

Opposition to President Johnson

In 1866 Congress continued to debate the rules for restoring the Union. Meanwhile, new state legislatures approved by President Johnson had already begun passing laws to deny African Americans' civil rights. "This is a white man's government, and intended for white men only," declared Governor Benjamin F. Perry of South Carolina.

Black Codes

Soon, every southern state passed **Black Codes, or laws that greatly limited the freedom of African Americans**. They required African Americans to sign work contracts, creating working conditions similar to those under slavery. In most southern states, any African Americans who could not prove they were employed could be arrested. Their punishment might be one year of work without pay. African Americans were also prevented from owning guns. In addition, they were not allowed to rent property except in cities.

The Black Codes alarmed many Americans. As one Civil War veteran asked, "If you call this freedom, what do you call slavery?"

African Americans organized to oppose the codes. One group sent a petition to officials in South Carolina.

"We simply ask...that the same laws which govern white men shall govern black men...that, in short, we be dealt with as others are in equity [equality] and justice."

—Petition held in South Carolina, quoted in *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* by Vincent Harding

Radical Republicans

The Black Codes angered many Republicans. They thought the South was returning to its old policy of states' rights. Most Republicans were moderates who wanted the South to have loyal state governments. They also believed that African Americans should have rights as citizens. They hoped that the government would not have to force the South to follow federal laws.

Radical Republicans on the other hand, took a harsher stance. They wanted the federal government to force change in the South. Like the

<p>moderates, they thought the Black Codes were cruel and unjust. The radicals, however, wanted the federal government to be much more involved in Reconstruction. They feared that too many southern leaders remained loyal to the former Confederacy and would not enforce the new laws. Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania and Charles Sumner of Massachusetts were the leaders of the Radical Republicans.</p>	
<p>A harsh critic of President Johnson, Stevens was known for his honesty and sharp tongue. He wanted economic and political justice for both African Americans and poor white southerners. Sumner had been a strong opponent of slavery before the Civil War. He continued to argue tirelessly for African Americans' civil rights, including the right to vote and the right to fair laws.</p> <p>Both Stevens and Sumner believed that President Johnson's Reconstruction plan was a failure. Although the Radicals did not control Congress, they began to gain support among moderates when President Johnson ignored criticism of the Black Codes. Stevens believed the federal government could not allow racial inequality to survive.</p>	
<p>President Andrew Johnson argued that the South should not be placed under military control.</p> <p>“Military governments... established for an indefinite period, would have divided the people into the vanquishers and the vanquished, and would have envenomed [made poisonous] hatred rather than have restored affection.”</p> <p>—Andrew Johnson</p>	
<p>Thaddeus Stevens believed that Congress had the power to treat the South as conquered territory.</p> <p>“The future condition of the conquered power depends on the will of the conqueror. They must come in as new states or remain as conquered provinces. Congress...is the only power that can act in the matter.”</p> <p>—Thaddeus Stevens</p>	