

Reconstruction: The Unfinished Revolution (1st Lecture on Reconstruction)

Handouts:

USE: "Mississippi Black Codes,"

Do not use: "Intimidation of Black Voters," "Carpetbagger Describes the Ku Klux Klan," or "Principles Over Party"

Slides: From collection: #341,399,400,520,171,172,342,537,173,70,519,518,538,and 539

Film: Two clips are 7 minutes total. (two and five.) From "Eyes on the Prize" for a modern glimpse at the Second Reconstruction to set the stage for the first 1800s Reconstruction and failure. From Eyes on the Prize, episode 3, titled "Ain't scared of Your Jails (1960-61)." at Wilson Library. Start at very beginning. Feb 1, 1960 Greensboro, N.C. Sit-ins a challenge to southern tradition. Young white says not right. Threatened established order. Then music from eyes on the prize until title of episode 3. SKIP to second cut (skip takes 30 seconds). Start with John Lewis about sit-ins, then Diane Nash on sit-ins, then resident on outside agitators and "our" heroes. Then Nashville Sit-in beatings. Then Mayor. Then a Nashvill white woman on her Civil Rights violated. Then another resident saying blacks should go to back doors if they wanted food as they always had. End.

Another Handout: A Rage for Order Reading Guide

Student Reader: Langston Hughes' Poem

Audio: Tape 9. "Steal Away Jesus by Bernice Johnson. Recorded in 1965.

Outline on overhead transparency:

- I. Victory and Assassination: "What if" history
- II. 133 Years Ago: Parallels and Unparallels
- III. Presidential Reconstruction
- IV. Black Codes
- V. Radical Reconstruction (or Congressional Reconstruction)
- VI. Impeachment

Play Audio as students walk in. Bernice Johnson, "Steal Away Jesus."

Lecture:

Show Eyes on the Prize clips and then ASK Students: what had happened between the Civil War when slaves were freed and why in the 1950s there is a need for Second Reconstruction to finish the First's Unfinished Revolution. And why did it take almost 100 years for the second revolution to begin.

Ask students: What is the question? What is the point of fast forwarding to the future? Why was a "second reconstruction" necessary.

The Second Reconstruction (the modern day Civil Rights Movement that began in the 1950s was necessary because the First Reconstruction after the Civil War ended in failure when the white southerners were able to redeem the South and enforce an unshakable system of Jim Crow Segregation.

Victory:

The war was nearly over. On March 5, 1865, Lincoln gave his second inaugural address.

On April 1, 1865, General Sheridan's Union Army smashed the Southern Army at Five Forks only a few miles from Richmond, the capital of the Confederate States.

A courier bore the grim news to Jefferson Davis, attending church in Richmond: Quote: "Sir, General Lee telegraphs that he can hold his position no longer."

Davis left his pew, gathered his government, and fled the city. On the morning of April 3, Union troops entered Richmond, pulled down the Confederate flag, and ran up the Stars and Stripes over the Capitol.

On April 4, Lincoln toured Richmond, and for a few minutes, sat at Jefferson Davis' desk with a thoughtful and distant look in his eyes as if he saw innumerable troubles still ahead.

Meanwhile, Robert E. Lee and his troops tried to escape, but got trapped at a small village at

Appamatox, Virginia. Lee asked for terms of surrender and met General Ulysses S. Grant in a private home. Except for a few pockets of resistance, the war was over.

Assassination:

Soon, Grant returned to Washington. On April 14 he turned down a theater date with the Lincolns, because Julia Grant found the first Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, overbearing.

That night at Ford's Theater, a pro-Confederate actor—who we saw in the film at Harpers Ferry—John Wilkes Booth, entered Lincoln's unguarded balcony box and shot him in the head. Waving a knife, Booth leaped onstage shouting the Virginia state motto, "Sic semper tyrannis" (Such is always the fate of tyrants) and then escaped, despite having broken his leg.

That same night, a Booth accomplice stabbed Secretary of State William Seward, who later recovered, while a third conspirator, assigned to Vice President Andrew Johnson, failed to attack.

Union troops hunted down Booth and shot him within two weeks, or else he shot himself. Of eight accused accomplices, including a woman boardinghouse keeper, four were hanged and the rest were imprisoned.

On April 15, when Lincoln died, Andrew Johnson became president. Six days later Lincoln's funeral train departed on a mournful journey from Washington to Springfield, Illinois, with crowds of thousands gathering at stations to weep as it passed.

Ask Students: What does Reconstruction mean?

