 2 Passage of Sherman Antitrust Act outlawing monopolies.
September 25 Yosemite National Park established.
December 29 146 Sioux Indians killed by U.S. troops at the Wounded Knee massacre.
1891

December  Basketball invented by James Naismith.
May 19  Populist Party launched in Cincinnati, Ohio.

1892

January 1  Immigration receiving station in New York City transferred to Ellis Island.
July–November  Homestead strike by steelworkers against the Carnegie Steel Company.
September  First successful gas-powered automobile made in the U.S.
November 8  Grover Cleveland elected president.

1893

January 17  Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii overthrown.
June 27  Crash of New York stock market begins four years of depression.
November 7  Women’s suffrage adopted in Colorado by popular vote.

1894

July 2  President Cleveland sends in federal troops to enforce injunction against Pullman railway strike.
August 27  Nation’s first graduated income tax law passed by Congress.

1895

May 20  Supreme Court in *Pollack v. Farmer’s Loan and Trust* declares federal income tax unconstitutional.
September 18  Booker T. Washington speaks at the Atlanta Exposition.
PREFACE

The Civil War had profound and lasting repercussions on the United States. No change was more dramatic than the death of the defining institution of the defeated Confederacy—slavery—which was abolished by constitutional amendment eight months after Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox in April 1865. Other significant changes took longer to materialize. For example, the military demands of war propelled advances in technology that laid the foundation for an explosion of industrial development in the victorious North. Still other transformations stemmed from wartime efforts by Congress to bind the far-flung nation together. Both the 1862 Homestead Act and the decision the same year to sponsor construction of a transcontinental railroad helped spur postwar westward migration—a development that transformed the western regions of the country.

The changes America underwent during the three decades following the war’s end did not proceed without controversies and debates, as the following selection of opposing viewpoints illustrates. Some of the issues presented here were of special concern to specific regions of the country. Americans were frequently at odds over matters pertaining to the reconstruction of the South, the industrialization of the North, and the settlement of the West. Other issues, such as labor/management relations and immigration, were national in scope. But all of these disagreements took place in the context of a nation that was growing rapidly in population, wealth, and power.

THE SOUTH AND RECONSTRUCTION

Reconstruction (1865–1877) was dominated by two fundamental questions. One question concerned the manner in which the former Confederate states should be reintegrated into the Union. At issue was whether they should be permitted to regain their status as states quickly, as President Abraham Lincoln proposed before his April 1865 assassination, or whether they should be held as conquered provinces, as Radical Republicans in Congress argued. Closely related to this dilemma was a second question: How should the 4 million former slaves be reintegrated into what was no longer a slave society? Should they be granted the right to vote and otherwise participate in the political process? Or should their political and social rights be restricted, as many whites in both the North and the South believed? Radical Republicans insisted on federal control of Confederate states to ensure that the ex-slaves would soon be given political equality, economic opportunity, and full civil rights. Opponents of the Radical Republicans generally opposed federal control of state governments, in large part because they wanted to pass state laws that would limit the rights and powers of blacks (as many Southern states did after the Civil War by enacting special “Black Codes”).

The Radical Republicans achieved mixed success in their goals. They passed federal laws that were designed to achieve a measure of integration throughout the South. Through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, respectively, black Americans were granted citizenship and black men received the right to vote. But by 1877 all federal troops had been withdrawn from the former Confederate states, all eleven states had been readmitted to the Union, and political leadership in the South had returned to conservative whites. Three-quarters of the southern black population became sharecroppers, many of whom were so poor that their material welfare was not much better than it had been under slavery. During the 1880s southern writers and political leaders hailed the rise of a “New South” based on industrial renaissance and postwar reconciliation. But critics, both white and black, argued that whether the issue was race relations or economic development, the region still had a long way to go.

IMMIGRATION, MIGRATION, AND THE AMERICAN FRONTIER

The South was not the only region of the country divided along racial and ethnic lines. Blacks faced racial prejudice and discrimination in other parts of the nation. Moreover, the fears of some Americans were directed not only at blacks (who then constituted a relatively small portion of the population outside the South), but also at other minorities, including newly arrived immigrants and American Indians.

Between 1860 and 1890 more than 10 million people immigrated to the United States. A large number of them came from Asia and southern and eastern Europe, areas that were previously not a major source of immigrants. While some settled in rural areas, many instead formed ethnic enclaves within America’s cities. Some Americans encouraged immigration and praised immigrants’ contributions to America, but others looked at the unfamiliar newcomers with suspicion. Some feared that immigrants would take jobs from native-born Americans or that the presence of large numbers of low-wage immigrant laborers in the workforce would depress wages. In California and other western states, Chinese
immigrants and other minorities were often the victims of racial prejudice—and sometimes violence. On the local and national levels, debates began on whether the traditional American policy of open immigration should be abandoned.

