Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era

Marin Academy
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Essential Questions

With the end of war in 1865, how would the North deal with the South? With African Americans?

What were the successes of Reconstruction (1865–77)? Why did it ultimately collapse in 1877?

What made the KKK so deadly effective?

Was the Jim Crow Era (1877–1954) really “American Apartheid”? 
“Sneak Previews” of Recon.

1861–64: Several cases of Union troops capturing S. land => giving to freed slaves
- **But**, North strongly encourages AA’s to grow cotton
- In NOLA, Fed. Gov’t establishes contract labor system
  - AA’s should “Return to plantations where they belong…[and] labor faithfully”
- *How do you think AA’s feel about this?!*

Jan. 1865: Sherman issues **Field Order #15**
- After meeting with 20 key AA leaders, Lincoln’s Sec. of War
- Promises millions of acres to freed slaves in **40 acre** plots

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**Lincoln’s 10% Plan**

- **Lincoln’s 10 percent plan** – unveiled **December 1863**
  - To be readmitted, a Southern state needs 10% pledging…
    - To abolish slavery
    - To support the Constitution
  - All Confederates who swear allegiance are pardoned
  - **Goal:** Shorten war, smoother & faster re-unification
  - **BUT,** Lincoln’s views clearly evolving in 1864 & ’65

- **4/9/1865:** war ends – Lincoln killed 5 days later…
  - Replaced by **Andrew Johnson** (D–TN) => adopts 10% plan rigidly, rejects Sherman’s 40 acres plan
The Radical Republicans

13th Amendment: Abolishes slavery throughout U.S.
- Southern states must ratify to rejoin union
- Adopted Dec. 1865...but are AA's citizens? Voters?!

Radical Repubs: Strongly abolitionist
- Challenge Lincoln, then esp. Johnson

Goals: empower freed AA's, disempower and punish S. slaveowners, rebuild South on system of free labor

Johnson’s Pro-South Plan

Johnson gives S. incredibly easy path to rejoin Union
- Just ratify 13th Amendment
- By end of ’65, VP of Confederacy back in House!

South est’s black codes
- AA's must sign long-term contracts on plantations,
  - If not => fines, arrests

RR's furious – “South lost the war but won the peace”
AA's Respond

AA's organize swiftly, establish “colored conventions” throughout the South

Nov. 1865: Convention in SC, 2,000 AA's

Draft a petition to Congress stating…

“We simply ask that we shall be recognized as men… that the same laws that govern white men shall govern black men; that we have the right of trial by jury of our peers; that schools be established for education of colored children as well as white…that no impediments be put in the way of our acquiring homesteads for ourselves and our people; that in short, we be dealt with as others are – in equity and justice.”

Rad. Repubs Respond Too

Johnson’s pro-South actions => anti-black riots in S.

Johnson so blatantly pro-South => RR's gain support of moderates, start advancing bold agenda

Freedmen’s Bureau – help freed AA’s transition to freedom thru education, land, fighting black codes

Civil Rights Act of 1866: Make ex-slaves citizens

Johnson vetoes both => more violence

Unites Congress even further => pass both over veto

1866 Congressional elections: Repubs get 3-to-1 majority!

Impeach Johnson – but not convicted

Push thru boldest legislation yet – especially…
The 14th Amendment

Congress passes June 1866 – states ratify July 1868

“1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

“When the right to vote at any election ... is denied to any of the male inhabitants of such State, being twenty-one years of age, and citizens of the United States...the basis of representation therein shall be reduced…”

More Radical Reconstruction

1867: RR’s pass Military Reconstruction Act
- Divides former Confederacy into 5 military districts
- To create new state gov’ts => State conventions where AA’s can participate and former Confederates can’t
- Hafta ratify the new 14th Amendment

Again, Johnson flips out, vetoes => shaddap

1869: Congress passes 15th Amendment
- “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”
Freedmen in Politics

Many AA’s run for office as Repubs

- 14 reps in House
- 2 senators

A crazy fact...

Thousands more serve at the state and local level

Lasts 2–8 years – great success w/ education, rights

The Rise of the KKK

Former Confederates fight Reconstruction through Democratic party

- Initially, use political persuasion & economic intimidation

When that fails => increasingly shift to violence

- Democrats form paramilitary organizations in every state

1866: **Ku Klux Klan** formed in TN formed by ruthless Southern general **Nathan Bedford**
The KKK’s Approach

- Led by Southern elites, but recruit poor whites
- Violence is not random: target symbols of freedom
  - Threaten, assault & murder prominent Republicans; burn and destroy churches & schools; intimidate voters
- Some crazy stats on the scale of Southern violence...
- Is this terrorism?