In 1865, the year the Civil War ended, and in 1868, the year that Andrew Johnson was impeached, these were the burning questions of the time:

1. On what terms should the Confederacy be reunited with the Union?
2. What system of labor should replace plantation slavery.
3. What should be the place of blacks in the political and social life of the South and the nation at large?

These questions were really what the battle during Reconstruction after the Civil War was over.

And, the answer to these questions will answer why Reconstruction was a failed revolution

Terms:

Before we continue let's take a look at some terms that will help explain what happened during the Reconstruction years after the Civil War.

Phases of Reconstruction:

- 1 Reconstruction
- 2 Presidential Reconstruction
- 3 Radical Reconstruction
- 4 "Redeem" or "Redemption"

Question:

Here is the the question for this class meeting: What explains why Reconstruction was an "Unfinished Revolution?"

Introductory Quote:

Here is an eloquent quote about how it all turned out. It is by W.E.B. Du Bois, the famous black historian of the first half of the 20C.

PUT on BOARD: How it all turned out: "The slave went free; stood for a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again into slavery." - W.E.B. DuBois

Lecture:

Ask Students: What is the procedure for the impeachment of a President? Answer: first house judiciary committee, then full house, then Senate to decide on the House articles of impeachment with the Chief Justice presiding.

ASK STUDENTS: Just for fun, and of course there is no right or wrong answer, how many of you think that Clinton should have been convicted in the Senate on impeachment charges? How many agree with the Senate's acquittal of Clinton? How many believe he should have been acquitted but censored?

Ask Students: Did his crimes warrant impeachment?

134 Years Ago: Parallels and Unparallels:

We can get at what is meant by the "Unfinished Revolution" that Reconstruction after the Civil War represented by taking a look at what was at stake. We can discover the meaning of Reconstruction by rediscovering the first impeachment of a President 134 years ago - an event that has particular relevance recently.

Here are the facts:

Andrew Johnson was a Southern Democrat who had risen from the class which his Southern detractors impolitely called "white southern trash." He never did learn to read until he married and his wife tutored him.

Johnson began a career as a tailor in Raleigh, North Carolina, then moved to Tennessee where he set up a tailor shop. But Johnson soon entered politics, becoming a state legislator, then a United States congressman in the House of Representatives, then Governor of Tennessee, and then a U.S. Senator.

Although he owned a few slaves and was not opposed to slavery, he hated the southern plantation elite. When Tennessee joined the Confederacy, Johnson became the only southern Senator to remain loyal to the Union. He quickly became a hero in the North and a villain in the South.

In an attempt to win over the border states, Lincoln in 1864 chose Johnson as his Vice-Presidential running mate. When Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, Johnson became President and inherited the task of reuniting the nation after the Civil War. Despite his reputation, much of Johnson's loyalty still lay with the South. Johnson was determined to bring the South back into the Union as soon as possible. This meant going as easy on the South as possible.

Presidential Reconstruction:

Johnson's plan for accomplishing this was the first phase of Reconstruction - known as Presidential Reconstruction. By this plan, Johnson only required that Southern states formally abolish slavery and pledge loyalty to the Union. They could then re-enter the Union and send representatives to Congress.

In December 1865, only 8 months after the wars end with Lee's surrender to Grant at Appamatox, the new southern Congressmen arrived in Washington. Chosen in all-white elections, they included the former Vice-President of the Confederacy, four former members of the Confederate Cabinet, and four rebel generals.

Northern Republican Congressmen were furious. Senator Ben Wade of Ohio asked Quote: "Did any nation in history ever welcome 'traitors' into its Congress as equals? Would a man who was not utterly insane advocate such a thing."

Northern Congressmen were angry that Johnson had been so lenient toward Southern States' admittance back into the Union and that ex-slaves had been excluded from voting.

Black Codes:

Meanwhile, in the South, the all-white "Johnson Governments" passed "black codes" aimed at denying the civil rights of ex-slaves and controlling blacks as a source of exploited and unfree labor as a replacement for slavery.

HANDOUT to Students: "Mississippi Black Codes"

This is how the South legally put Blacks back into a state of virtual slavery again.

ASK students: about the important points of this handout on the Mississippi Black Codes.

1. What Can't blacks do?
2. Who is being controlled by this code? Blacks, whites or both?
3. Who was punished more severely?

Black Assumptions:

For their part, 4 million ex-slaves were now free and believed themselves entitled to the same rights and privileges as all other citizens. Optimism led freedmen to insist that America live up to its professed ideals.

