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Legacy of Reconstruction

by Joe Escobar - Friday, February 24, 2017, 10:14 PM

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

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Birthright citizenship



by Megan Martin - Saturday, February 25, 2017, 11:14 PM

As the civil war ended and reconstruction began, the fourteenth amendment answered part of the question of what was going to be done with the now free "4 million slaves"(textbook 572). The fourteenth amendment "defined all native-born or naturalized persons, including blacks, as American citizens and prohibited the states from abridging the 'privileges and immunities' of citizens from depriving 'any person of life, liberty, or property without due process of law,'" (textbook 570). This made blacks citizens, and was a law that many other countries did not have. Foner talks about how in several other countries just because you are born there does not make you a citizen. In recent times, the talk of immigration and birthright citizenship are controversial topics. It's interesting that such a law, as Foner said, is around because of the Civil War. With regards to the fourteenth amendment, the textbook says "these measures embodied a true revolution"(572).

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Birthright citizenship

by Emma Allen - Sunday, February 26, 2017, 7:27 PM

In the 19th century, regardless of how far back ancestors went, if you were born in the US, but also African American, you were not a citizen. It was all about race. It goes along with ethnic nationalism which was “grounded in the racial boundaries of slavery” (Foner). Foner brings this up to highlight how much the civil war did for this country. We have come very far to have developed a civic nationalism. For instance, if your parents came to the US from Mexico or what have you, and you’re born in the US, you’re a citizen. That was just not the case in 19th century America. It was all about race.

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#1: Prominence of Birth Rights

by Andrew Erkert - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 1:04 PM

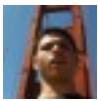
I see this as being the most prominent issue that has lasted to this day and is still arguably the biggest issue discussed in our national politics here in the U.S. To realize this, you don't have to go far into research. One simply has to know some of Donald Trump's major goals. Basically half of the population voted for Trump so you can assume that the immigration issue was a major concern for many Americans. We've all heard his ideas and opinions on the topic and we know that many sympathize with his beliefs. Birthright citizenship is something that is becoming more and more controversial and I think at this rate, we may see it amended pretty soon.

There also was the rumor about Obama not been a native of the U.S., which is a clear example. People wanted him impeached for it and wouldn't accept his citizenship as legitimate.

Because people can just move (or sneak into) or work and give birth so their child can be an American, many Americans feel like their nation is being "cheated" and taken advantage of. These "citizens" aren't respected by many and many believe that should all be deported or put through the tedious citizenship process. Foner brought this type of scenario up in the video.

I think the 14th Amendment was built for its time and has lost its importance to many now that slavery and suffrage has been resolved.

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#3: Unenforced Laws

by Andrew Erkert - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 1:46 PM

Foner brought up a great point about the laws that were in existence but not enforced. He said "The Civil Rights Movement in America did not need a new constitution." He compared it to the new constitution constructed in response to Apartheid in South Africa and how they wrote a completely new constitution that was 200 pages long because "they couldn't live under the old constitution." The Civil Rights Movement had all of the terms and conditions in the Constitution that they wanted and needed but most of them were not enforced for African Americans even though they had been in place for a long time. Whites blatantly ignored this civil liberties and influenced the ignorance of them to avoid black empowerment.

Foner made the claim that Reconstruction had set up a foundation for the future generation almost a century later to continue the fight for their cause and complete the revolution.

This was an interesting point because it emphasizes how in any government or society, rules will be ignored. Some rules just do not feel as important as others. In present day America I see this in many less publicized laws like driving too fast or wearing a seatbelt or using a phone while driving.

Our current government would argue that our immigration laws are ignored as well and not enforced with enough effort which ties into the immigration issue as well. Some would also argue that people are ignoring our 2nd Amendment rights by adding more regulations on the purchase of guns.

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Point #3 Laws and Rights

by William Mc Mahon - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 3:58 PM

Passing laws and "having rights" is not the same as enforcing laws and exercising rights.

Following the end of the Civil War, rights for the Freedmen weren't clearly defined. Steps were made to secure for them the same rights as white Americans, but they were dogged by the racism still present both politically and in American society. With the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, states could no longer restrict suffrage based on race. However, Five years later in Mississippi, various forms of coercion and violence sought to suppress the black vote. The violence drew a plea for help to President Grant, but social and political pressure pushed Grant to avoid the use of federal troops to intervene. "What had been a Republican majority of 30,000 in 1874 became a Democratic majority of 30000 in 1875."(Textbook pg. 586) Black men had the right to vote, but it wasn't as simple as going to the ballot box. It's also worth noting that this is a case where Republicans failed the Freedmen, to at least a small extent.

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Birth Right citizenship.

by Joshua Grigsby - Wednesday, March 1, 2017, 10:17 PM

After listening to professor Foner's brief lecture on the reconstruction of the United states of America, I can't help but be stuck on the issue of birthright citizenship he brings up early on. At a first glance I naturally assume that any individual born within the union is thereby, a citizen of it. However, Foner makes a compelling argument.

