

Statement: Conflicting attitudes toward the Civil War and Reconstruction

I. The Tragic Legend of Reconstruction (sometimes called "The Dreadful Decade," "The Age of Hate," and "The Blackout of Honest Govt.,")
Dunning School

A. Ingredients of this View:

1. Lincoln is treated as a merciful, compassionate, and charitable war hero intent on bringing the South back into the Union as painlessly as possible and as quickly as possible. His assassination was the first tragic step in this whole tragic episode.

2. Andy Johnson is a small "d" democrat who tried to put into effect Lincoln's mild plan for reconstruction. His reconstruction policy is celebrated as a smashing success (May-December, 1865). Southerners organized loyal state govts, showed a willingness to deal fairly with their former slaves, and in general, accepted the outcome of the Civil War in good faith. But Johnson's plans were awry when the Congress convened in December and his efforts were attacked by the vindictive and "blood-thirsty" Radicals.

3. The Radicals were fanatical; dedicated to imposing a harsh scorched earth peace on the South. They were arch villains and hypocrites. In the Tragic Legend view the Radicals are bunched together as a "conspiratorial clique" scheming to frustrate Johnson and overturn his govts in the South. What they really wanted was not equality for the Blacks. . . but to turn the South into an economic colony for northern manufacturers and surplus capital.

a. Thaddeus Stevens the arch criminal. . . .

4. The Negro and the Tragic Legend. . . . voting cattle for the Radicals. . . .

5. Scalawags and Carpetbaggers. . . . terms of opprobrium

6. Radical Reconstruction is represented as "Black Reconstruction"--Negro rule. . . . A period of unbroken horror and hopeless repression for the white southerners. An era that did not come to an end until 1877.

7. The Redeemer Myth--The South suffered heroically under this "foreign rule"; tolerated the corruption of these govts as long as was humanely possible; and then finally provoked beyond all human endurance they rose up to throw out the abominable Radical Govts--by force and violence.

III. Lincoln's Reconstruction Plan(s)

A. Lincoln the complete politician

1. In a way this idea that Lincoln had a reconstruction "plan" is another myth about Reconstruction. He was ready to try any solution or experiment with any set of alternatives providing it would give him the desired results.

2. True that all Lincoln's plan were characterized by a strain of charity and mercy. They were also all highly political in design. He did want the South back into the Union as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

a) But at the same time he was determined that the GOP would emerge from the war as the supreme political force in the nation for the foreseeable future.

b) That he would be the political head of this party.

c) Lincoln and the Southern Whigs: He realized that the southern states represented political leverage. . . .

Lincoln's Whiggish background. His hopes for a reuniting of the sections around a biregional Republican party.

d) Lincoln and the Negro--Lincoln's political career made in Illinois--a state in which the freedman could not vote, hold office, attend public schools; and a state that eventually excluded blacks from entering the state. These were the racial attitudes he was exposed to from youth, attitudes he was never able to overcome despite his compassion for the black man in racist America. . . .

He generally stood aloof from campaigns in Congress by more racially advanced Republicans for more rights for Negroes. He never even so much as hinted that the ballot should be extended for the black man living in the North. He never assumed leadership in his state of Illinois to have the exclusionist black laws removed.

Lincoln apparently approached reconstruction with three assumptions about the Negro: 1) that emancipation from slavery should be gradual; 2) colonization was the ideal solution to the race question; 3) colonization failing, the free Negro would have to accept inferior status in American society.

IV. Had Lincoln Lived :

Lincoln's relation w/ his Party - Cooperation over Reconstruction.

South's position in the Union - quick entry had South would have to meet Northern expectations

Lincoln w/ the Black

see rising

III Reconstruction--the Setting of the Problem

A. Evolving War Aims of the North

1. Reconstruction was really an effort to find out what the war for the Union was all about.

2. War aims shifted from preservation of the Union to emancipation of the slaves

3. Equality for the Blacks--correct this over statement. . . .
Lincoln hit upon a shaky consensus in the GOP on the black man in the south:

Blacks released from slavery should at least enjoy equality of civil and personal rights guaranteed to all citizens under the Constitution.