A Plan for Intimidation

- In 1876, the SC Democratic party drafted the following plan to “take back the South” from Republicans:
  - “Democratic Military Clubs are to be armed with rifles & pistols…”
  - “Every Democrat must feel honor bound to control the vote of at least one Negro, by intimidation, purchase, keeping him away, or...how he may best accomplish it…”
  - “Never threaten a man individually. If he deserves to be threatened, the necessities of the times require that he should die. A dead radical is very harmless – a threatened Radical...is often very troublesome, sometimes dangerous, always vindictive…”
- The legacy?
Congress & Grant Respond

1869: *(re-runs!)* Congress passes 15th Amendment

1870–71: **Enforcement** and **KKK Acts**
- Groundwork for legal and military intervention in South

**President Grant** – moderate Repub, elected 1868
- 1871: Grant dispatches federal troops throughout South
  - Leads to hundreds of arrests, trials & convictions
- But, by 1875, Grant says he “had tired” of the issue, refuses to continue sending troops
  - As we’ll see, though, not just Grant – Repubs & North overall

Why Did Repubs/the North Abandon Reconstruction?

- Don’t want to redistribute land, disrupt plantation economy (esp. cotton).
  - 1862–90: Fed, state & local gov’ts give 180m acres to RR’s
  - How much did former slaves get…?

- Many Northeners don’t **want** to give AA rights
  - 14th Amendment wouldn’t have passed w/o South!
  - In 1867, NY refuses to give blacks the vote

- Republican Party becomes more focused on big business, money, corruption > rights and values
  - Depression of 1873 spur[s] many to give up Reconstruction
The “Great Compromise”

- **Bitter 1876** Pres. election
- After much fighting => reach “Great Compromise”
- Dems concede presidency to Repubs, give verbal promise to treat AA's fairly
- Repubs agree to remove all troops from South, leaving AA's at the mercy of their former masters…

The Jim Crow Era Begins

- Lasts 1877–1954
- No exaggeration to call it “American Apartheid”
Do AA’s Have Any Rights?

Despite 13th Amendment banning slavery…
- Black Codes and sharecropping => virtual slavery

Despite 14th and 15th Amendments…
- Widespread segregation (public & private)
- Blacks have basically zero voting rights throughout South:
  - Poll tax: Have to pay tax to vote, often months before election
  - Literacy test: Have to pass a test to vote
  - Grandfather clause: can only vote if your grandfather did
- Of course, these dirty tricks only apply to AA’s
- Many AA’s respond by migrating North in waves, where conditions are (somewhat) better

Rewriting History

Historiography: How people interpret history

Southern whites attack AA’s by reinterpreting history for their own racist purposes – esp. Reconstruction

“Birth of a Nation” (1915) – hugely influential film that glorifies KKK, blames failures of Recon. on AA’s & Repubs

Can you guess the source? “The former field hands [slaves] found themselves suddenly elevated to the seats of the mighty. There they conducted themselves as creatures of small intelligence might naturally be expected to do. Like monkeys or small children turned loose among treasured objects whose value is beyond their comprehension, they ran wild – either from perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance.”
The Horrors of Lynching

- Widespread throughout S, almost never punished
- A disturbing video clip…
- “Strange Fruit” (1939) by Billie Holiday

Jim Crow, 1890s and On

1896: *Plessy v. Ferguson* = HUGE
- In a 7-1 vote, Supreme Court upholds the right of private businesses to practice segregation
- Institutes policy of “separate but equal”

Two opposing black leaders emerge during JC Era:

- **Booker T. Washington**: emphasizes education, hard work, economic advancement for AA’s
- **W.E.B. Du Bois**: focuses on political rights & equality

**Harlem Renaissance** – flourishing of AA culture around 1920s and 1930s
**Deep Quote #1**

**Freddy Dee**, at the Repub. Nat’l Convention in 1876:

“You say you have emancipated us. You have and I thank you for it. You say you have enfranchised us. You have, and I thank you for it…. But when you turned us loose, you gave us no acres. You turned us loose to the sky, to the storm, to the whirlwind, and worst of all, you turned us loose to the wrath of our infuriated masters. The question now is, do you mean to make good to us the promises in your Constitution?”

**Deep Quote #2**

**Historian James Horton:**

“If America had just looked the world in the eye and said, ‘We hold these people in slavery because we need their labor, and we've got the power to do it.’ Now that would have been much better because then when the power was gone, when slavery was over, it's over. But what we said was, ‘There is something about these people.’ By doing that it means, that when slavery is over, that rationalization for slavery remains…”