What of the individuals who come here illegally and have legal children? At this time, with all of the drama that was this time period, I feel I can safely assume immigration was extremely low. The individuals running our reunited country could have easily overlooked the idea that one day birthright citizenship will work to rip families apart. I am not taking a stance on immigration in this post. I just find that upon looking at it more deeply, there lies a huge seemingly unanswerable problem. My first thought was just to remove birthright citizenship but I was faced with the gross reality of having to remove children for simply being born on the wrong side of imaginary lines.

My humanity didn't like that option all too well. Its clear, however, that many of the decisions we made during this time have come up again rather recently in one form or another and its mind boggling to think about how we should act now. Should the mother of said child be given citizenship because of her legal newborn? That would be amazing in a perfect world. But the reality that choice faces is that it would only work to increase illegal immigration by basically giving individuals a free pass into the free world with only one contingency, to have a child. Then, not only would we have thousands of pour individuals coming, but also being forced to have families they may not necessarily be able to afford. Birthright citizenship seems to have been a rushed decision made in the 19th century in hopes of getting things back to normal as fast as possible. Had they taken the time to legitimize the newly freed individuals in a different way, maybe we wouldn't be facing this dilemma now.

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Laws vs. Enforcement

by Megan Martin - Thursday, March 2, 2017, 4:08 PM

In the video, Foner talks about how "the 14th amendment remained on the constitution but was ignored for many many years" (Foner video). The recently freedmen were promised rights while the Civil War was still going, and when it ended those rights weren't truly enforced. An example are the Black Codes we read about and learned about in class. The recently freedmen were often "hired out to a planter and forbade to lease land"(textbook pg 566). Lincoln's emancipation proclamation went into effect January 1st, 1863 yet these men weren't allowed to lease land, vote, and were practically still victims of slavery. This goes to show how just because laws are there, doesn't mean they are being enforced as they were made to be.

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#3 - Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson

by William Mc Mahon - Friday, March 3, 2017, 1:28 PM

The treatment the Freedmen experienced during reconstruction is perhaps the gravest injustice they had to endure.

It is, however, not the first time a minority of people were ignored in American history. In 1832, the Supreme Court ruled on the case of Worcester v. Georgia that "Georgia's extension of state law over Cherokee land was unconstitutional." (Textbook p.385) Andrew Jackson blatantly ignored the ruling saying, "John Marshall has made his decision: Now let him enforce it!" (Textbook p. 385)

I feel like there is a parallel between Andrew Jackson and Andrew Johnson. It's true that Johnson didn't openly deny any Supreme Court rulings, however, I think it's safe to say he abused his powers as President at the expense of a group of people who could not fight for themselves. He proclaimed amnesty for all but the most high-ranking Confederates (Textbook p.563), then pardoned many more. This led to the election of nine ex-Confederate congressmen, including the former vice President of the Confederacy Alexander H. Stephens. (Textbook p.566)

Allowing former Confederates to participate in state and national politics led to state governments passing "Black Codes" and reducing the Freedman to a social condition that was as bad, if not worse, than slavery.

Although these actions were within the bounds of Johnson's power as President, his legacy is a demonstration of party politics at the tragic expense of a helpless populace. Johnson used his Presidential powers belligerently, albeit according to the law.

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#4 Two Steps Back

by William Mc Mahon - Saturday, March 4, 2017, 8:00 PM

I believe Eric Foner is correct to say that American progress and freedom do not perpetually rise higher and higher.

Unfortunately, sometimes it is three revolutionary steps forward, and two tragic back steps. This was the case during Reconstruction.

The 13th Amendment to the Constitution became law on December 6th, 1865. (Textbook p.545) At the same time, some states were already passing "Black Codes", laws designed to reduce the Freedmen into quasi-slavery.(Textbook 566) The Federal Government fought against the Black Codes by creating the Freedman's Bureau, and abolitionists were successful creating public schools in the South (Textbook p. 567, 569), but the rights secured for the Freedmen in the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments remained unrealized in many respects.

The main reason for this was violence. the Ku Klux Klan attempted to influence the ratification of state constitutions (Textbook p. 574) and, again, used violence to try to influence the outcome of the 1868 presidential election. (Textbook p. 576)

It is easy to think of the Civil War as a grand stage in which good triumphed over evil and slavery was abolished. The reality of the situation is that the victory was the beginning of a long, arduous process of black men and women fighting for the same rights and privileges white people have. This process continues to this day.

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LOR #4- Progress and advancement in society is not linear

by Name Withheld-0716 - Saturday, March 4, 2017, 11:19 PM

The reconstruction period is best defined to me by the moniker of the gilded age, which signifies this era of history as one where on the surface it could be deemed an age of reform, industry and development, but in many ways society was devolving and going backward. Three key ways in which the US deteriorated was through the rise of white collar crime, racial segregation, and mass violence. These are at odds with the more flowery reconstruction era themes like equal citizenship, economic prosperity, freedom, social progress and civic virtue. This illustrates why the gilded age is an apt description for this time period.