Far away from America’s cities and coastal regions, the areas affected by immigration, conflict arose between the Native American inhabitants of the western regions and the cowboys, pioneers, farmers, and other newcomers who sought Indian land. Conflicts between settlers and Indians often turned violent. In the 1870s and 1880s, partly in response to attacks by Native Americans and partly to secure the plains for settlement, the U.S. government launched numerous military campaigns to remove Native Americans to reservations. Many reformers argued that the reservations would provide Indians with a better, more secure way of life. They believed that Native Americans would benefit from learning modern agricultural methods, whites’ social practices, and Christian religious beliefs. Although some whites decried the forced relocations, which they perceived as government abuses against American Indians, few advocated returning land to the Indian tribes or preserving Native American culture.

In addition to the Indian wars, the settlement of the West brought with it the destruction of the buffalo herds, the rise and fall of the open-range cattle system, and the joining of the East and the West by railroad. Between 1870 and 1890 the non-Indian population west of the Mississippi River grew from 7 million to 17 million. By 1890 the U.S. Census Bureau declared that the frontier, in the form of an unbroken line delineating an unsettled region, had all but disappeared. The prairies formerly populated by herds of buffalo and nomadic tribes of American Indians were now populated with farmers trying to earn a living from the land.

AGRARIAN PROTEST

The millions of people drawn west by the prospect of land to homestead faced a harsh life with numerous obstacles to success. Drought, locusts, and other natural disasters were a setback for some, but many farmers came to believe that their problems were the result of social inequities and faceless enemies, including banks, railroads, and corporations.

Previous generations of American farmers and settlers had been largely self-sufficient. They obtained their food, clothing, simple tools, and other necessities of life directly from their own land and toil or by trade in local markets. But in the years following the Civil War, farmers increasingly concentrated on raising cash crops, such as wheat, corn, or cotton. These crops were then shipped by rail to distant markets. Over time farmers grew dependent on railroad companies to market their products and on banks for working capital to buy needed land and farm machinery. Many farmers failed to break even due to the expensive shipping rates charged by railroads and the high interest rates of banks. The steady drop of prices for staple crops in the years following the Civil War, especially during the 1880s, worsened farmers’ already bleak prospects.

Some farmers responded to economic distress by organizing among themselves. Their political efforts led to the formation of the Grange movement of the 1870s, the Farmers’ Alliance network of the 1880s, and the Populist Party of the 1890s. All these movements called for greater regulation of banks and railroads; the Populist Party demanded outright government ownership of the railroads.

THE INDUSTRIAL NORTH

While the frontier was being settled and the South was struggling to recover from the Civil War, the northern states led the nation in the most significant economic development of the era: the rapid rise and supremacy of industry, which by the 1890s had exceeded agriculture as a source of income for Americans. Advances in technology were a key factor in this industrial growth. Between 1860 and 1890, 440,000 patents were issued by the U.S. Patent Office. Among the inventions of the era were the telegraph, telephone, typewriter, and adding machine. The manufacture of steel, essential for railroad rails and skyscrapers, became a major American industry. With the growth of industry came controversies over the distribution of the wealth it produced.

RICH AND POOR

The industrial age created an unprecedented gap between the rich and the poor. A few Americans were able to obtain great fortunes for themselves. The number of millionaires rose from around twenty in 1850 to more than three thousand in 1900. Tycoons such as Andrew Carnegie (steel), John D. Rockefeller (oil), and J. Pierpont Morgan (banking and railroads) became dominant figures of the era, overshadowing in fame and power even presidents of the United States. Some praised these entrepreneurs as geniuses of business organization who helped to harness natural resources and to provide industrial products for American businesses and consumers. Others criticized them for using unethical methods to destroy competitors, for having little or no regard for the public good, and for underpaying and mistreating their workers.

At the other end of the economic scale were those who labored in the nation’s factories, on the nation’s rails, and in the nation’s mines. These laborers typically worked at least sixty hours a week for low wages, often in hazardous conditions. The percentage of self-employed workers in America fell from about half of the workforce
in 1860 to one-third by 1900; consequently, more workers than ever before were dependent on wages for a living. Their dependency on wages, combined with the fact that they could be laid off or fired at any time, created a perilous economic situation for many workers and their families. Some workers responded by forming labor unions and engaging in strikes. However, while they laid foundations for future labor movement successes, most of these efforts failed in the face of intense business and legal opposition.

