

History 225

Re: Addendum notes to Radical or Congressional Reconstruction  
Source: Summers, The Gilded Age

Summers points out that Congressional reconstruction was tottering even before the foundation stones were laid. In their faith in states' rights and private property or laissez faire sentiments, the majority of the Republican party--that is, the Northern moderates, did not disagree much from President Johnson.

The majority of the Republican party was really forced into remaking the South only because Johnson and white conservatives gave them no alternative.

Had Johnson passed the Civil Rights Bill (and perhaps not vetoed the Freedman Bureau bill) most moderate Republicans would have declared this a success in that the civil liberties and rights of newly freed blacks and loyal southern Unionists would be guaranteed. But Johnson's obstructionism and incompetence forced the majority of the Party into the camp with the Radicals in a coalition that had to undertake the reconstruction of the South in order to protect what the war had won. That they had to take this course did not mean that they liked it.

*Free  
Liber  
Abolition*

By Johnson's obstructionism, blind ambition, and incompetence I am referring his blatant white supremacy which led to the reconstruction of the South under his governments (Reconstruction--Confederate style) including the unspeakable and intolerable Black Codes; his efforts to purge the Radicals from the party and his disastrous misreading of Northern expectations for which he paid in the 1866 elections; his advice to the southern governments not to ratify the 14th Amendment; and his continued obstructionism that pushed the Republicans to initiate impeachment proceedings. (See *Force* *Chapt. 7*)

It is impossible to imagine that if Lincoln had lived to fill out his second term that things would have come to this impasse between the executive and the congress.

Having to deal with reconstruction the general impression is that Northern Republicans in the main now looked to move quickly as possible in addressing the issue of what to do with the former Confederate states and then to get on with the important business of national development. The knotty problem was the "Negro question." What to do with the 3.4 million blacks.

Here we see the conservative limits of Congressional reconstruction as it was played out by the moderate white Republicans. Giving the blacks the vote (as set forth in ambiguous terms in the 15th Amendment) and the right to contract freely (that is, their civil rights protected under the 14th Amendment) this was all that was needed by their lights for blacks to protect their interests. The Congress could then devote its time and energies to pressing national issues that was their real meat and drink--tariff, banking, currency, railroad expansion, etc.

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Source: Summers

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Could these governments succeed or prevail under these dispensations? The answer would be a resounding no.

Under what conditions could a democratized and racially liberated South have taken deep roots and prevailed. Open to speculation only.

Question of the redistribution of the land to blacks and the poor white upcountry southerners.

Did blacks have any claim. The issue of restitution for 200 years of forced labor. It was black labor that was largely responsible for the economic development of the South. Actually, it was King Cotton that was largely responsible for the accelerated industrialization of the North.

During the American Revolution the 13 colonies were able to win their independence from England only with the support of the French and France's supply of military aid and assistance (before she brought her military into the war after 1778). French military aid was financed by Southern cotton raised and harvested by slave labor.

Limited scope of Congressional Reconstruction evident in otherways:

15th Amendment is couched in confining language it does not provide unconditional manhood suffrage. (read the language) It does not utter a word about the rights of blacks to hold office.

It does not provide the vote to women. Women's movement never arrived. It would have to wait until later. If they thought the 14th Amedment gave them the rights of citizens to vote the Supreme Court thought otherwise.

Indians were relegated to the reservation and became wards of the nation.