

History 202, united states history from 1865 to the present

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The Building of a New Nation Following the Civil War, the United States was a country that had experienced great loss and had gone to great lengths to either maintain or abolish slavery. As a nation, they were given the difficult task of repairing the damaged country as a whole, but especially the south and its economy. Their job was to not only to restore the country, but to modernize it and make it stronger compared to other nations. The task presented to the United States, its president, and its government as a whole was one that probably seemed impossible, but it would only prove to be difficult, not so much impossible.

The United States faced many challenges after the end of the Civil War. Few of which include the assassination of Lincoln, rebuilding the destroyed southern economy, the federal government's role in helping the 4 million freed African Americans, how to treat the former states of the Confederacy, and conflict over which branch of government should decide on how to reconstruct the south. Reconstruction is the process of readmitting Confederate states to the Union, rebuilding the south, and granting or protecting the citizenship rights of African Americans.

Before Lincoln was assassinated, his plan for reconstruction was to make it simple for the south. He believed the southern states did not technically secede because no state could leave the Union, and also that secession was the fault of a disloyal minority in the South. President Johnson clashed with Republicans over reconstructing the Union and liberating African American slaves. With the disfranchisement of all former Confederate leaders, office

holders, and Confederates with over \$20, 000 in taxable property, Johnson kept Lincoln's plan's power to grant individual pardons to southerners.

By the summer of 1865 all seven of the remaining Confederate states met Johnson's reconstruction requirements, but none of the constitutions extended voting rights to African Americans. By the fall of 1865 Johnson had granted 13, 000 pardons to many former Confederate leaders. Many debates arose due to southern governments under presidential reconstruction limiting the rights of African Americans. Southern state legislatures passed "black codes" to limit the rights of African Americans, which prohibited blacks from testifying in court, renting land, or borrowing money to buy land.

Work contracts also forced freedmen to work cotton fields under conditions similar to slavery. Black codes combined with Johnson's reconstruction plan widened the rift between Johnson and Republicans in Congress. What resulted from this and the fact that Republicans were unhappy with Johnson's "soft" treatment of the south, was Congressional Reconstruction. Congressional Reconstruction was meant to be harsher on southern states and more protective of African American rights. In 1867, the south was under military rule, and each state had to write a new constitution fulfilling Congressional requirements and elect new state governments.

The Freedmen's Bureau was created by Congress in March 1865. It was the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, and it acted as a type of early welfare agency providing food, shelter, and medical aid for blacks and whites in need after the Civil War. Originally it had the authority to resettle freedmen on confiscated Confederate land, but the resettlement

power was removed when President Johnson pardoned Confederate land owners and the courts restored the lands to their original owners.

The Freedmen's Bureau's greatest success was in education. It established 3,000 schools for African Americans, established black colleges, and taught an estimated 200,000 African Americans to read. The Amnesty Act of 1872 removed restrictions on ex-confederates and allowed Democrats to retake control of state legislatures. By 1876 Congress had removed federal troops from all but three states: South Carolina, Florida, and Louisiana, and Democrats returned to power in all southern states but those three.

Republican governments in the south made many adjustments during reconstruction such as universal male suffrage, property rights for women, internal improvements, and state supported public school systems, hospitals, and asylums for the care of the handicapped. The end of Reconstruction meant the beginning of intense discrimination against African Americans in the south. The Gilded Age was a time of dramatic transformation in the nation, and African Americans were seen as an inferior race during the Gilded Age. The only active organization for the blacks was the NAACP founded by W. E. B.

Du Bois and others in 1910. It wasn't until the 1950s that the civil rights movement started in earnest to bring the rights of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth amendments to the U. S. Constitution passed shortly after the Civil War during Reconstruction that said blacks were free, made citizens, and given the right to vote. Some people would say that although American society was advancing after the Civil War, many

problems were not resolved beneath the surface. It's true, the overall level of richness and power of the country was increasing for example, but so was the level of poverty.

Not to mention the struggle to find legal rights to defend the individual was often made difficult. Big companies and powerful writers and politicians were able to defend the 'American dream' even while others were suffering, losing their rights, or being exploited in the workplace. The political history of the Gilded Age is usually reduced to a tale of corruption and scandal, and indeed there were plenty of both to go around at all levels of public life. This was the age where income inequality was an increasingly pressing issue in the United States and around the world.

The United States was experiencing a widespread of economic growth, due to the expansion of railroads, factories, and mines, which led the nation in industrialization. Most big businesses supported the Republican Party and they favored monopolies, trusts, and the spoils system. Farmers created a movement called Populism, and supported increased money supply using silver. The population of post-Civil War America boomed with a new tide of immigration. This made The U. S. the third most populous nation in the Western world after Russia and France.

While farmers struggled and barely maintained their numbers, business and industry boomed with America's increasing demand for goods and services. The Gilded Age saw the United States shift from an agricultural to an urban, industrial society, as millions of Americans flocked to cities in the post-Civil War era. Even though there was much corruption people were supposed to

believe that with enough willpower and determination, anyone could be a success, even become wealthy, if they just tried to fit in. However, this was not really possible.