The expansion of industry in these years had some positive results for American workers. The general decline in prices, while harmful for farmers dependent on crop sales, meant that workers with steady jobs enjoyed rising real incomes to help them purchase the increasing variety of consumer goods. The industrial revolution supported a growing middle class, provided work opportunities for America’s immigrants, and allowed more women to find wage jobs outside the home. Many Americans viewed the growth of the middle class and the ascent of such figures as Carnegie, who rose from an impoverished immigrant to a steel magnate, as proof that in America anyone who worked hard could succeed and become rich. However, as the century drew to a close, some people were concerned that America’s industrialization was not helping the nation as a whole, and that the widening divide between rich and poor Americans threatened national ideals of freedom and equality. These questions continued to be part of the American dialogue as the nation approached the twentieth century.
RECONSTRUCTION AND
THE NEW SOCIAL ORDER IN
THE SOUTH

Viewpoint 1A
Reconstruction Should Be Harsh (1865)
William Mason Grosvenor (1835–1900)

INTRODUCTION
William Mason Grosvenor, an abolitionist prior to the Civil War, commanded one of the first units of black soldiers organized to fight for the North in that conflict. During the war he observed firsthand the relatively lenient reconstruction process by which the state government of Louisiana was re-created under Northern military occupation, with little change in the political or economic status of blacks beyond the abolition of slavery. In an article published in the New Englander magazine in 1865, excerpted here, Grosvenor criticizes the state and local government established during the Civil War. He also takes issue with the “abeyance” theory of reconstruction—the idea that the Confederate states, whose secession did not have legal validity, still possessed all their constitutional prerogatives as member states of America, and should be restored these temporarily suspended rights as speedily as possible.

On what foundation does the North have the right to dictate social changes in the South, according to Grosvenor? What problem does he have with the Confederate states retaining their original constitutions?

It is fortunate that the political victory achieved in the re-election of President Lincoln is generally received, not with noisy exultation, but with calm and thoughtful thankfulness. It gives ground for hope that in rejoicing over triumphs gained and dangers escaped, the nation will not be blind to the severer trial yet to be met, and the fearful responsibilities that will attend it.

There remains the . . . most serious test of all—the trial of wisdom and statesmanship. This is not merely a rebellion or a political contest with which we have to deal: it is a revolution. Our task is to obey and execute a fiat of the Almighty, written on the face of the Western hemisphere in the course of the Mississippi river. “There shall be, upon this broad domain, one nation and but one.” The shock of arms revealed the fact that we had never been one people, and that a true nationality, embracing all States and sections, had never existed. Heterogeneous populations, hostile systems, and irreconcilable ideas had only been placed in contact, and held to bare juxta-position by a constitutional compact. No chemical union had ever taken place; for that the white-hot crucible of civil war was found necessary. To keep up the fire until antagonistic elements are refined away and a perfect union is effected is needful, and is the deliberate purpose of the nation, expressed in the late election; but that is not all. To direct the process of amalgamation, to determine the time for each step, and to give shape to the new substance, will demand the most exalted statesmanship. A single error may cause a flaw that shall send the whole work back to the furnace.

But whether the future nationality shall be equal to the glorious possibilities of free government, whether the harmony of forces and homogeneity of elements shall be complete, will depend upon the measure of statesmanship that may guide the work now close at hand. Already a great constitutional reform is demanded; and we are but dull scholars if we have not learned through all the severe experiences of this war, that no work of human device is perfect, and that nations, like children, will outgrow their clothes. Already the financial problem calls for something more than temporary expedients. Already questions of a standing army, of a permanent revenue, and of tariff or direct taxation, require reexamination by the light of new events and needs. Already the problem of the future of the negro race assumes the gravest importance, and can be deferred but a little longer. Questions of amnesty or punishment of public enemies already engage the attention of rulers and people. Behind these there throng in the anteroom whole troops of problems new and strange—of interests needing protection and claims clamoring for adjustment. The offing is full of questions, fast anchored once, but now cast adrift by the storm. The change to which we are called is radical. It is the new-birth of nation.

