

History 1010

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Reconstruction in the United States of America began with the initiatives of President Abraham Lincoln. During the Civil War, Lincoln set up reconstructed governments in some of the southern states to help reunite the country. After his assassination, President Andrew Johnson attempted to continue Lincoln reconstructive policies and agenda but too quickly declared that reconstruction had succeeded (Henretta, and Brody). This caused tension between the President and Republican members of the Congress that concluded reconstruction was not over. These Radical Republicans sought more change in the south to fully unify the nation. The 1866 Congressional elections allowed these Republicans to take control of the Congress and continue the process of reconstruction in the south (Henretta, and Brody). This process became known as Radical Reconstruction and began the process of freeing and emancipating black Americans.

After gaining control in 1866, the new Radical Republican Congress began instituting new policies that not only hindered the power of President Andrew Johnson but also helped reconstruct the south so that black Americans could gain freedom. In order to establish their plan, Radical Republicans had to work with their moderate Republicans to gain enough power in both the House of Representatives and Senate that President Andrew Johnson could not veto aspects of their plan (Henretta, and Brody). The plan started with the First Reconstruction Act of 1867. This first act named the seceded states as territory that could be controlled by the military under martial law. The troops kept peace in the region and protected the former slaves while Congress compelled the southern states to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment in order to reintegrate with the Union states. This amendment provided blacks with the rights to vote, but in order to guarantee their suffrage,

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Congress passed the Second Reconstruction Act that put the military in charge of voter registration. In order to establish order in the South, Congress used the military to enforce the previously desired reconstructive techniques. Although they were unpopular with the people, they proved to be effective because by 1870 all the states were reabsorbed by the Union (Henretta, and Brody). The effect of the new legislation is, however, debatable.

Nevertheless, Congressional Radical Revolution did not necessarily change the way black Americans were treated by society. The institution of the First and Second Reconstruction Acts, with the help of the Fourteenth Amendment, caused hundreds of thousands of black Americans to register to vote. Most of these blacks, obviously, registered as Democrats and allowed for many black politicians to gain power including in the House of Representatives and the Senate. The new government officials helped establish roads, public schools, and hospitals. In their daily lives, black Americans were still treated like second-class citizens (Henretta, and Brody). However, strong racism continued and while southern states were forced to establish schools for blacks, they were segregated from the white schools and barely received sufficient funding (Henretta, and Brody). In the end, Congressional Reconstruction techniques proved beneficial to establishing legislative black rights and reunifying the country, however, they did little to improve to lives of freed slaves.

Ultimately, Congress's Radical Revolution altered the governmental makeup of the United States and allowed black Americans to legally have equally rights. While the reconstruction did not necessarily alter their day-to-day lives, it was necessary in order to pave the road toward a new, equal society.

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While members of the seceded southern states may have seen the reconstruction as harsh, Congress took justifiable means to reunify the country. This is evidenced by the fact that their new laws, ultimately, did cause the southern states to readmit to the Union. The small freedoms established for blacks during this time period most likely paved the way toward greater movements such as the Civil Rights movement. In the end, it is evident that social change can start with new legislation.

Work Cited

Henretta, James A., and David Brody. *America: A Concise History*. 4. I & II. Bedford: St. Martins, 2009. Print.