

HST 202: ONLINE U.S. History W19 (Escobar)

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Legacy of Reconstruction
by [Joe Escobar](#) - Saturday, February 23, 2019, 7:44 PM

This thread is for discussions on the Legacy of Reconstruction topic.

To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post, something that describes the specific claim (1-4) you are addressing. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Legacy of Reconstruction

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Birthright Citizenship and Immigration
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Tuesday, February 26, 2019, 3:47 PM

In the video/audio clip “Professor Eric Foner on the legacy of Reconstruction” Professor Foner made an important connection between a current immigration issue and the era of Reconstruction. Foner started speaking on this issue by pointing out the apparently strange concept in American law which says that a child who is born in America to an undocumented immigrant mother is automatically an American citizen. This has been a topic of much debate in American politics, and many people do not understand its roots. Foner points out that in many other countries of the world, a child born to an undocumented immigrant mother would not automatically be born into citizenship. The difference is the American legal concept of “Birthright Citizenship” which came about during the reconstruction period after the Civil War.

A major issue even before the Civil War was what was to become of the freed slaves. There were some like the American Colonization Society who believed that free blacks (but not slaves) needed to be colonized in Liberia (Murrin textbook page 418). These conversations were taking place over thirty years before the Civil War, and the issue grew exponentially when four million slaves were freed after the war. Professor Foner states that “The struggle to abolish slavery and the debate over what was going to be the status of these people eventually led to the incorporation in the laws and in the Constitution—the fourteenth amendment—of this principal of ‘Birthright Citizenship,’” (Foner 4:13 minute mark).

Birthright citizenship is the concept which we currently enforce in this country which says that if you are born in this country, you are a citizen. This is a reversal of the 1857 Dred Scott decision by the Supreme Court which said that black people were not citizens even if they were born in this country. Foner points out that “That tells us that citizenship was defined not by birth, but by race,” (Foner 5:01 minute mark). Today we are experiencing an unforeseen side effect of birthright citizenship as it applies to children born in America to undocumented immigrants. We still believe that if you are born in this country you should automatically be a citizen, but some have started questioning if this concept should apply to those who are born to parents who are here illegally. Indeed, there are undocumented immigrant women who enter this country illegally for the express purpose of birthing a child on American soil.

This is a reversal of the issue which led us to Birthright Citizenship in the first place. Originally, it was intended to help those who either had been brought to America against their will or were at least held in bondage against their will after being born here. Now we are seeing people who are coming to this country by any means necessary in order to gain citizenship for their children. With the current political environment surrounding the issue of immigration, it is possible that we may see more changes to the concept of Birthright Citizenship and just who it should apply to. Some would see this as a good thing, others would see it as a step backward. As Professor Foner pointed out in this clip, America did not start out perfect and continue to get better, our history is full of mistakes and learning opportunities.

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Re: Birthright Citizenship and Immigration
by [Ashley Tippins](#) - Friday, March 1, 2019, 3:46 PM

Hi Clifford;

Thank you for your post. I hadn't really understood the arguments against birthright citizenship until looking into it for this forum and reading your post. It does make sense that if a person comes into the United States without the proper documentation* then they, and those they bring with them, would also not have the proper citizenship documentation. That understanding operates under the principle that those who came with the individual came under their own free will, and if that principle holds, the argument is sound.

However, both young children and children born in the US after emigrating do not have the free will to decide to not come into the United States without the proper documentation prior to entry. Why would we hold the child accountable for actions that were taken by the parent? As you stated in your post, birthright citizenship is "intended to help those who...had been brought to America against their will". I think that children born, without their permission or consent, to an undocumented parent should be afforded citizenship. Under birthright citizenship, those that were born in America and have lived in America their whole life, regardless of the nationality of their parents, are considered American. This is the same standard that we would expect for children of German, Irish, and English immigrants, so why not for immigrants of today?

* I want to make a point not to say these folks immigrated illegally because there are legal ways to enter the US without obtaining citizen or resident documentation prior to residence in the country. One example would be if you are applying for asylum. A significant number of the Mexican and Central American folks that were reported to have come in for the exclusive purpose of having children, the so-called "anchor babies", were fleeing from the political [violence](#) of their original countries; immigration under these circumstances would be grounds for the petition of asylum within the US, and would not be coming into the country illegally.

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Re: Birthright Citizenship and Immigration
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Friday, March 1, 2019, 4:46 PM

Hi Ashley,

Thank you for the thoughtful response. After reading your response I went back and reread my post and I see now that it might have seemed like I was suggesting that the children of undocumented immigrants should be denied citizenship if they are born here. That was not my intention, I was simply trying to show a contrast between the original intent of the law and the effects it is having in this country today. I do appreciate how you tied in that many of these children are being brought here against their will, or at least without their consent. This is an aspect which I had not considered when I wrote my post. Thank you for that. I know this post won't get me any points, but I just wanted to reach out and say that I enjoyed your post and I am glad you replied. Thanks again.

Cliff

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Re: Birthright Citizenship and Immigration
by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 1:24 AM

Hi Clifford!

Thank you for your very thorough response. I also spoke about the birthright citizenship and immigration topic and I think it is very valuable to speak about it. I think you had very good notes from the videos, many quotes that I also used from Foner. I don't necessarily think you were implying that children born in the US by undocumented woman should not be considered US citizens. I do agree that birthright citizenship causes issues for people. I do also believe that trying to reverse this amendment in any way would take our country a step back. More realistically it would probably cause an uproar.