THE PROPER MODE
OF RECONSTRUCTION

Of all the unsolved problems the most important, and the one that demands most urgently thorough examination and final settlement, is that which concerns the present status of the rebellious States and the proper mode of reconstruction. It is too momentous a subject to be left to chance. . . . The question is one of no little difficulty; it goes deeper than all our statutes and deeper than the Constitution itself, and makes all precedents as useless as the trilobites. The very multitude of theories darkens counsel, and rarely, if ever, has the question been stripped

of all extraneous matter and clearly stated. It has nothing to do with slavery or confiscation. It is simply this: “Do the civil rights under our government, once vested in certain States and the citizens of those States, still exist, and, if so, in whom are they vested?” To discuss particular measures of reconstruction and attempt partial reorganizations, without first giving to this question a final and formal answer, is to put up a frame and finish off a wing before the shape of the building is fixed or the foundation laid. . .

Punishment . . . shall be severe enough to prevent for all future time the recurrence of a crime so terribly destructive.

It would surely be not a little to the credit of the nation to sweep away . . . all those paltry simulacra of elections and organizations which have hitherto started up like mushrooms in the track of our armies . . . Have we not seen enough of these manufactured organizations, which “live, move and have their being” in the baggage wagons of our army? They afford excellent chances for political chicanery; nice honors and fat offices are recovered from “abeyance” by men whose surprising merit had not been discovered in times of peace; but is the Union cause materially helped or do the Union loving people of the South thereby obtain any substantial protection? Is it not time to ask if these sickly plants do not cost more than it is worth to rear them, and to look with favor on a theory, which, by removing all pretext for such premature growths, sweeps away the whole system of political jugglery so engendered?

PUNISHING TREASON

Another consideration seems worthy of special attention. Our law of treason is less effective or severe than that of other civilized nations. To the framers of the Constitution treason seemed a crime strangely horrid and improbable, and there doubtless appeared to be greater danger from an over rigorous loyalty, which, in times of excitement, might mistake reasonable freedom of thought and speech for hostility to the government. . . . But, were the South to lay down her arms to-day, and resume the rights which the abeyance theory conceives, there is no security that even these leaders would not find absolute immunity from punishment. Even the most notorious traitor could exercise every right of citizenship until he had been tried and convicted by a jury from his own State, and nothing in the laws of that State would exclude any other notorious traitor from the jury-box. What punishment would [Jefferson] Davis fear from a jury of Mississippians, of whom perhaps half had just laid aside smoking muskets and dripping swords to enter the panel? To place such immunity within the reach of rebels, who may abandon the contest whenever they find it hopeless, is to put a premium on treason. We are cramped by no legal forms of constitutional obligations, unless we choose, in punishing this rebellion. Rising to the proportions of a civil war, it has placed in the hands of the nation not only the remedial agencies of the courts, but the torch and sword of the conqueror. Rebels are now not rebels only, but public enemies; Gettysburg’s slaughter and Sherman’s march have a broader sweep than any enacted penalties; and the right of conquest cuts deeper than any conceivable measure of confiscation. The law of war becomes supreme, and of that law “Vae Victis” [“Woe to the vanquished”] is the epitome. We have only to apply the principles of the decision above quoted to the work of reconstruction, to make sure that the punishment, for leaders at least, shall be severe enough to prevent for all future time the recurrence of a crime so terribly destructive to the national prosperity and the national honor. . . .

Schemes of reconstruction which make possible immunity for the great conspirators, or instant return to all political privileges for traitors as well as loyalists, will not be such as the people will approve or the nation can safely adopt. Nor will it answer, in overflowing leniency for past offenses, to neglect security for healthy political action in the future. Men who have deliberately betrayed trusts guarded by all the sanctity of an oath are not safely to be trusted as loyal and true citizens, whenever they may choose to renew an obligation once violated. But the state constitutions only can effectually debar any from suffrage, office, or trust; under the abeyance theory each State can demand recognition with her old constitution and laws; nor is it easy to find authority for requiring particular changes as conditions of recognition. Instead of retaining these old constitutions, redolent of the slave-pen, defiled in every part by the use of traitors, and infested in every joint and crevice by claims that loyal men must loathe but can never wholly extirpate, the erection and admission of new States demolishes all these relies of a shameful past, and secures new and spotless constitutions, each in harmony in every part with the spirit of the new era, and instinct and vital with freedom and loyalty.

Viewpoint 1B
Reconstruction Should Be Lenient (1866)
Herman Melville (1819–1891)

INTRODUCTION Northern-born writer Herman Melville, most famous for his novels including Moby Dick, wrote a short collection of poems inspired by the Civil War that was published in 1866. In a companion essay to the poetry collection, excerpted here, the antislavery and