The reconstruction period can be lauded for the economic gains, urbanization and the frontier capitalist mentality that is a part of american culture today. And it is true that this time period saw the expansion of industry and free labor ideology and upward mobility in the workforce that is connected to the american dream and something we all benefit from to this day. In this regard reconstruction could be considered an economic turning point in history comparable to one of the industrial revolutions or the renaissance or the enlightenment. But with that profound change and step forward comes consequences and negatives. One example of that indecency was the Credit-Mobilier Scandal, where numerous US congressmen, including a future president James Garfield, were implicated in a corruption scheme where the Union Pacific Railroad company had Congress in its pocket, and was extorting the taxpaying public for its projects to expand into western territory and connect the far west to the northeast. Not only did they fraudulently acquire more money than they needed, but they also lobbied for legislation that suited their agendas regardless of the costs, which is an ongoing issue in modern politics where corporations have more influence than a majority of the people. This incident to me is a microcosm of the white collar schemes that elites in Washington and Wall street dabble in, and because these problems persist to this day and were rampant in this era, it is fair to say that white collar/financial crime is a legacy of the reconstruction period.

Eric Foner mentioned that " revolutions can go backwards" and that appropriately characterizes the reconstruction era in regards to the immersion of freed black people into the republic. While the US passed groundbreaking amendments in this time period to outlaw slavery and guarantee equal protection whites and blacks under the law, this does not truly reflect the condition of many free black people in this era. States in the south did not just abandon their slaveholding roots and racist sentiments overnight. Many southern democrats and whites feared a systematic takeover, an usurpation. In *Liberty, Equality, and Power*, it states that " Linked to the myth of black incompetence was the legend of the "Africanization" of southern governments during reconstruction. The theme of negro role was a staple of Democratic propaganda. It was enshrined in folk memory and in generations of textbooks. "(Pg. 579 pp. 2) This is indicative of the mentality the white supremacists in the south had towards african american integration into society and their rights to vote and hold political office. Southern state governments adopted the Black Codes, legislation that marginalized black people in court, causing increased incarceration sentences and blacks being banned from testifying against white people, the prohibition of legal interracial marriage, and voting restrictions. It's these sort of state sponsored statutes that were the prelude to Jim crow laws after reconstruction, which segregated black and white people at an institutional level until the civil rights movement. So in spite of departing from the bondage based form of slavery that took place for centuries, slavery continued in the united states in a more indirect, systemic fashion, and racial relations were poor throughout this period in history. Sharecropping is another example of how a variation of slavery persisted in spite of the reconstruction amendments and industrial advances of this time. Because many black people lacked education and money after the civil war, white landowners could

extract their labor and profiteer off them while granting the black laborer just a small share of the crop he can yield from that land. This impeded black people from moving up in socioeconomic status and gaining property and land of their own, and it closely emulated the slave-agriculture system of the south.

Post-war years ideally are supposed to be accompanied by peace, but that was not necessarily the case in the post-civil war reconstruction years. Violence in this age was not just an emotional response to the changes but a political tool much the way terrorism is considered to be defined as. Lynching, arson, rape, and murder were a threat to every person of color in every ex-confederate state and even among certain northern states where militias had penetrated. The Klu Klux Klan was the most influential and prominent hate group of this era and has to be considered as one of the gilded legacies of the reconstruction. This racist militia was formed specifically to assault the fabric of political and economic enfranchisement for black people in the US. In *Liberty, Equality, and Power*, it cites the Colfax Massacre in Louisiana. "In one notorious incident the colfax massacre in Louisiana, a clash between black militants and armed white left three whites and nearly 100 blacks dead. Half of the blacks were killed in cold blood after they had surrendered. In some places, notably Tennessee, and Arkansas, Republican militias formed to suppress and disarm the Klan, but in most areas the militias were outgunned and outmaneuvered by ex-confederate veteran Klansmen." (Pg. 582 pp.1) This puts into perspective the political climate behind the violence of this era, and why the KKK were effective in their assaults due to their military, war, and hunting backgrounds. The problems the KKK caused for the reconstruction acts and amendments were the precedent for the presidents constitutionally granted power to suspend habeas corpus, a practice still used by the United States in times of conflict and war. Considering the KKK hate group still exists to this day and has this disturbing subculture behind it much the way neo-nazis do, it has to be a major example of a negative legacy of reconstruction, an ugly side to the progress we made as a nation.

The reconstruction era is best defined as a gilded age when evaluating the consequences behind the tremendous social and political achievements this country made during this time. The economy and standard of living improved for many but not all, blacks remained disenfranchised, persecuted and segregated for decades, white collar crime and corruption schemes ran at the highest level, and political violence became commonplace. It is remarkable how this period of time is not considered of great import when many of the effects of reconstruction are systemic and persistent in nature, like the issues of today with corruption, immigration, racism and terrorism.

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