I understand that our country makes mistakes and has learning lessons; but reversing this amendment in any way is not a valuable learning lesson. It would cause much more destruction to our country and our people. Not only this but if the the reversing of this law didn't go well, it would be incredibly hard for the USA to get back up on its feet. Our country worked so hard to get this amendment and it helped out so many people post civil war. I completely agree that the 14th amendment was originally created for slaves and African-Americans who were born or forced to live in the US etc. Changing it now though could cause confusion in citizenship and our history. I do realize that this is a very difficult topic and it has many layers and answers. I really enjoyed your response! Thank you!

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The right to Citizenship
by [Brianna Shelley](#) - Thursday, February 28, 2019, 4:36 PM

On June 13, 1866 after a lengthy debate, the 14th amendment received its required two-thirds majority in congress and went to the states for ratification. Section 1 of the 14th amendment defined all native-born or naturalized persons, including blacks, as American citizens. (Liberty, Equality, Power; Page 570) Prior to this Amendment Birth-Right Citizenship did not exist. On the eve of the Civil War, the law had stated that; no black person could be a Citizen of the United States. The Supreme Court had ruled in The Dred Scott Case in 1857, that America is a Country for white people, black people are aliens here. Even if they were born here or their ancestors had been here for generations, they could never be citizens of this Country. (Professor Foner on the Legacy of Reconstruction; 4:57) The United States today has been plagued by many Immigration controversies, but Section 1 of the 14th amendment is an enforced law. If you are an illegal alien and become pregnant and your baby is born here, that baby is a Citizen of the United States. Before the Civil War many African Americans whose ancestors had been here for many generations prior were not given the right of Citizenship. Abolitionist fought for an idea of citizenship severed from the concept of race, which is what came about after the Civil War and Reconstruction era. (Professor Foner on the Legacy of Reconstruction; 6:30) Today our Country has adopted Civic Nationalism, which means anyone has the right to become an American Citizen, which was not always the case. Many people have fought long and hard to be granted equal rights and citizenship and as we all know this is still an ongoing struggle.

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Progress is not linear
by [Ashley Tippins](#) - Thursday, February 28, 2019, 6:59 PM

In the video provided for this forum, Professor Foner states that the United States is still living with the effects of the reconstruction era. However, this statement might run counter to most Americans understanding of the impacts of the reconstruction era. The colloquial understanding of reconstruction is that the southern states implemented the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments with relatively no backlash and thus black folks became fully enfranchised citizens throughout the United States after the civil war. This is not the case. There have been many examples of both progress and regression in the civil liberties provided by the US government. There are a number of examples that are highlighted in the textbook but this post will focus on is the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1960's.

The first example of the backlash that follows progress in the American socio-political landscape is the emergence of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) -- the generic term for a number of white terrorist organizations throughout the south that were formed in direct opposition to universal male suffrage. One of the predominant myths that is taught about American civil rights is that after universal suffrage was enacted, there was widespread enfranchisement of former

slaves in the Southern and Border States. This myth is predicated on the belief that laws enacted are also implemented; however, this is empirically disproven by the vigilante justice that was enacted by the KKK in the late 1960's. During the vote for ratification of the 14th Amendment, former Confederate military men beat, killed, and intimidated African-American voters to stay away from the ballot box (Murrin 374). While this didn't prevent the ratification of the 14th amendment, it did indicate that, regardless of the enacted law, neo-confederates were refusing to give up social control of former slaves and southern political institutions.

Later, prior to the election of 1872, the KKK rode in force to turn southern white republicans into democrats and discourage black citizens from going to the polls. At the Colfax Massacre in Louisiana, 100 black and 3 white folks were killed in cold blood to intimidate other voters from voting Republican (Murrin 381-382). Overall, the goal of the KKK was to maintain white social control of the black population and convert reluctant white Republicans into Democrats that would support them in this cause. The important impact of the KKK, and the part that is frequently omitted from American myth, is that the KKK succeeded in their aims. While the federal government enacted laws that made it illegal to engage in this form of voter intimidation and suppression, without the support of the state legislatures, there was no way to enforce these laws. President Grant only ever suspended the writ of habeas corpus in nine counties in South Carolina, and out of the 3,000 klansmen that were indicted, the justice department was only able to convict 600 men, many of whom only got light jail sentences or fines (Murrin 382). Thus, this form of voter intimidation continued in the south; morphing from secret societies like the KKK to openly violent political parties during the Mississippi election of 1875. The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendment remained "sleeping giants" until nearly a century later when the civil rights movement forced the federal government to enforce the laws that it had enacted during reconstruction.

