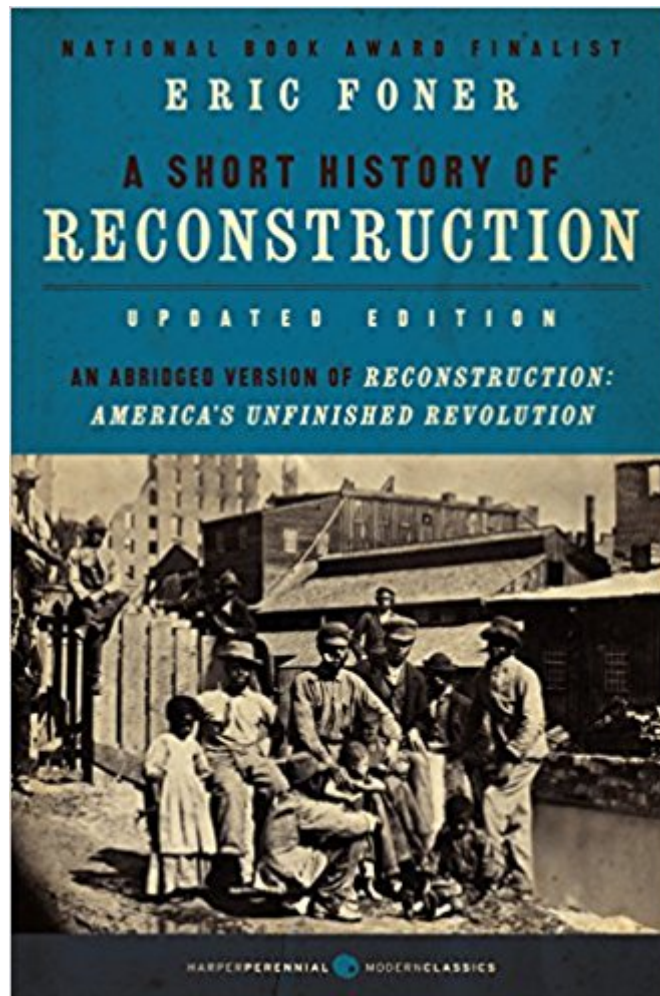




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A Short History Of Reconstruction, Updated Edition



Synopsis

From the "preeminent historian of Reconstruction" (New York Times Book Review), a newly updated abridged edition of the prize-winning classic work on the post-Civil War period which shaped modern America. In this updated edition of the abridged Reconstruction, Eric Foner redefines how the post-Civil War period was viewed. Reconstruction chronicles the way in which Americans "black and white" responded to the unprecedented changes unleashed by the war and the end of slavery. It addresses the quest of emancipated slaves searching for economic autonomy and equal citizenship, and describes the remodeling of Southern society; the evolution of racial attitudes and patterns of race relations; and the emergence of a national state possessing vastly expanded authority and one committed, for a time, to the principle of equal rights for all Americans. This "masterful treatment of one of the most complex periods of American history" (New Republic) remains the standard work on the wrenching post-Civil War period "an era whose legacy still reverberates in the United States today."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In an attempt to document the important issues of reconstruction, Eric Foner compiled his book Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877. This book was the basis for the abridged version titled, A Short History of Reconstruction. The shorter version is an excellent study of Reconstruction, and does not read as though it were patched together for light reading. Foner addresses all the major issues leading up reconstruction, and then finishing his book shortly after the end of reconstruction and the election of Rutherford B. Hayes in 1876. In the preface of his

book, Foner discusses the historiography of Reconstruction. He notes that during the early part of the twentieth century many historians considered Reconstruction as one of the darkest periods of American history. Foner notes that this viewpoint changed during the 1960s as revisionists shed new "light" on reconstruction. The revisionists saw Andrew Johnson as a stubborn racist, and viewed the Radical Republicans as "idealistic reformers genuinely committed to black rights." (xiii) Foner notes further that recent studies of reconstruction argue that the Radicals were actually quite conservative, and most Radicals held on to their racist views and put up very little fight as the whites once again began to govern the south. Foner initially describes the African-American experience during the Civil War, and Reconstruction. Foner argues that African-Americans were not simply figures that took little or no action in the events of the day. Foner notes the enlistment of thousands of African-Americans in the Union army during the war. Foner also notes that many of the African-Americans that eventually became civil leaders had at one time served in the Union Army.

Not only is this a riveting account of one of our country's most shameful periods, but it is highly relevant – even essential – to understanding the racial conflicts that are again arising in the United States today. The roots of our current racial attitudes lie in the causes and outcome of the Civil War. Many of those factors are still in play today, most significantly a lingering racism. While the country has clearly made considerable progress in race relations in the past half century, including the election of a black president, racism is still a powerful force, which has been made obvious by racially-motivated animosity toward that same black president. Reconstruction was a direct outgrowth of the Civil War-era emancipation movement and a drive to achieve full equality and citizenship for free blacks after slavery ended. The effort had three phases: 1. Presidential Reconstruction under President Andrew Johnson, which emphasized local rule in the former Confederacy, leniency toward former Confederates, and a reluctance to grant blacks full equality, which could lead to black power over whites where blacks were a majority in the deep South. Republican Reconstruction governments were largely made up of northern unionists (called "carpetbaggers") and loyal southerners who had opposed the Confederacy, many of whom served in the Union Army (called "scalawags"), and free blacks, who were allowed to vote, hold public office, and serve on juries. But, little enforcement of equal rights was undertaken and southern states were able to undo progressive Reconstruction measures and return blacks to a state that was called "slavery in all but name."

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