

To what extent is 'Restoration' a more fitting term than 'Reconstruction' for the period 1865-1877?

During the period 1865 to 1877, Reconstruction was the period in American history immediately after the Civil War. The physical rebuilding of Southern cities, ports, railroads, and farms that had been destroyed during the war was only a small part of the Reconstruction process. The major work of Reconstruction involved restoring the membership of the Southern states in the Union. The main president during this period was Johnson, following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and although Johnson disagreed with slavery he was opposed to equal rights for blacks and the notion that they were equal to whites. The main reason for his opposition to slavery was that he believed that between a slave and his white owner, they were continuing poor white poor, by doing their jobs for no pay etc. Johnson wanted reconstruction to essentially be a re-establishment of the previous America before slavery and this was why he was opposed to the equality between blacks and whites. This was opposite in opinion for the Republican Party their view of reconstruction was to ensure that blacks would become equal to whites and have the same rights they had, mainly the right to suffrage.

To start on the long and arduous process of equality, the Republican Party showed that through willpower and determination they would eventually get to finalise their beliefs, this is shown through the 13th and later the 14th Amendments. The first of these had to be ratified by any seceded Confederate states before being allowed to rejoin the Union, the new change to the Constitution was the abolition of slavery throughout the country, and that all people should be free. This is an area of which the life during Restoration for slaves changed, they no longer had masters and had to work for free, in theory. However, due to the racism in the country during this period, this amendment was not followed through. So to counteract this, Congress decided to take Reconstruction into their own hands and passed the 14th Amendment declaring equality for blacks and the fact that they, Congress, should have the power to enforce this amendment (section 5). This turnaround from what life was like previously for the black people before the war is so significant because before black people were not even considered to be second-rate citizens, which they were following the amendment, they weren't even citizens in the eyes of the law. This amendment was in many ways badly drafted, decided on through compromise and the need to hurry it through before the Southern states were readmitted and could object to it.

In the pattern of passing amendments, the first, second and third Reconstruction Acts were passed in March and July of 1867. These acts provided a much more radical approach to dealing with the South and were the result of shock at Johnson's obstructive attitude against blacks. Unlike the previous bills they only just made the two thirds majority, which shows that the more moderate of the Republican Party were beginning to feel uncomfortable at the degree of federal intervention in the South. The first of

these acts divided the South into military districts, each controlled by a federal army officer who had the power to overrule any judgements made by the Southern governments set up by Johnson. The second made provisions for who was to be allowed to vote in the elections at the conventions to ratify the 14th amendment and to decide on a constitution. The final banned the procedure of barring certain people from voting on the grounds of race.

All the Amendments and Acts passed in Congress show some level of change in America and this demonstrates that there was some results being made by the Republican Party and its way of Reconstruction and how it would reconstruct America, but this effect and impact was reversed in due course by the Southern states as they began to find ways around the amendments and were able to avoid giving the blacks their rights of being proper US citizens, later seen in the Grandfather clause, when blacks were unable to vote if their grandfather had been a slave. The reason these Amendments and Acts were so easy to find loopholes in, was because they were not fundamental enough, they had to be conservative before they were presented to Congress for voting. This is due to the fact that the moderate Republicans within the party would have been too uneasy about the radical ideas and would never have agreed to the Amendments or Acts. This factor shows how little the Republican Party were able to achieve because anything too dramatic would have never achieved the two thirds majority that was needed for the Amendment to be passed by Congress.

By 1871, all the Southern states had devised constitutions, ratified the 14th Amendment and consequently re-entered the Union. However, it remained to be seen whether once the federal military presence had disappeared, the new order would last. For example, Georgia was allowed back into the Union in 1868, but as soon as the federal army officers had left the state, the state legislature expelled all its black members. The white southern attitude to the new reconstructed governments was expressed by a Southern Democrat newspaper; 'These constitutions and governments will last just as long as the bayonets, which ushered them into being shall keep them in existence and not one day longer.' These reconstruction acts were not that effective as shown by the quote that as soon as the federal officers disappeared, life would go back to the way that it was, so although being radical, they were not successful necessarily. Although this idea that the acts had established federal military dictatorship over the South there were never more than 20,000 troops in the south at one time and so even the amount of control over the south from the Republican Party was limited because of the small army. These acts show how there was some change within Reconstruction and the issue of the voting was consistently attacked by the Reconstruction governments but again the Southern governments were able to undermine the impact by using their strong influential supporters, in the case of Reese, the Supreme Court.

A very significant factor that influenced the reconstruction process was the setting up of the Freedman's Bureau, originally created in 1863 under

President Abraham Lincoln. It was proposed by the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission and set up to look into how best to deal with the freed slaves. The Commission visited the South and reported back to Congress on the need for some kind of agency to oversee the lives of the newly freed slaves. The subjects that were dealt with were labour policy, land distribution, relief work, healthcare, justice, race relations and the most important and the one with the greatest achievement was education. Literacy rates went up ten times in one generation, the Freedmen's Bureau itself, was a very small proportion of the federal budget, with just \$7m per year spend on the Freedmen's Bureau and the entire federal budget being \$300m per year. The Freedmen's Bureau operated over a very short time span and was in effect replaced when the Reconstruction Acts brought military rule to the South. It only really had 12 months in which to function, between March 1866 and March 1867, and cannot have been expected to have changed the whole culture and labour relations of the South in that time. In particular, land redistribution was a failure, but in general the Freedmen's Bureau, as a whole was a historic breakthrough in social policy.

The Radicals began to commit themselves less and less to the issues that they had originally raised. It started when the liberal Republicans began to break away claiming that the group was becoming too radical for them and that they had become unconstitutional. The liberals even tried to reverse some of the work the Republican Party had achieved an Act called Amnesty Act, which was when all the ex-confederates were invited back into the Union. This was obviously a step backwards in terms of reconstruction because they were letting the Johnson's version of the reconstruction government win. Finally, the Republicans turned their attention away from the issues of the South to new issues like migration and the economy. 1877 sees the official end of Reconstruction, this end of the Republican Party could be seen as their defeat due to the impossible battle they had against Johnson and his fervent supporters. They saw their battle as useless and helpless due to the constant undermining that went on.

The term Restoration could be seen as a more fitting term than Reconstruction because although efforts were made to change black rights and their equality a certainty, they were never triumphant because the opposition and the supporters of people like Johnson had more powerful positions in power and therefore were able to undermine all they believed. The problems with the differences between the Republicans and the President is one of the most important reasons why the Republican party was unable to achieve much because they turn out to be the weaker party working against the President, the obvious stronger party. Also because Johnson was President he was supported by all the authorities and all of the society's natural leaders, who are easily followed by public, as they are more likely to trust these high members within society. To achieve any drastic variations, the Republican Party had to contest against some of these most leading and important people in the country. This is why the term 'restoration' could be seen as a more fitting term because the Republican Party were unable to

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achieve much adjustment to the way life was for the black people within the country, because they had very powerful competition who had more ability to control what happened with Reconstruction than they themselves could.