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Immigration Questions of Today Answered in the Reconstructionist Period

by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Thursday, February 28, 2019, 7:17 PM

In the reconstructionist period everyone in America was questioning their rights. The slaves having been freed opened up a whole new conversation on citizenship and rights. What rights and citizenship status did the blacks now have? Would they be the same as whites? Would whites have more rights? Would everyone be allowed to vote? Our textbook states one of the results of these conversations was the 14th amendment(pg. 570). Section 1 defined all native-born or naturalized person including blacks, as American citizens. This proclaimed them citizens if they were born here or if they had been here for a certain amount of time and went through the naturalization process no matter their race. This amendment to the constitution is still true today and is the topic of much debate in illegal immigration issues. How can the child of an illegal immigrant instantly have citizenship? Many argue that illegal immigrants come here knowing that we have birthright citizenship unlike many other countries. Foner points this out in his video that not all countries have birthright citizenship using Germany as his example(3:45). Researching on usembassy.gov the site states that for a child being born in Germany does not automatically gain them citizenship they must also have at least one parent who is a German citizen and lived in that country for at least 8 years. But in our country thanks to the 14th amendment that was passed because of debates during the reconstructionist period. It does not matter if your parents are citizens or if they have lived here 8 mins if you are born here you are a citizen.

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1. Birthright citizenship defined in the 19th Century as it applies to illegal immigration issues today.

by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Thursday, February 28, 2019, 9:48 PM

I am going to specifically be talking about the first prompt "Birthright citizenship defined in the 19th Century as it applies to illegal immigration issues today." Professor Foner begins speaking about how if illegal "aliens" enter the USA and get found out they are not citizens of the USA and they must be taken back to their home country. No matter if they worked here, lived here, etc. However, if a woman, Foner claims from Mexico or whatever country, comes illegally to the USA and has a child in the USA that child becomes a US citizen. While the mother still remains an illegal "alien." This is your birthright citizenship that was created after the civil war in the 14th amendment. Foner also adds that this right is not in many countries and uses Germany for an example. The 14th amendment was created when the civil war ended to allow all slaves and african americans to become US citizens. Considering a large majority of slaves and free blacks were born in the USA. Slaves and even free blacks before the civil war were not considered US citizens even if they were born in the USA. This amendment was clearly created to allow blacks citizenship, and not only that but from there on (continuing forward) any person no matter the race if there were born in the USA they were a US citizen. I personally think they wanted to make this amendment as simple and as blunt as possible. Stating what the new birthright policy was and how it cannot be changed. If the US tried to

change or alter this amendment in any way it would show the people of the USA that their citizenship if born here is not guaranteed. Which causes a greater problem, and goes back all the way to the slave era, before the civil war. Where all this was created because of the civil war and abuse towards blacks. Yes, it is true that illegal immigrants can enter the USA conceive and have a child, and that child will have citizenship. This allows us to not repeat history and our mistakes. Where there was once a time where blacks were born here and not considered citizens, and even worse they were considered less than human. I think if the US tried to revoke this amendment it would cause chaos and the US would have to deport probably a decent amount of people from the US. Many of our citizens were conceived from illegal immigrants. Not only that but probably half our population or a majority would have to be deported because many of our citizens are descendants from their ancestors that were US slaves/free blacks. A child born today from an illegal "alien" is no different from a child born from a slave pre civil war, who eventually gets their citizenship from the 14th amendment. Keeping the 14th amendment how it is, allows the US to keep moving forward and not repeating a horrid time in history.

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Progress in the U.S.
by [Vince Shumway](#) - Thursday, February 28, 2019, 11:52 PM

The time period of the 60' and 70's in the nineteenth century was a time of progress and a time of failure. This snippet in time could also show the broader view of the American progress and regression. During this time period the United States passed some of the most important legislation that our country has ever seen with the fourteenth and fifteenth amendments which really defined what it means to be a citizen in the US. It was huge progress finally giving the rights the black population deserved and finally they became citizens. However, It wasn't all positive especially with the entrance of the KKK (page 574) which pressured the republican and black populace in the south. Also, another negative for example was the Mississippi plan which would "persuade" white Republican voters to switch parties. As well as intimidate black voters (page 586). However even with all this bad going on this time period still laid foundations for great social improvement and hope for all races in America. Progress in the States has not been in a linear positive progression throughout history, it is better portrayed as a scatter plot maybe with good and bad points all over the place. With that in mind I believe a that with "line of best fit" in that scatter plot would show a positive upward movement in progress and in freedom. The U.S. has never been perfect, but over the entire span of its existence it has moved towards good and positive outcomes for all of its citizens, always improving even if it takes many years.

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Re: Progress in the U.S.
by [Ashley Tippins](#) - Friday, March 1, 2019, 4:11 PM

Hi Vince,

Thank you for your post - I also responded to this issue in my original post and largely agree with your analysis. I think that if current day folks had a better understanding of the reconstruction era and the politics of the 1860's and 70's, then everyone would have a much more accurate understanding of current American politics. There were a couple of things that I also think complicated the notion of progression during reconstruction.

The first one is briefly mentioned in the textbook, but I think it deserves a closer examination. When the 15th amendment was being debated, early feminists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were critical of the 15th amendment for creating, "the most odious form of aristocracy the world has ever seen: an aristocracy of sex" (Murrin 575). There was this massive step forward in terms of race relations however, a huge blow to the women's suffrage movement; the progression and regression of American politics in a single amendment. This move was not surprising: many people, including women, still found the idea of women's suffrage to be preposterous. Additionally, the Second Great Awakening had instilled a renewed adherence to strict gender norms as evidence of a holy life. The movement in the middle class North in the 1820's and 30's toward mother-centered domesticity gave women more power over the private sphere but deeply entrenched the division between private and public life. Due to these social factors, I think the above statement by the suffragettes is a bit hyperbolic, but I think the sentiment is an excellent example of the multi-faceted nature of American politics.