Here is a voice that later emerged to tell of Black rage and hope.
Have Student read Langston Hughe's poem

Ask Students: Although this poem was written in the 1920s, what issues does Hughes raise that blacks might have been wondering about from the end of the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s.

The "Redeemed South:"

All the while that President Johnson and the Radical Republican Congress fought over the fate of Reconstruction, the South underwent a political struggle to "redeem" the South for conservative Democrat white control in search of a solution to solve what they called the "negro" or "race" question.

In this context, the Northern Republican Congress refused to seat the Southern Democrat delegations. Johnson was outraged and he went before the public to discredit Congress. Thus began the long battle that led to the impeachment of Andrew Johnson.

Radical Reconstruction:

Declaring Presidential Reconstruction a failure and a travesty, Congress seized control of Reconstruction policy and initiated what the history textbooks call "Congressional Reconstruction" or "Radical Reconstruction."

In 1867, Radical Republicans won out over the Moderate Republicans and were able to pass laws that dealt less sympathetically with the ex-rebels. The radicals were led by Charles Sumner and Ben Wade in the Senate and Thaddeus Stevens in the House. All of them were from New England or New England migration states in the Midwest. These areas had formerly been the political hotbed areas of abolitionism before the Civil War.

The Radicals controlled nearly one-half of the votes in Congress, in part because Johnson's stubborn lenient approach toward the South had increasingly alienated the more moderate Republicans and pushed them into the Radical camp.

The Radicals were able to pass the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. The thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment protected the Civil Rights of all male citizens regardless of race. The Fifteenth Amendment prohibited disfranchisement because of race, but Southern whites were ingenious in limiting black voting.

Most dramatically, Congress dissolved the Johnson State Governments in the South and imposed military rule on the South to enforce the Civil Rights of freedmen. Certainly a Revolution in American society was underway.

Impeachment:

In order to keep Johnson from interfering with its Reconstruction policy, Congress passed the Tenure of Office Act. The law forbade Johnson from dismissing any members of his Administration without Congressional approval. Specifically, the law was intended to stop Johnson from dismissing his Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton. Stanton was a crucial player for Congressional Reconstruction, because he opposed Johnson and favored the Reconstruction policies of the Radical Republican Congress. Also, because he was Secretary of War, he was the major power in the military rule of the South.

When warned that firing Stanton in defiance of Congress could lead to impeachment, Johnson declared Quote: "Impeach and Be Damned." He then fired Stanton.

By the way, Stanton refused to be dismissed and barricaded himself in his War Department office for the duration of the impeachment trial.

During the Senate trial, Johnson's lawyers argued three major points which sound eerily familiar to the recent defense of Bill Clinton's defenders. Johnson's lawyers claimed:

1. That Johnson's actions did not rise to the level of "high crimes and misdemeanors" as required by the Constitution.
2. That impeachment was politically motivated by Republican Radicals indulging in partisan politics.
3. That the Tenure of Office Act itself was unconstitutional, because it undermined the idea of "separation of powers" and "checks and balances" between the three branches of government. Mostly they argued that conviction would severely weaken the Constitution and the office of the presidency.

By the way, The Supreme Court ruled in 1926 in Myers vs. the U.S. that the Tenure of Office of Act was in fact unconstitutional.

The vote for impeachment in the Senate came on May 16, 1868. 36 of 54 Senators had to vote to convict the President. It failed to reach the required two-thirds vote by only a single vote.

The last vote fell to Edmund G. Ross, a Republican from Kansas. He disliked Johnson passionately and had voted faithfully for a tougher Reconstruction policy against the South. But Ross feared that conviction of Johnson would weaken the presidency. During the vote, he nervously ripped papers into strips hour after hour - all the while trying to decide how to vote. When the Supreme Court Justice called his name and asked Quote: "Mr. Senator Ross, how say you?" Ross nervously answered Quote: "Not guilty." The trial was over. The Senate failed by one vote to convict the President.

In 1868, unlike 1998 and 1999, Americans were not blasé about impeachment. Passions ran high. The issue was not sex—or even perjury. It was far more momentous. On paper, the question was whether the President could fire the Secretary of War without the consent of Congress. In reality it was a battle over Reconstruction after the Civil War - over the fate of former Confederates and former slaves.

Tomorrow we will discuss how it all turned out and why Reconstruction was a failed revolution.

SHOW SLIDES

Discuss the similarities or dissimilarities between Johnson and Clinton's impeachment with the students.

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