B. A Democratic Society Emerges from Total War

1. Public attitude: swung between "war hatred" and a deep desire to return to normalcy. With the latter sentiment generally in dominance during the Johnson reconstruction

2. Democratic nature of the war and its consequences:
The Civil War was perhaps our most democratic war. Consensus or support for the war had to be won from the people . . . it could not be coerced. See this in the reluctance of Lincoln to promulgate the Emancipation Proclamation . . . and the GOP's efforts to justify it as speeding up the war and not on moral grounds. Illustrated in the most intimate relations between battles and elections. There was a direct relationship between the GOP's success in elections and the way the war was going in the field.

a) This was the best reported war in history. . . .

b). The Union regiments and units were made up geographically.

c). Most telltale illustration of the democratic feature of this war was the procurement of troops. By 1864 the Union army was made up of veterans who had enlisted in 1861 and whose three-year terms were running out. There was no way in the world that they could have been coerced to remain under arms for the duration. Had they wanted to be discharged the whole war effort would have collapsed. But in 1864 3/4s of them did re-enlist (136,000 men). This was a dramatic ratification of the war and its principles.

4) War losses-- Union losses were estimated at 360,000 deaths from all causes. This was out of a population of 20,000,000. In relative terms the Union casualty rate was 6 to 7 times greater than a comparable percentage of American dead in World War II

WWR 300,000 dead - pop. of 135 million

Statistics - 2,000,000 fought on Both Sides
\$ 20,000,000,000 cost for Both Sides

total casualties -
over 600,000
620,000

History # 319

Re: Lincoln and His Party

Lincoln's Reconstruction Plan(s)

Use of War Governors to build Unionist sentiment in Union occupied states. See the career of Andrew Johnson in Tennessee.

By December 1863 Lincoln spelled out program with more detail. This was in the guise of his 10% plan.

The plan was voluntaristic and non-coercive. Based on 10% of the electorate in 1860 swearing an oath of future loyalty to the Union and the Constitution. The one provision in the plan that was required was the inclusion in the new state constitution of the emancipation of all slaves.

The plan included no changes in state boundaries, subdivisions, general code of laws (except those affecting slaves). In short, there was to be no structural changes in the state; no social or economic revolution carried out under the guise of "reconstruction."

The leniency of the plan:

Any proscriptions. These aimed at the Confederate leadership. The remainder of the southerners were to enjoy Executive amnesty.

Purposes of the Plan: 1 To bring the seceded states back into the Union as soon as possible. 2 To accomplish this there was nothing in the way of threatening social and economic provisions that would reshape the state internally.

[As a war measure it was used to erode away the support of the Confederacy in the South. Comment on Lincoln's use of the Amnesty Proclamation in this manner. Point out that the plan was not as lenient as historians have characterized it.]

Problems with the oath →

*3. To politically neutralize the Northern Democratic
charge that Lincoln had no plan for doing the
South back into the Union. That Republican policy
was unprincipled and unimpractical.*

*see this party toward the 1864 national
election.*

II. Success of the Plan

Arkansas--More than 10% took the oath . . . But the Congress rejected sitting the Representatives sent to Washington.

Florida--Lincoln could not get 10% to take the oath

Louisiana--Struggle in Louisiana. Ultimately the War Governorship of Nathaniel Banks was able to bring together a Unionist element that gave Lincoln his 10% and more. Governor Hahn was elected governor and support from Unionist Moderates.

The new constitution provided for no black suffrage. The new state government even voted against funds for black schools until this was turned around by General Banks. Lincoln's suggestion that intelligent blacks (more than 45% of the blacks in the state were literate) and blacks who served in the military be given the vote was ignored. The returning Louisiana government was made up of former confederates who took the oath and racially conservative Unionist moderates.

The point being: the Louisiana experiment became an immediate bone of contention between Lincoln and the Radicals in his party and the party in general.

Point: Lincoln suggested that qualified Blacks be able to be nominated and elected to be delegates to the Constitutional Convention in the State. This was not the same as extension of the franchise to blacks.

