

Reconstruction Era

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Introduction

A revolution is defined as a sudden, radical, complete, or fundamental change in a society or political organization. During the period of Civil War Reconstruction between 1863 and 1877 the society and politics of the once again united States of America fundamentally changed (Kelly 2011). The socio-economic and political situations of white Southerners and African Americans in the now abolitionist South changed forever. This essay analyses the background to and the events of this period in order to establish to what extent the Reconstruction represented a revolution and yet remained unfinished in 1877.

Body

From the beginning the War went badly for the North and its Union Army. In 1863, however, the Union Army won decisive battles at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, finally taking advantage of their military and numerical superiority. After Lincoln's reelection in 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman began his march to the sea, capturing Atlanta whilst devastating Georgia and the Confederate Army, reaching the sea in December 1864. On April 9th, 1865, Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant, bringing major Civil War combat to an end. When the American Civil War ended after four long bloody years of conflict, 620,000 men had perished, giving what Lincoln called "the last full measure of devotion." Entire Southern Cities lay in ruins, Southern industry was destroyed and Southern capital wiped out. Two thirds of the South's railroads and half the South's farm machinery destroyed and forty percent of its livestock had also been killed (Kelly 2011).

The Civil War had put the United States' place as a nation at risk. Its outcome determined whether or not America would finally practice the American Revolutionary ideals of liberty, equality and justice and the principle that all men are created equal. The aims of the Reconstruction were to assimilate the Confederate States back into the Union, punish those responsible for the bloody conflict, and to give the black population, disenfranchised in American society, equal rights as United States' citizens. This reconstruction period unofficially began a year before the war ended, when President Abraham Lincoln on the first of January, 1863, announced his "emancipation proclamation". Lincoln declared "that all persons held as slaves" within the rebellious southern states "are, and henceforward shall be free", signaling the abolition of slavery in the South.

In the year 1870, Hiram Revels turned into the first African American to serve in Congress. As an African American, he was not alone in serving in government throughout Reconstruction. Between the year 1865 and the year 1877, numerous African Americans served in state and nearby governmental issues. Fourteen dark men served in the House of Representatives between the year 1869 and the year 1877, six served as lieutenant governors, and more than 600 served in southern state councils (Lynch, 2012). Reconstruction's end in the year 1877, be that as it may, permitted white southerners to push African Americans out of government.

In 1877 a compromise between Republicans and Democrats in Congress having been made, Rutherford B Hayes was declared president. He promised that he would withdraw federal troops from the Southern States. This removal of federal supervision resulted in the end of the Reconstruction period and the reversal of much of the previous 15 years of progress. Jim Crow segregationist laws followed with racial separation and increased racial violence in the South.

Thus the Equal Rights Movement for Black Americans was held back until the 1960s (Kelly 2011). The equality Lincoln envisioned in his emancipation proclamation was unseen for almost a century.

Conclusion

To conclude, the Civil War reconstruction period did revolutionize the socio-economic situations of White Southerners and African Americans. Black Americans had advanced. Four million of them were now free from slavery and had benefited from social changes such as public health, education and welfare that resulted from Reconstruction policies. However, the Reconstruction could be regarded as unfinished as the issue of African American rights, for which this period is remembered, was left unresolved for almost a century. The Reconstruction failed to grant black Americans the rights envisioned in Lincoln's emancipation proclamation and guaranteed to them by the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments. Nevertheless, the ultimate objective of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed, according to President Lincoln himself, was for "the survival and reunification of the Union". In regards to this objective, the Reconstruction was finished and a clear success.

Throughout Reconstruction, Congress made three changes to the Constitution. They gave the national government more control over the states. The Thirteenth Amendment finished servitude. Dark Codes still constrained the privileges of African Americans. To ensure those rights Congress passed the Fourteenth Amendment. It gave blacks full citizenship. Southern states needed to endorse this revision to rejoin the Union. The Fifteenth Amendment distinguished the right of African American men to vote. Anyhow African Americans confronted a long battle for correspondence.

References

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