Another theory that I am developing about American politics is in regards to the permanence of the political fights and debates. The political fights between the North and South in the early to mid-19th century about infrastructure, the role of the federal government, state's rights, and regulation are remarkably similar to the

arguments today between Democrats and Republicans. Those that are focused on the more cosmopolitan, "city", worldview tend to support strong federal government and governmental investment in infrastructure and the economy while those that have more agrarian or working class worldviews tend to oppose the intrusion of the federal government in nearly any sphere. The fights might take place over different things, railroads vs. cybersecurity, but the basis of the arguments remain the same. Unfortunately, this gives me a very pessimistic view of the future of American politics. It really seems that unless we have a profound, thorough, and common understanding about the history of this country, we will just continue to have the same debates over and over again.

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Re: Progress in the U.S.

by [Vince Shumway](#) - Saturday, March 2, 2019, 12:14 AM

Ashley,

Thank you for your insight I really liked your comments and view points . I largely agree with you as well. I think that some of the arguments we have as a society will never fade away or change in a lot of ways. The times have changed and people in our society have certainly changed over the years, but I think that some of these arguments and issues will never change or be solved. It is always a balancing act between the two major parties as well as conservatives or more progressives. I think they continue to keep each other in check. Like I said though some of these arguments or issues may never pass because there will always be different views in this world as well as different beliefs.

I agree that these major civil rights achievements regarding the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments may have made huge social improvements legally, but there were also short falls especially considering the women's suffrage movements. I am not sure how the newly ratified amendments would have hurt the women's rights movements, besides of course making the U.S. a total patriarchal society. Other than not explicitly giving women the rights now held by all men I don't understand how it hurt women. I do wish that women always had the rights that they deserved, but I do think that given the times with beliefs and the social structure in place there was only enough "room" for so much change at a given time. An entire war was fought just for an entire race not to be enslaved. Democratic societies seem to move at a slow crawl, but maybe that's what had to happen since the country was literally being ripped apart over something as barbaric as slavery.

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Re: Progress in the U.S.

by [Ashley Tippins](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 10:59 PM

Hi Vince,

Thanks for your response. We definitely largely agree on a number of the issues discussed in the forum, but I did just want to touch on some of the points made in the last paragraph. I think there are couple of reasons that the women's suffrage movement had legitimate concerns with the 15th amendment.

The main reason was that the amendment explicitly divided the right to vote along gendered lines. Prior to the 15th amendment, there had been a number of ways that states determined who was eligible to vote and, while for the most part voting rights expanded over time, there had been other qualifications that went along with the right to vote. By reducing the qualifications to universal male suffrage, the government was taking a stance on who had a right to a voice in American politics, and women decidedly did not have a voice. The impact of this means a codified exclusion of women's perspectives and concerns from entering the public sphere. I think you put it best with confirming that the amendment made, "the U.S. a total patriarchal society." This type of society is oppressive to the creativity and innovation of women under a patriarchal society; in the same way that oppressive conditions of colonialism, slavery, and homophobia prevent truly brilliant folks from thriving due to lack of opportunity, so does a patriarchal society squander the many talents that women offer to public life.

While the 15th amendment may seem, in retrospect, like the obvious stepping stone to women’s suffrage, I can understand the suffragettes fear that this would make their already seemingly impossible task even harder. There was a real possibility that men could use the 15th amendment to justify the continued disenfranchisement of women for a century, as they did black folks equal access to public life. An excellent example of this is the 13th amendment. On face the amendment is positive and progressive: abolishing slavery once and for all. Except for this one clause that allows slavery or involuntary servitude as a punishment for a crime. At the time the clause seems benign, but this exception incentivized the creation of a police force out of the slave patrols of the antebellum south. Slavery might have been illegal, but not if they accused them of a crime first. Fast forward a century and a half and that clause is used to justify the forced labor of millions of, disproportionately black and brown, folks in prison. Amendments can and should be changed, but there is a tendency in American politics to believe that they are set in stone. While I can understand the hesitation to see an issue with the 15th amendment not including women, I think that there was good cause for fear on the part of the suffragettes.

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Legislation is not the same as enforcement
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Friday, March 1, 2019, 7:17 AM

I would like to address the issue related to passing laws and “having rights” not being the same as enforcing laws or exercising rights. Professor Foner accurately points out in the video clip that having rights written in law does not guarantee that those rights will be enforced (Foner 6:45 minute mark). Foner goes on to explain that although the 14th amendment enfranchised black people in America as well as making them citizens, it was ignored for decades. We see many examples of this in chapter 17 of our text with issues surrounding the Johnson administration, black codes, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Mississippi plan.

President Andrew Johnson made efforts to keep political power in the hands of white people by only allowing whites who had taken an oath of allegiance to vote for delegates to craft a new state constitution in North Carolina (Murrin 565). The “Black Codes” which were adopted in many reconstructed states “excluded black people from juries and the ballot box, did not permit them to testify against whites in court, banned interracial marriage, and punished blacks more severely than whites for certain crimes,” (Murrin 566). The Ku Klux Klan was created as a way to maintain “social control of the black population,” (Murrin 581). This was achieved through intimidation, [violence](#), and murder. In Mississippi, the population of eligible voters after the passage of the 14th amendment was 55% black people. In order to combat this, white people attempted to manipulate the black vote using intimidation, economic coercion, [violence](#), and murder (Murrin 586).

