



THE END OF THE WAR AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

The 13th Amendment, adopted late in 1865, officially abolished slavery, but freed blacks' status in the post-war South remained precarious, and significant challenges awaited during the Reconstruction period (1865-77). Former slaves received the rights of citizenship and the "equal protection" of the Constitution in the 14th Amendment (1868) and the right to vote in the 15th (1870), but the provisions of Constitution were often ignored or violated, and it was difficult for former slaves to gain a foothold in the post-war economy thanks to restrictive black codes and regressive contractual arrangements such as sharecropping. Despite seeing an unprecedented degree of black participation in American political life, Reconstruction was ultimately frustrating for African Americans, and the rebirth of white supremacy—including the rise of racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan—had triumphed in the South by 1877. Almost a century later, resistance to the lingering racism and discrimination in America that began during the slavery era would lead to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which would achieve the greatest political and social gains for blacks since Reconstruction.



Learning that Lincoln was to attend Laura Keane's acclaimed performance of "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., on April 14, 1865 John Wilkes Booth—himself a well-known actor at the time—masterminded the simultaneous assassination of Lincoln, Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William H. Seward. By murdering the president and two of his possible successors, Booth and his co-conspirators hoped to throw the U.S. government into disarray. Lincoln occupied a private box above the stage with his wife Mary, a young army officer named Henry Rathbone and Rathbone's fiancé, Clara Harris, the daughter of New York Senator Ira Harris. The Lincolns arrived late for the comedy, but the president was reportedly in a fine mood and laughed heartily during the production. At 10:15, Booth slipped into the box and fired his .44-caliber single-shot derringer into the back of Lincoln's head. After stabbing Rathbone, who immediately rushed at him, in the shoulder, Booth leapt onto the stage and shouted, "Sic semper tyrannis!" ("Thus ever to tyrants!"—the Virginia state motto). At first, the crowd interpreted the unfolding drama as part of the production, but a scream from the first lady told them otherwise. Although Booth broke his leg in the fall, he managed to leave the theater and escape from Washington on horseback.



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Text 1

1. Explain the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments.
2. How did the situation of slaves evolve after emancipation?
3. Explain what was « Reconstruction »?
4. What were the consequences of slaves emancipation for a certain population of white people?

Text 2

5. What happened on April 14, 1865?
6. Who was John Wilkes Booth?
7. Why did he do this?