

Congressional reconstruction in the south 1863-1867

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The radical reconstruction of 1867-1877, known for some of the most significant changes in American history. The Radical reconstruction was supported by Congress and less popular with President Johnson as it focused on civil rights issues, something that Johnson had no interest in. The reconstruction was meant to improve the economy of the devastated south, politics and social justice following the American civil war (War of the South).

It wasn't until " March of 1867 when congress adopted the Reconstruction act even though Johnson had vetoed it" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 566), the period of Radical Reconstruction begun, note that Johnson had his own plans for reconstruction. The Radical Reconstruction made several demands such as; voting rights for freed slaves, Radicals to conform to the idea of equality, protection of the Republican Party in the south, keeping old confederate generals from office, increased tariff on goods to support state funded programs.

Immediate achievements of the Reconstruction act of 1867 were: formation of political organization, " spread of the Republican Party in southern states that were returned to the Union" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 57), which increased the public's involvement in free public education, orphanages, prisons and homes for the mentally challenged. The 'Union League' was one of the achievements during the Reconstruction. Its formation resulted from mass political meetings which included men, women and children who simply rallied to claim the very rights enjoyed by the white citizens.

These meetings were widely attended and produced both male and female speakers such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper and James D. Lynch. Frances

was known " for her two years' tour and lectures of 'Literacy, land and Liberations'... and James was known for his abilities to draw upon the emotion of his audience" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 573). In 1868-1869 new state constitutions were formed for the first time with the involvement of the public, most of whom were black representatives, this is why the public was given an increased responsibility in politics.

With their involvements, aside from schools and others listed above, the new constitutions removed practices such as; " whipping for punishments, property qualifications for officeholders, and imprisonment for debt" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 573). Other political achievements included an increased number of African Americans who now held public office (estimated 2, 000), " South Carolina was the only state at this time in which African Americans made up the mass of the legislature" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 574). this is simply because the population was " 60% blacks" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 574) in South Carolina at this time.

Finally African Americans held a seat in every level of Government though there were only two blacks who served the U. S. Senate during this period. Hiram from North Carolina and Blanche K. Bruce from. Hiram was born free, received an education, served in the Union Army and became the first " Black Senator in American history" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 574). Blanche unlike Hiram was a former slave. (No additional information mentioned by Foner about Blanche). Though only for a short period the first Black and his mother a freed slave, the second black governor was not elected until " 1989".

Though most blacks who held public offices gained ranks via serving the Union army, some black were born free in the north and received a proper education like Jonathan J. Wright who served on the South Carolina Supreme Court. Among many prominent black officials, Robert Smalls, " a slave who secretly guided a vessel called the Planter, through enemy waters and delivered it to the Union's Army' (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 574)? Smalls gained his fame for this single act and later was elected as a political leader in South Carolina and was eventually elected to congress for five terms.

Economically, some gained from during the Reconstruction, namely the 'Carpetbaggers and the Scalawags'. Carpetbaggers were from the north, some simply came to the south for politics and many were Union soldiers who remained in the south for lands and other economic advantages. Some remained for support in rebuilding and education the south by becoming teachers. Scalawags, a name given to Whites in the south who never owned slaves and now supported the Republicans to keep confederated officers out of office.

Other economical advances were the suspension of debt collection and protection for property owners from loan sharks. Thus far the public school education provided by the state stood above all as an achievement during the Reconstruction. Most schools were segregated with the exception of " New Orleans, where public schools were integrated... and only South Carolina did the state university admitted black students" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 575). By 1870 more than half the white and black population attended public

school (One may note Booker T Washington's "Keep me separated but equal").

Change in office from prewar leaders to newer governments, laws were passed to end racial discrimination from service providers such as railroads and hotels, though this was not enforced equally from region to region, it was one of the first steps towards standardizing what we now call equal citizenship for all. Republican government established the 'State Land Commission' made attempts to improve the South's economic situations by allowing laborers/farmers to claim their crops before the land owners and merchants.

This was an issue since, farmers often owed the land owners and would regularly part with their crops for less than its worth. Officials believed that establishing railroads were key to improving the South's economy, they believed that this will make way for factories, towns and a variety for agricultural developments. This idea was not very successful since most Northern companies had their attentions turned to the West instead of the devastated South. Due to the failure to improve the South's economy, the economic status of most freedmen remained the same.