Although some of these examples were resisted by force, they all point to the fact that simply having the 14th amendment on the books would not guarantee that black people were treated equally. Civil Rights protests would be happening in America nearly a century after the passage of the 14th amendment, which further demonstrates this point. Although America had laws in place which said that black people were equal to white people, they certainly were not treated as such for a very long time.

Today we are seeing a reversal on this issue in some parts of the country, including Oregon. Sanctuary laws are in place which guarantee that our state government and local law enforcement will not cooperate with federal immigration agencies in immigration law enforcement. This goes back to an issue which became very prevalent on the eve of the Civil War: state’s rights vs. federal power. Although the federal government has laws on the books regarding illegal immigration, they have had a very hard time enforcing them, especially when local law enforcement will not cooperate with them. This is a current example of a problem which Professor Foner pointed to during the Reconstruction era.

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Progress and freedom in the United States
by [Brianna Shelley](#) - Friday, March 1, 2019, 10:29 PM

The assassination of President Lincoln after the Civil War put the Nation on a path that would undo and threaten the success of the Union over the Confederate army. So many battles were fought, and lives were lost to free African Americans from slavery. After the Union won the war many had thought that the hard part was over but with the country ripped apart, the hardest part had yet to come. The Nation had to figure out a way to bring the South back into the Union and how to provide liberty, freedom and Civil rights to 4 million freed slaves. The Reconstruction era

following the civil war turned out to be a back and fourth pull between the North and South, Republicans and Democrats. Northern Republicans fought hard to protect the rights of Freed men and women. They proposed and implemented Civil Rights act such as the 14th and 15th Amendments. They passed social legislation to create the first free public school for blacks in the South. Still, the white resistance [violence](#) intensified. In 1865 2,000 black men, woman and children were murdered ([Violence](#) Video; 00:40) White Supremist would find the man who was saving money, working hard and trying to better himself, pick him out and murder him. Their goal was to destroy the moral and inspiration among African Americans. One Historian in the "[Violence](#)" video described it as "systematic culling of alpha males from the black community." States in the South even implemented laws called "Black Codes," which among other things, prohibited black men from any work except with his field hands. ([Violence](#) Video; 1:40) It was an attempt to reinstate slavery without the chains.

President Johnson virtually did very little, if anything to fight and protect African Americans. He tried to block and hinder any attempt to provide civil liberties to them. He vetoed both measures that congressed passed to protect the economic and civil rights of freedpeople. The first law would extend the life and powers of the Freedman's Bureau. The other law defined freedpeople as citizens with equal legal rights and gave federal courts appellate jurisdiction to enforce those rights. (Liberty, Equality, Power; Chapter 17 Pages 569-570) Johnson even changed his original plan of reconstruction and pardoned 15,000-20,000 Planters and allowed them to move back to their land and kick the black men, women and children off who had settled there after the war. Professor Foner states that "Johnson was stubborn, self-righteous and rigid in thinking. Really the worst person possible to become President by accident, at a time when flexibility, vision and creative leadership was really what was needed." ([Violence](#) video; 8:30)

The Civil War was over, the Union had defeated the Confederates but there were still so many more battles to be fought over the freedom and civil liberties of the freedpeople. To quote Eric Foner again, "Our history is a story of ups and downs, of progress and retrogression, of rights that are gained and then taken away to fight for them again another day." (Professor Foner on the Legacy of Reconstruction; 9:30)

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Racial Nationalism: Racism By Another Name
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Saturday, March 2, 2019, 7:18 PM

In the video clip posted for this forum, Professor Foner discusses the difference between racial nationalism, which America recognized during the beginning of the republic, and civic nationalism, which we recognize today. Professor Foner points out that in America today, anyone can become an American citizen as long as they go through the proper legal process, however leading all the way up to the Civil War, no black person was considered a citizen of the United States, North or South (Foner 4:30 minute mark). We of course know now that the 14th amendment to the Constitution changed that forever once it was ratified, but this was the reality in America during all the years which led up to ratification of that amendment.

The Supreme court of the United States decided during the Dred Scott decision in 1857 that American citizenship would only be extended to white people. Today we look at this decision and shudder as we consider that the highest court in the land made such a monumental decision which was grounded entirely in racial nationalism, or what we today would call racism. This racial nationalism, or "ethnic nationalism" as Professor Foner calls it, came to pass because this country was founded by white European men who ended up owning black African men, women, and children. I don't think that racial nationalism was necessarily something that the Founding Fathers explicitly thought about, I think it was just something that was generally accepted as the social norm, which is why they chose not to put any such language in the Constitution. They did not express in the Constitution that only white people could become citizens, but they also did not express that no black person could become a citizen; this just happens to be the way in which the country developed.

