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**Level: .LMD2**

**Module: ASCC**

**Course Number: 4**

**Course Title: The Reconstruction Era (1865-1877)**

The Civil War had deep consequences that damaged and ruined the south. America was torn apart into many pieces as the country was divided not only into the north and south but also into sections. Reconstruction thus can be described as a period of time in which America was being rebuilt and politically reunified. This period witnessed many leaders, goals and achievements. Reconstruction was considered as both a success and a failure.

Reconstruction or as it is also referred to, the building of the country economically and/or politically started in the war in many regions in the South that belonged to the Union army from the Mississippi River, border states reaching sections of the Atlantic Coast.

Reconstruction began right after the Civil War in 1865. It can be defined as the period of “putting back the pieces together”, an era when America wanted to be a full-running country once again. However, this was not easy to achieve because of the memory of all people who were killed that transformed into resentment and even hatred. The South was very weak economically with slaves released but who had no idea how to start without their masters. They were emancipated with the 13th amendment (1865). This was of a great concern for political leaders who appeared each with a plan.

One of the plans was the Lincoln plan also called the 10 per cent plan that simply refer to the fact that in order for a confederate state to join ‘the Union’, it had to accept the emancipation of slaves and swear ‘loyalty’ to the Union. Additionally, people in power could not hold office or carry out voting without the consent of the President.

Abraham Lincoln considered this type of Reconstruction as a way to weaken the Confederate states by providing southerners the prospect of reunification under the most moderate and generous terms. Lincoln flexible plan granted amnesty or official pardon to all officers who sustained the Confederacy only if they joined under his terms.

Unfortunately, Lincoln was assassinated on April 4 1865 before he implemented his plan. He was followed by a president from the Republican Party (Radicals) who had two major aims. First, they blamed the South for the Civil War and wanted them to pay back. Second, they wanted to help four million slaves by providing protection. Three main Radical Republican leaders appeared on the stage, Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and Andrew Johnson. Thaddeus Stevens wanted slaves to become independent economically while Charles Sumner fought for political rights for African Americans and for citizenship. Still, President Andrew Johnson had a plan similar to former presidents. Those plans were not approved by the Radicals for they believed that he gave so many pardons( 13.000) and that he was not paying much attention to the major issue ‘slaves’ rights. Consequently, Congress impeached him and brought its own plan of Reconstruction. The Reconstruction Act, which means troops, should move and take residence in the South. Second, a state can be part of the Union if they changed the 14th amendment. They had to agree that all men that were born on the American soil were entitled to citizenship and this is why they had to receive equal treatment by law. They were also granted the vote (1870) but this was on paper only. In 1876 Presidential elections, two men run for presidency, Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. The race was nearly the same so there was a “commission” which interfered for an outcome. With the Compromise of 1877, Hayes was declared the winner. The troops withdrew from the South. They were protecting slaves there because they were emancipated; they set their own rules (black codes) which restricted African American freedom. They even obliged them to work in labor economy for low wages and debts. At this level, Reconstruction ended, it is true that not all plans worked but at least some people felt that they did their jobs.

Was Reconstruction a success or a failure? It was neither a success nor a failure. It was a major step in the reunification of America as new laws were set up to protect African American rights (they were granted the vote and citizenship). It was not giant leap but a major step for we cannot say it was a success with one president assassinated and the other impeached but still it inspired women to claim for their own rights. Overall, it was a success with so many exceptions.