III. Wade-Davis Bill (July 1864)

Wade-Davis bill was an anti-administration manifesto. . . .

Point to see is that from the beginning of the war the Republican Congress had its own ideas about Reconstructing the South. The conflict between President Johnson and the Republican party was not something that blew up with Johnson assuming the Presidency.

Areas of disagreement:

Where did the Constitutional leverage rest for reconstruction?

Lincoln as President had the war-making powers that came as commander-in-chief. These he used with sweeping originality--in terms of the conscription of an army; the use of federal funds to outfit a military machine; the suspension of habeus corp s; the throwing up of a blockade around the Confederacy; the institution of martial law, etc. . . .

He also had the Pardoning Power . . .

But Congress was authorized by the Constitution to pass on the credentials of the readmitted states, or their representatives. This was a power that Lincoln never denied. . . .

Congress also claimed for itself the ultimate power in terms of Reconstruction by virtue of Article IV, section 4 of the Constitution: This was the "guarantee clause" which states that "The US shall guarantee to every state in this Union a Republican form of government"

Republicans--moderates and radicals alike--took great pleasure in quoting Chief Justice Taney's decision in Luther vs. Borden (1849) in which Taney, the author of the Dred Scott decision, had ruled that it was the role of Congress to determine the legitimacy of a state government.

B. Provisions of the Wade-Davis Bill

Support for the bill came from a majority of the Republicans in both houses of Congress. It was not a Radical measure. Only denominated as Radical if compared to the Conservative or Democratic Unionist view of Reconstruction--which was that the southern states be permitted back into the Union without any conditions. That is, without even the incorporation of emancipation in their state constitutions.

The W-D bill did not include any provision for black suffrage.

It ~~did~~ not include any provision for land confiscation (which Stevens wanted)

Nothing about territorialization. . .Which was an extremist or radical position in 1863.

It did, like the Ten Percent Plan, include the provision of emancipation incorporated in the state constitution.

It also provided for the writ of habeas corpus by any black who was denied freedom under any claim of service. . .If he could not get justice in the local or state court system then he could take his case into the federal courts. This was a marked difference from the Lincoln 10% Governments.

Point here: That Congressional Republicans were concerned about the failure of Lincoln's plan in Louisiana that made no provision for safety and security for the freedman.

The critical difference was in the general strategy or tenure of the bill. . .That is the substituting of 10% for more than 50% and the addition of the "iron-clad" oath. . .

The obvious purpose of the Wade-Davis bill was to make reconstruction impossible until there was peace.

Secondly, it was a firm reassertion of the Congressional Republicanism's (the whole party) contention that Reconstruction was the role of the Legislative body and not the Executive. . .Or at least, not the sole or absolute right of the White House. . . The fact that a heavy majority of the Republicans in both house signed or voted for the bill was indicative of the feelings of Lincoln's party

IV. Had Lincoln Lived?

From the outset one thing can be said that applied to both the 10% Plan of the Lincoln administration and to the Wade-Davis bill. Both would not have been very effective as basis for reconstruction after the war.

Lincoln's plan was a "war emergency measure". . . Once the war was over and the Confederate soldiers began returning to their states to try and build a government on only ten percent of the population would have meant frustration and defeat. . . or the continued presence of the federal army to support such a narrow based government.

As for Wade-Davis and thier "iron-clad" oath its provisions were too sweeping. It would have ended in political annihilating most of the white southern makes. . .

The Republicans themselves were divided in the Congress. The majority were moderates who wanted certain fundamental guarantees; (1)they wanted the antislavery amendment ratified; (2)protection for the freedmen and the southern Unionists to the extent necessary to make freedom and responsibility meaningful; (3)they wanted to prevent a resurgence of southern power threatening to the Republician party and its polices and for the future guarantee of the Union. These moderates supported the view that reconstruction should be carried out as quickly as possible and with little social, and economic disruption as possible. . . .

The minority radicals wanted this and much more-- they wanted to reshape the institutions of the South. To break the planter ruling class for good; distribute land to the freedmen; exclude former rebel leaders from politics and enfranchise the blacks. . .