Slavery was a huge part of this phenomena. As the young country began to find its way, so many black people in America were part of the institution of slavery that it was taken for granted that if your skin was not white, you were of a lower class, an inferior class. I think the distinction between the social classes of white people and black people is a major part of what led to the concept of racial or ethnic nationalism being perpetuated as long as it was. It was simply known that if your skin was white, you belonged on a higher rung of the social ladder than those with darker skin. Luckily, America came to its senses eventually. After the Civil War, slavery was finally abolished and Americans were willing to accept (at least on paper) blacks as equal citizens, and eventually we came to the idea of civic nationalism.

Civic nationalism is the idea that anyone in the world can become an American citizen as long as they go through the legal process to become one. There are of course certain restrictions and disqualifying factors, but for the most part anyone can become a citizen. When the Civil War broke out, the idea of civic nationalism would have been preposterous. Many Americans today like to think that the North fought the Civil War with the goal of having absolutely-equal rights for blacks and that America today was their end-game. We of course know that this was not the case. The issue of ending slavery entirely was formally presented as a goal of the war long after the first shots were fired. The idea that black people would ever be entirely equal to white people was not even initially considered by

Lincoln. Lincoln stated in the Lincoln-Douglas debates when speaking about black people that “I agree with Judge Douglas that he (the black man) is not my equal in many respects...” (Murrin 485). It is also known that Lincoln stated that his main goal in the Civil War was restoration of the Union, whether that meant freeing all the slaves, none of the slaves, or some of the slaves. Lincoln of course changed his opinion on the matter, and we assume that, had he lived, he would have been the main proponent of the 14th and 15th amendments.

The steps which America has taken since the Civil War to ensure that anyone can become an American citizen are remarkable. In this country today, we often pride ourselves on the fact that we will take anyone who is seeking to make a better life for themselves. This simply was not the case in America leading up to Reconstruction. America was a place where white people ruled all other races: Blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics, even Irish and German immigrants (who today might also be considered “white”). Civic nationalism levels the playing field that ensures that everyone has an equal voice in this country. Racial nationalism was simply racism by another name; something to be remembered only for the hard lessons which came as a result as of it.

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Re: Racial Nationalism: Racism By Another Name
by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 9:01 AM

I agree with you that the results of the civil war led to civic nationalism for the most part. But I believe it took a lot longer than the reconstructionist period to get the country there. Even though the 14th and 15th amendments were passed during this time they also faced major resistance during this time as well. They continued to face resistance for years, after they passed blacks and indeed people of any race were supposed to be equal and have the same rights. But not only the blacks but the Indians and even the Irish faced difficulties with rights for years. In fact I believe we still have some problems with racial vs civic nationalism in this country today. We see stories on the news all the time of someone who is a legal citizen of this country but yet still has their rights violated because they are ethnically profiled. So for the most part I would say we have embraced civic nationalism but at times still get very close to racial nationalism.

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American history is not a straight line of improvement
by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Saturday, March 2, 2019, 8:27 PM

In the video clip provided for this forum, Professor Foner points out that Americans today like to think that America “Began perfect, and have been getting better ever since,” (Foner 8:40 minute mark). He goes on to point out that our history ebbs and flows much more than we sometimes like to remember. The history which we of course have been focusing on lately is that of the issue of slavery and the Civil War which ended it in America. Slavery was a part of America since a very early period of our history. Our textbook states that “Africans reached Virginia in 1619 when, as John Rolfe reported, a Dutch ship ‘sold us twenty Negars,’” (Murrin 58). From that point on, Africans were subjected to the worst kind of treatment in order to advance the interests of the white race. It wasn’t until after the Civil War and Reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s which African Americans were legally recognized as equal citizens, and it would be almost another century before this legal representation began to receive realistic recognition.

This of course is not the only case in which the “All men are created equal” clause has been abandoned in the history of our country; as I said, it is simply the one which we are currently studying. I would submit, however, that the overall trend of American history is one which has led to greater rights for all people. America has made mistakes along the way and will continue to do so; but I think the overall pattern has been one of more rights for the most oppressed sections of society. I’ve said this before in these forums, but I think it is worth repeating, times change rather quickly, people often change at a much slower pace. The American people are not an exception to this. While we like to think of our country as one which has always been on an upward trend of righteousness, close examination of our history reveals a different story. We enslaved Africans for more than the fist half-century of our republic, we continued to discriminate against them after that (as well as other immigrants), we even put our own citizens in internment camps during World War Two out of fear of organized foreign attacks. Even today, we have seen the President of the United States wanting to put Muslims on registry lists in order to track them out of fear of attacks on this country.

There are many examples we can point to in our history which suggest that we have taken steps backward in our development as world leaders of civil rights, but I don’t think that it is because our hearts were in the wrong place. I think that during reconstruction, the overall fear was the upset of the social order and the abandonment of the established way of life; we know now that this was wrong at its inception. I think that later it became more of a self-defense mechanism against foreign attack; one which we have also come to know was wrong, but at the time seemed right. This demonstrates that the American opinion and the overall direction of American history is not linear, it is subject to the ebbs and flows of popular opinion. Sometimes those opinions are wrong, sometimes they are right. The challenge for the vigilant historian is to take each ebb and flow as they come and make an honest assessment of which is right for humankind and which is not.