It is crazy how someone could believe that they could become successful just by trying to 'fit in,' yet everyone was expected to 'buy' the story of the golden American dream anyway. Concern with gold was certainly heightened by U. S. money being minted in scarce gold coins. In addition, gilding, in the sense of gold plating, is often done to make objects beautiful that must also be strong and durable, because gold itself is a soft metal. This might reflect an American sentiment of that era that their efforts toward culture and refinement were just a veneer over a strong but coarse base.

In the 1800s America was a second-rate power. Most Americans who looked overseas were interested in expanded trade, not territorial possessions. In 1893, the depression that heightened the belief that a more aggressive foreign policy was necessary to stimulate American exports began. At the time, Cuba had been fighting for independence since 1868, and the United States intervened and went to war with Spain to gain Cuba's liberty and freedom. This resulted in The Splendid Little War. The most highly publicized land battle of the war took place at San Juan Hill, outside Cuba.

This is where Teddy Roosevelt charged up the hill with his fleet known as the Rough Riders, only to find a black regiment had already preceded them. In the treaty with Spain ending the war, the United States acquired the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and the Pacific island of Guam. America's interest in its new possessions had more to do with trade than gaining wealth from

natural resources or large-scale American settlement. Many believed that American participation in the destruction of Spanish rule would lead to social reform and political self-government.

The American rule of more territory also brought with it American racial attitudes. America's triumphant entry into the ranks of imperial powers sparked an intense debate over the relationship among political democracy, race, and American citizenship. The Foraker Act of 1900 declared Puerto Rico an "insular territory," different from previous territories in the West. Americans spread racial views to new colonial possessions and embraced the idea of the white man's burden paternalism while other nations influenced by U. S. attitudes and policies. The cost of the Spanish American War was 6. billion, but the growing economy gained also, a permanent lease on naval stations in Cuba, including what is now Guantanamo Bay. America's interest in its new possessions had more to do with trade than from gaining wealth from natural resources or large scale American settlement. The Philippine War cost the lives of well more than 100, 000 Filipino's and 4, 200 Americans. The aftermath allowed for the expansion of railroads, harbors, brought in school teachers, publichealthofficials, and sought to modernize agriculture. The Progressive Era in American history was a time of great change and reform in the United States.

It was marked by a series of political and social reforms aimed at problems that arose as a consequence of urban growth and the Industrial Revolution. Activism, new federal laws, and a series of constitutional amendments marked this era of change. There were many problems during the

Progressive Era. They included poverty and unsanitary slums in American cities, poor working conditions including child labor in factories, corporate trusts that eliminated competition and raised prices with impunity, discrimination against women and ethnic minorities, and corruption in the so-called urban political machines.

During the Progressive Era, women and African-Americans were effectively barred from political participation. In addition, African-Americans in the South were subjected to mandatory segregation and "Jim Crow" laws. Susan B. Anthony led the movement for women's suffrage, which resulted in the 1920 ratification of the nineteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution, which extended voting rights to women. Labor unions grew in opposition to unfair labor practices and dangerous working conditions in American factories. Journalists began writing stories about unsanitary meat packing facilities.

In result, "The Jungle," an expose of America's meat-packing factories written by Upton Sinclair, intended to generate public sympathy for America's working class; instead, the attention focused on the safety of meat. Congress later passed food-and-drug safety legislation. In addition to the various reform laws passed by Congress during the Progressive Era, this period of history saw the ratification of four constitutional amendments: the sixteenth, the seventeenth, the eighteenth, and the nineteenth. The sixteenth authorized a graduated income tax to fund government operations, and the seventeenth provided for direct election of Senators.

The eighteenth amendment banned the sale and importation of alcohol, and the nineteenth amendment extended voting rights to women. The eighteenth amendment failed because prohibition fueled the rise of organized crime and had little public support as time passed. It was repealed in 1933. The Progressive Era included other reforms as well. The U. S. government exercised greater control over the banking system through the creation of the Federal Reserve System. After multiple wars, conflicts, and controversies, the United States is well on its way to becoming an advanced and industrialized new world.

The Progressive Movement was an effort to cure many of the ills of American society that had developed during the great spurt of industrial growth in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Although not all individuals were equal, it is still not even that way today, but what mattered was that there were improvements being made. African Americans were no longer enslaved, and were free to start their own business, open their own schools and churches, and educate themselves; something that would have been unheard of just forty years ago.

The nation had also grown tremendously in the aspect of modernization and industrialization. New factories were popping up along with coal mines, and railroads were being built all across the country to transport goods and create national brands. A downfall to this was that the rich were becoming richer, and the poor were becoming poorer. The nation was also making itself stronger by acquiring more territory such as, Guam, Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico. Not to mention gaining permanent naval stations in Cuba. As a

whole, the United States grew quickly and prospered tremendously, regardless of their rocky start.