**8-5.1: Reconstruction Policies – Full Version**

**8-5.1 Focus Question:**

What was the impact of Reconstruction policy in South Carolina?

**8-5.1 Essential Notes:**

The Reconstruction policies of the federal government significantly impacted society and politics in South Carolina after the Civil War. Although South Carolina faced significant economic problems as a result of the Civil War, the federal government did not believe it should have the responsibility to rebuild the South economically. Instead this was the responsibility of individuals and state and local governments.

Consequently the **Reconstruction policies** of the national government did not include the reconstruction of towns, factories, farms, and transportation systems. This is a common misunderstanding.

The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, known as the **Freedman’s Bureau**, was established by Congress prior to the end of the Civil War. The Bureau was the first line of assistance to everyone affected by the war, including whites, as well as destitute freedmen. This federal agency, under the control of the United States army provided food, clothing, medical care, education and some protection from the hostile white environment. The Freedman’s Bureau helped many freedmen find jobs and established courts to protect the illiterate workers. The bureau was also charged with distributing to freedmen those lands that had been abandoned during the war or that had been confiscated as punishment for disloyalty to the Union. However, the Bureau was forced to take these lands back when President Johnson pardoned the white owners and returned their property to them. Congress would not pass legislation granting lands to freedmen because they respected the constitutional rights of southern whites to their landed property. The great majority of African Americans did *not* receive land that would have given them economic independence. In lieu of having their own land, the Freedman’s Bureau helped African Americans establish the sharecropping relationship with the worker-less plantation owner. Although this system mired African Americans as well as landless poor whites in economic dependence and poverty for generations, it did play a role in the economic reconstruction of South Carolina. The most important contribution of the Freedman’s Bureau, however, was the facilitation of the establishment of over 1,000 schools throughout the South.

Plans for Reconstruction were developed and promoted by Presidents Lincoln and Johnson and also by the United States Congress. The purpose of **President Lincoln’s plan**, formulated before the end of the fighting, was to end the war as quickly as possible. By requiring that only 10% of the population swear allegiance to the Union before they could reconstitute their state governments and send representatives to Congress, Lincoln hoped to convince southern states, including South Carolina, to surrender. Lincoln also required state governments to recognize the end of slavery. Lincoln’s assassination did not significantly change this presidential Reconstruction plan. President Johnson basically continued Lincoln’s 10% policy with the additional personal purpose of humiliating the southern elite by requiring that they individually request a pardon from President Johnson and ratify the 13th amendment that freed the slaves. Johnson quickly granted pardons to the prominent southerners who requested them.

While these presidential Reconstruction plans had their own objectives, by the time of Congress’s plan there were other objectives. The reasons Congress passed a Reconstruction plan were to protect the rights of the newly freed slaves as well as the Republican’s political power. During the months after Appomattox when Congress was not in session, the South Carolina legislature and legislatures in other southern states passed **Black Codes** and elected former Confederates to Congress. Congress refused to admit returning Southern officials to Congress. Increased violence against the freedmen and President Johnson’s opposition to Congressional efforts to secure the rights of the freedmen by his veto of the extension of the Freedman’s Bureau and his opposition to the 14th Amendment significantly changed the course of Reconstruction policy. As a result of the voting public’s reaction to violence in the South against African Americans and the actions of President Johnson, the so-called “**Radical Republicans**” won a majority in the congressional elections of 1866 and passed a congressional plan for Reconstruction. This plan called for military occupation of the former Confederacy, splitting it into five military districts. South Carolina was in the second military district. Each district had a military governor and the army was used to enforce its laws. Congress impeached Johnson to ensure that as commander in chief he could not undermine its efforts. Although he was not removed from office, Johnson’s power was reduced. The Union army attempted to enforce the Reconstruction policy and the **13th, 14th and 15th amendments**.

Ratification of and assurances that they would abide by the 13th amendment was required of southern states before they could form new governments. The **13th amendment** effected emancipation of the slaves throughout the United States and brought profound social change for southern African Americans. Freedmen worked to consolidate their families and communities, establish a network of churches and other autonomous institutions, claim equal citizenship, get an education and carve out as much independence as possible in their lives. Although freedom brought significant social change for African Americans, initially there was little change for the white population. Social classes remained fairly stable despite the loss of economic status by the planter elite. The Black Codes demonstrated that white South Carolinians were unwilling to recognize the social and political rights of the newly freed slaves. Both groups preferred to maintain a social distance that slavery had not allowed. African Americans left the white churches for congregations of their own. They moved from the slave quarters to plots away from the Big House and established their own communities. This separation and loss of control over African Americans caused anxiety among whites to escalate. White South Carolinians resented African Americans who were now free of the imposed submissiveness of slavery and some white southerners feared retaliation by their former slaves. The formation of terrorist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan reflected mounting racial tension and the determination of the white population to keep the African American population in ‘its place’ socially, politically, and economically.

The **14th amendment** was designed to protect the political and social rights of freedmen from this intimidation. The 14th amendment overturned the *Dred Scott* decision by recognizing the citizenship of African Americans; it upheld the right of all citizens to “equal protection” before the laws and “due process” of law. The amendment required that 2/3 of the Congress vote to grant amnesty to ex- Confederates before they could hold public office. It included a provision that was designed to force states to grant political rights to freedmen by reducing representation for states that did not allow African Americans to vote. However, this provision proved ineffective. The **15th amendment** was passed to ensure that the right of *all* male citizens to vote, in the North as well as in the South, would not be denied based on “race, creed or previous condition of servitude.” The amendment was also motivated by the desire of the Republican Party to secure its political power in the South. The Southern vote, largely made up of the vote of African Americans, had contributed to Grant’s election in 1868. South Carolina refused to ratify the 14th and 15th amendments. As a result of **Congressional Reconstruction**, the military governor of Military District 2 required South Carolina to hold a convention to write a new state constitution that would recognize the amendments.