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Not a Straight Line

by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 7:11 AM

If we were to make a chart of progress and freedom in the U.S. it would not go steadily up in a straight line. Rather it would have a lot of high and low spikes. As Foner said in the video "our history is much more complicated much more interesting story of ups and downs"(8:50). Lets look at our imaginary chart of progress and zoom in on the section that represents the reconstruction period. We would start at the top of a spike. The civil war had just been fought and the slaves freed. A positive spike for progress and freedom. But then it will take a hit almost immediately in the arguments about giving the newly freed slaves the same rights as the rest of the country. Then it would spike again as the 14th and 15th amendment are ratified. But then we would see another dip at the resistance these amendments met and the [violence](#) and segregation enacted on the freed slaves. So we see just from this time period how it does not move in a forward and positive trajectory but as Foner says has a lot of ups and downs.

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Allowed to do vs. Can do

by [Kimberly Wong](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 8:46 AM

Foner says in his video that "Rights on the books are not sufficient". Just because you have the right to do something does not mean that you will be able to or that anyone is required to help you enforce this right. During the reconstruction period black men were granted the right to vote. But this did not stop people from trying to prevent it. Just because they were given the right did not mean that they could exercise it. Many were threatened with [violence](#) if they tried to vote. Interference with black voters became so bad during the election of 1876 our textbook states that a new word was made for it bulldozing. "To bulldoze black voters meant to trample them down or keep them away from the polls"(pg 588). While they tried to enforce the right of the freed slaves to vote in large cities many of the backcountry areas went without enforcement. So despite the fact that they had been given the right to vote many could not enforce or exercise this right.

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2. The profound differences between racial nationalism and civic nationalism.

by [Breanna Lindsey](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 12:13 PM

It is very interesting to look into America's history and see the tremendous changes that has taken place over the centuries. The USA today is a country who follows civic nationalism. This means that anyone can become a US citizen. Professor Foner speaks in the video about how the USA follows civic nationalism and begins speaking on what that means (5:33 video clip). Which values equality and individual rights. Pre civil war there was no such concept of this. Not everybody could be a citizen even if they were born here.

Before the civil war America was following ethnic nationalism that was grounded in our racial boundaries of slavery. In the video Professor Foner speaks about this, and says it may be true today that America is following civic nationalism, but that is not how it used to be. Foner says, "True today not true in the first half century or more of our republic, we had a ethnic nationalism grounded in our racial boundaries of slavery(5:50)." Racial nationalism means a country is trying to preserve a race, and by doing this they ban races from mixing, and ban the immigration of other races. This is what pre civil war America looked like. America still looked like this up into the 1960's where they made colored people use separate items and made the colored people live a different lifestyle so they wouldn't have to converse with white people. Pre civil war free and slaves who were black were severely discriminated. Colored people weren't even considered to be a full person. Not only that but they were enslaved, beaten, didn't have rights etc. The civil war is what changed all that and at least made living a bit more tolerable for African-Americans. The only group as Foner mentions in the video that wanted a civic nationalist country was the abolitionists. The abolitionists were a radical group that opposed slavery and much more, but there were also a very despised group that was in the minority. Foner also speaks about this very briefly in the video. Foner says, "reconstruction and civil war brought remarkable change." I would have to agree with Professor Foner on this topic. Yes, America is not perfect, but by overcoming the civil war our country took one step closer to a more civic nationalist country. This saved many African-Americans and supported radical groups like the abolitionists. Although, America is not perfect, our country continues taking steps in the right direction.

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Passing laws is not the same as enforcing laws

by [Brianna Shelley](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 3:07 PM

The past and the present have showed us that determining a law or adding a new amendment to the constitution does not mean that such laws will be followed or even enforced by the same Government who determined the law. During the reconstruction era there were three goals; (1) to reincorporate the former Confederate States into the Union. (2) Accomplish a transition from slavery to freedom in the South and (3) enforcement of equal civil and political rights promised in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. (Liberty, Equality, Power; Page 592) The Compromise of 1877 took away the civil and political rights given to the freed slaves and once again they were treated like second-class citizens and were segregated from whites in schools, bathrooms and other public places. Professor Foner states in the Legacy of Reconstruction video that "rights on the books are not efficient, they are not self-enforcing." (6:50)

Even before the Civil War during the Presidency of Andrew Jackson, in the Worcester v Georgia case in 1832 Marshal ruled that Georgia's extension of state law over Cherokee land was unconstitutional. President Jackson ignored this ruling and was quoted saying "John Marshal has made his decision; Now let's see him enforce it." (Liberty, Equality, Power; Page 385) This moment in history shows us that even when the highest court in our Nation, the Supreme Court makes a ruling, that ruling is moot unless there is a force from the Government or the people to enforce the law or ruling. "The power of the Court is the power to pursued unless other entities would enforce it." (Trails of Tear Video)

There have been many examples throughout history showing that passing laws or "having rights" is not the same as enforcing the laws or exercising those rights. Where great steps and measures are taken to provide equal Civil and Political liberties to all it takes more to ensure those laws and rights are enforced.

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Lack of Enforcement of Laws Robbed Freed Slaves of Equal Rights

by [Brianna Caridio](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 4:26 PM

It is surprising that the period of Reconstruction is not well known and generally misunderstood because to really understand the Civil Rights movement, it seems crucial to understand and be aware of the impact of Reconstruction. It is common knowledge that one of the outcomes of the Civil War was the abolishment of slavery, so when considering the Civil Rights movement, it becomes clear that while slavery had been abolished the laws passed to protect the rights of the four million freed slaves must not have been enforced. Professor Foner makes a great point about how the 14th Amendment contained measures that remained "sleeping giants" until the mid-1900's when they were enforced during the Civil Rights movement. While fortunately there was not a need to make significant changes to the constitution, this exemplifies how these laws had never been fully enforced.