With this failed attempt came a change in government, a 'biracial democratic government' was introduced to Americans. With this came the "overthrow of the reconstruction" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 575), many in the south were against the new form of government and called it corrupt and ineffective.

Though corruption existed before, its aims now differ, some states were stained with "bribery, insider deals and get rich atmospheres" (Foner, Give

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Me Liberty, II 576). These practices soon ended due to increased taxes to support public funded services such as schools and construction of railroads.

Raising of taxes backfired since it caused poor whites in the south to end their support for the Republican Government since they saw that their whites in the south who found it difficult to accept freed slaves as their equals and allowing them to hold offices and voting. Southern radicals who still dream of the (golden age of the South) now sought to obstruct the reconstruction by violence, by now they not only questioned the policies of the reconstruction, they believed that they must end the republican rule and had a disbelief in the federal government.

This movement became known as the "reign of terror" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 576). , giving rise to individual hate crimes on road sides against black who would not step aside for whites. These hate crimes would later become more organized and led to the formation of cults such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) which serves as a "military arm for the Democratic party in the south" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 577). Though the main target for the KKK were predominantly blacks/ freed slaves; Foner claims that the KKK often assaulted white members of the Republicans, wartime Unionist, office holders and teachers from the north.

These acts of terrorism were carried out by conservative whites in the south who preferred the olden ways. KKK activities alarmed southern government following the attack on a small town in "Colfax, Louisiana in 1873; armed whites assaulted the town with small cannons" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 578). Due to these circumstances, Washington approved the use of federal

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troops to subdue all terrorist activities, this which ultimately led to the federal government to expand its authority throughout the south.

Troops shortly deployed to apprehend anyone associate with the KKK, many ere arrested and many fled. These affirmative actions in 1872 towards the KKK caused the clan o disband and eventually dissolved completely granting the South genuine peace. Another contributing reasons for the failure of the reconstruction goes to the reappearance of racism in the North. Many believed that enough was done, blacks were now free and given voting rights and that was enough.

With all the emphasis on the KKK, other political ploys were formed in the north simultaneously. The Liberal Republicans were formed, electing the " editor of the New York Tribune for president" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 579). Being that there was now division amongst Republicans, Democrats made Greeley their candidate for president in the election of 1874. This was done with hopes of returning the Democrats to power but failed since most voters simple refrained from voting, resulting in a landslide victory for Grant in 1874.

Reconstruction was still not in the clear, in fact things had gotten worse, Journalist, James S. Pike, published " the Prostate States" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 578), which blamed the corruptions of the Southern states on black who held office, blacks were depicted as less than humans and animalistic instead. This contributed o the rebirth of racism and the rise of the Democrats again. With Democrats dominating congress, the; old ones enacted a final piece of Reconstruction legislation, The Civil Rights act of <https://assignbuster.com/congressional-reconstruction-in-the-south-1863-1867/>

1785... outlawing racial discrimination" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 580), though this was not upheld by the Supreme Court. In following years, Democrats would rise up and take control of few strategic southern states. These states began calling themselves the "redeemed" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 581), referring to the act of returning their rightful white leaders back to office. Unlike the KKK who operated at night, armed individuals in these 'redeemed' states were taken to combat these attacks which played a major role in the election of 1877.

In the so called redeemed states, ballot boxes were destroyed and freed slaves/republicans were turned away from voting by armed southern Democrats which consequently led the victory of the Democrats and Rutherford B. Hayes as president. Though one of the most controversial elections of the 19th century, Republicans submitted after attempting to secure a promise from Hayes that he will uphold the rights for all. This marked the end of the Reconstruction in 1877, though it continued, allowed many blacks to vote and hold office.

Reconstruction would not come up again "until the Civil Rights movement in the 1950's to 1960's" (Foner, Give Me Liberty, II 582). Though many would consider the Reconstruction of 1867-1877 a failure, it did prepare a foundation for the Civil Rights movement which occurred in 1950, it was the first attempt of many to meet the promise of the nation in which everyone was truly given an opportunity. The Reconstruction also illustrates the evils of politics and how one man's neglect towards his duties can affect a nation, this referring to Grant turning a blind eye to the attacks in 1875.