

Session 3

1865-1940

Reconstruction

As Union victory drew near Abraham Lincoln gave a speech on the White House lawn on April 11, 1865, urging his audience to welcome the southern states back into the fold. He made slave emancipation a reason for the war and set about arrangements for freed slaves to own land. Lincoln would not live to help carry out his vision of Reconstruction as he was assassinated three days' later. His successor, Andrew Johnson, was from the southern states and he was not in favour of slave emancipation. He inaugurated the period of Presidential Reconstruction (1865–67). Johnson offered a pardon to all Southern whites except Confederate leaders and wealthy planters, restoring their political rights and all property except slaves. This meant that the land that had been given to the former slaves was now given back to the former owners.

Johnson also outlined how new state governments would be created. These states were given a free hand in managing their own affairs except that they had to abolish slavery. They responded by enacting the black codes. These were laws that required African Americans to sign yearly labour contracts and imposed severe restrictions on freed slaves such as prohibiting their right to vote, forbidding them to sit on juries, limiting their right to testify against white men, carrying weapons in public places and working in certain occupations.

Despite Republican-driven civil rights laws, segregation between the newly emancipated slaves and their former owners was more and more enforced.

Ku Klux Klan

The activities of organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan undermined the attempts to enforce civil rights. The first branch of the Ku Klux Klan was established in Pulaski, Tennessee, in May, 1866. A year later a general organization of local Klans was established in Nashville in April, 1867. Most of the leaders were former members of the Confederate Army. The first Grand Wizard was Nathan Forrest, a former general. During the next two years Klansmen wearing masks, white cardboard hats and draped in white sheets, tortured and killed black Americans and sympathetic whites. Between 1868

and 1870 the Ku Klux Klan played an important role in restoring white rule in North Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

At first the main objective of white supremacy organisations such as the Ku Klux Klan, was to stop black people from voting. After white governments had been established in the South the Ku Klux Klan continued to undermine the power of blacks. Successful black businessmen were attacked and any attempt to form black protection groups such as trade unions was quickly dealt with. Congress passed the Ku Klux Klan Act and it became law on 20th April, 1871. This gave the president the power to intervene in troubled states. However, because its objective of white supremacy in the South had been achieved, the organisation practically disappeared.

The Ku Klux Klan was reformed in 1915 by William J. Simmons. After the First World War the Ku Klux Klan also became extremely hostile to Jews, Roman Catholics, socialists, communists and anybody they identified as foreigners. By 1925 membership reached 4,000,000. Even on the rare occasions they were arrested for serious crimes, Klansmen were unlikely to be convicted by local Southern juries. In 1944 the organisation was disbanded.

Jim Crow Laws

Jim Crow laws are any of the laws that enforced racial segregation in the South between the end of Reconstruction in 1877 and the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1950s. Jim Crow was the name of a minstrel routine. The term came to be a derogatory epithet for African Americans and a designation for their segregated life. From the late 1870s, Southern state legislatures passed laws requiring the separation of whites from “persons of colour” in public transportation and schools. Generally, anyone of ascertainable or strongly suspected black ancestry in any degree was for that purpose a “person of colour”. The segregation principle was extended to parks, cemeteries, theatres, and restaurants in an effort to prevent any contact between blacks and whites as equals. In many states marriage between whites and African American people was also prohibited.

Lynching

After the establishment of the Ku Klux Klan in 1867 the number of lynchings of African American increased dramatically.

It has been estimated that between 1880 and 1920, an average of two African Americans a week were lynched in the United States. Between 1865 and 1965 over 2,400 African Americans were lynched in the United States.

1919 Race Riots in Liverpool

The Black community of Liverpool is Britain's oldest. The community dates back to the American Revolutionary War with Black Loyalists settling in the city. The original African-American community was followed in the 19th and 20th centuries by sailors and soldiers from all over the West Indies and West Africa. The black community experienced continued growth due to the location of Liverpool as a port city. Mostly settling in the Toxteth district, the Black community became a mixed-race community early on, with intermarriages taking place on a large scale among people with African roots, Whites and Asians.

Some of the first recorded “Race Riots” involving black people took place in Liverpool in 1919. Black merchant seamen and demobilised soldiers had settled in Liverpool during and after the War. Returning soldiers from the First World War could not come to terms with the reality that black people had jobs in munitions factories. These same tensions were seen elsewhere in Britain as well.

In June, following a brawl between West Indians and Scandinavians, the police raided boarding houses used by the black seamen to try and find the culprits. The black seamen dug in and defended themselves with weapons even a revolver. This resulted in violence and several policemen were hurt. A lynch mob had now formed and Charles Wooten, a 24 year old black man was chased to the dock, thrown in the water and pelted with rocks as he swam. Wooten was dead when he was pulled from the water.

During the next three days there was mob rule on the streets of Liverpool and several black people were attacked and the community terrorised.