

Reconstructing the Nation

Window of Opportunity for expanded citizenship

Reconstruction the Constitution (began during the civil war, and formally ended in 1867; an effort, fundamentally to transform American citizenship in the wake of the civil war)

- Efforts by political leaders (manly republican) sought to use the power of a strong government, reconstruction was meant to all men in freedoms, economic opportunities
- Reconstruct the constitution and first task was to guarantee political freedom to African Americans
- 13th Amendment (February 1865; December 1865)-give political freedom to African Americans, and outlawed slavery
 - began passing black codes (denied basic freedom to former slaves)
- Civil Rights Act of 1866: all persons born in US (excluding Indians) was a citizen; entitled to full and equal benefit of all laws; Andrew Johnson vetoed bill (Congress overruled) first time congress had overturned a president; and first time legislation statutorily overruled
- 14th Amendment (1868) (started in 1866): intended to remove any doubts whether act of 1866 was unconstitutional
 - Section 1: declared all persons born in US are citizens; no state could abridge the privileges or deprive of life, liberty or property; or deny equal protection of the laws
 - Radical republicans believed there needed to be a lot more to be done; pushed through reconstruction act
- Reconstruction Act (1867) and Radical Reconstruction: 10 southern states (except Tennessee) placed under federal military rule "occupied"; governments of southern states were to be democratized and elect delegates to make new constitutions and had to accept 14th amendment and all male suffrage (black and white) then could send representatives to national congress
- 15th Amendment (1870): 7 states were readmitted to the union (Georgia, Virginia, Mississippi) began to solidify; no state government could restrict the right to vote by race, color, or previous race. Did little to let blacks hold office; did not provide women to vote
- Reconstruction transformed the constitution; became a proactive tool
- Republicans used legislation not just the constitution (provide new social opportunities)

New Opportunities

- Freedman's Bureau (March 1865): created to uplift and reform southern society; created courts to deal with conflicts; and draw contractions with landholders and laborers; establishing schools (by 1869 there were 3000 schools, schooling 150,000 students)
 - "The next best thing to liberty" (referencing to education)
 - mobilize black voters (racist democrats boycotted these elections)
- Elections and black officeholders (20 African Americans served as governors; 600 served as state legislatures; 16 are national legislatures)
- Women's rights (Elizabeth Cady Stanton; women activist, saw as potential moment) sought new opportunities at the ballot box

- States constitutions: allowed married women to own properties (“wonderful reform for the cause of women’s rights”)
- Suffrage: concerned that the 15th amendment did not give women the right to vote
- 1866- “white, wealthy education women deserve the right to vote just as much as the African Americans” (Stanton)

Nature of the Federal Government: bring freedom; power of president vs. power of congress; has always been a contested issue of our government (was it a threat or protector)

Expansion during Civil War:

- Expanded federal taxation (paying for the war), not paid by Americans until WWII
- Expanded national economy: opened up lands for homesteaders; establish colleges; Republican Habeus corpus (can not arrest you unless warrant, but cut off during war)

Johnson’s Reconstruction Plans: developed his own approach to reconstruction (president should be in control of reconstruction not Congress)

- “Constitution as it was, and the Union as it was”: Johnson wanted to reform the Union, used powers to reestablish construction
- Pardons (had to swear an oath of loyalty to the union; used this tool to open up new social system in the south) and loyalty oaths

Congress’s Reconstruction Plans

- Responding to “Black Codes” (formal exercises to exert control of newly freed blacks) substitute “freedmen” for slaves; formed slaves to carry passes, curfews, and stay in certain homes; free people would find it very difficult to leave properties
 - Blamed Johnson for all of this
- Thaddeus Stevens and Radical Republicans; convinced that the Union had won the war created a golden opportunity for finalizing equal rights for all; committed to confiscating the and dividing it amongst the slaves; declared “the whole fabric of society must be changed to make a true republic”
 - Result in battle... resulting in impeachment

Impeachment Crisis: Johnson continued to infuriate congress; in 1868 he removed his own secretary of war (of office);

Congress had just passed a law saying don’t do that

- Johnson was equated by one vote and NOT put out of office

Recruiting a Nation: “Binding up the nations wounds”- Abe Lincoln (can the United States truly be “united”)

- Southern Devastation: lost many men to death; major southern cities had been burned to the ground, railroads ripped to stop transportation of necessities) recovery was slow (late as 1870 (GA) many million of farming supplies destroyed)
- Free Labor Ideal
 - Special Field Order 15; “40 acres a mule” (Jan 12, 1865; land given to former slaves) Garrison Frasier: “Place us where we could reap the fruit of laborers, and have land to toil ourselves”

- Land redistribution (land would be confiscated): Johnson declared all land returned to owners (most rural poor people remained property-less)
- “carpetbaggers” (used by white southerners, sneer at northerners that headed south after war; actually well-educated and believed it was harder for them to do business with southern democrats, turned into republicans) and “scalawags” (traitors)
- The questions were not settled... by the mid 1870s, reconstruction was doomed
- By 1877 the project was abandoned (Compromise)
- Cotton would no longer be king, the blacks and whites would live together... known as the New South