Section 1 of the 14th Amendment should have given the newly freed slaves rights as citizens and denied states from infringing upon those rights, it clearly prohibited denying "any person of life, liberty, or property without undue process of law" (Murrin pg. 570). The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 that were enacted to fully restore Confederate states to the Union, required that the states allow all enfranchised men of appropriate age the right to vote in the election of new delegates. The delegates would not be seated in Congress until the "state had adopted a new constitution that granted equal civil and political rights regardless of race and had ratified the Fourteenth Amendment" (Murrin pg. 572). While President Johnson had been elected as a Republican, he was really a Democrat and "did everything he could to block Reconstruction" setting an example for the refusal of cooperation with the new laws by Southern Democrats (Murrin pg. 573).

The Grant administration attempted to utilize federal troops to enforce the 14th and 15th Amendments, but after Democrats gained a majority in the House of representatives, the Supreme Court declared that parts of the laws to enforce the new Amendments were unconstitutional. The Supreme Court also declared a civil rights law that had been passed in 1875 as unconstitutional. The federal government was using an unprecedented amount of power during and after the Civil War, but it was necessary if the new laws were going to be enforced, especially in the south. The Compromise of 1877 ensured Hayes presidency, but came at a steep price, the ability to enforce civil and political rights.

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A More Perfect Union

by [Clifford Lyon](#) - Sunday, March 3, 2019, 9:25 PM

Most people today agree that Abraham Lincoln was the absolute perfect person to have in the White House during the Civil War. Those who do not know much about Lincoln or the Civil War believe that this was a man who was born believing that all men were created equal and he would devote his life to ensuring that African Americans were completely equal to whites. The truth, as we know, is a little bit different. Lincoln knew that slavery was wrong, he wanted to contain it, but he did not initially believe that he could end it. He believed that black men should be entitled to the same fruits of their labors as white men, but he did not believe that the races were equal. Despite this, he led the country through it's most turbulent time to perhaps it's greatest high: the end of the Civil War and the restoration of the Union. This represented a real high-point in the course of American history.

Then Lincoln was assassinated, and the country got to know Andrew Johnson. When we use hindsight to examine the issues of the day, we wonder why Lincoln would ever agree to Johnson as a running-mate. The answer is that Lincoln was a man wholeheartedly devoted to the preservation of the Union, and he believed that having a Southern Democrat as a running mate would extend the olive branch to the former Confederates who suddenly found themselves conquered. Lincoln of course did not anticipate his being assassinated and leaving so much work undone. He could not have anticipated the way in which Johnson would make a 180 degree turn on his policies toward the planter-class. Just as we know that Lincoln was absolutely the right man for the job during the Civil War—however unpopular he was for much of it—we also know that Andrew Johnson was absolutely the wrong man for the job during Reconstruction. This is a prime example of regression and backsliding in the history of this country. This is how we know that American history has not always moved in the correct direction. Professor Foner somewhat facetiously suggests in the video clip that Americans today like to believe that Americans “Began perfect, and have been getting better ever since,” (Foner 8:40 minute mark). We of course know that this is not the case.

The truth is that America has been in an upward trend of righteousness since its inception, but there have been and continue to be many setbacks in that trajectory. In the case of Reconstruction, we see a President who issues blanket pardons to former confederates (Murrin 564-565). We also see a President who repeatedly vetoes legislation which would give African Americans greater rights (Murrin 569-570). We see an American public who grows tired of fighting with Southerners over their place in the social hierarchy and gives up on Reconstruction, showing perhaps the greatest failure of public opinion in the history of this country (Murrin 586). The reason for this is two-pronged. The first is that the general public in America never had a strong opinion which favored equal rights for black people. They wanted to preserve the Union and gain back what had been taken from them, but they did not especially care for the rights of the blacks. The second reason was that they simply forgot about the sacrifices which were made during the Civil War in blood and treasure in order to secure a victory. They got so tired of fighting with the Southerners that it was simply easier to give them what they wanted and move on.

The truth is that this is not an isolated incident in American history. Even today, the tide of public opinion has turned since September 11,2001 from one of great unification and belief in a cause to one of fatigue and willingness to concede in order to simply stop fighting. This all goes to show us that we do not continually improve and stand up for greater and greater human rights. We simply latch on to the issue of the day and ride it until we get too tired to continue. This does not mean that America is not headed in the right direction, it is simply an observation of human endurance. There is only so much the American public will take. Even during the Civil War, a war only matched perhaps in American history by the second World War in terms of righteous causes, the public was so tired of the fight that Lincoln thought he was in a worse place than Hell.

No matter how right the cause is, people can only fight for it for so long, and I think the Civil War and Reconstruction demonstrate that well. America may not have started perfect and gotten better ever since, but we have a history of correcting injustices. We are considered world leaders because we do the right thing for the most forgotten people, not always, but often. As long as we can continue improving our record, we will continue growing and becoming a more perfect union. An upward trajectory is all any of us should be asking for.

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