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History

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Reconstruction Era: Oklahoma Tribes

The Reconstruction Era was an attempt to unify a very broken nation. After president Abraham Lincoln died, plans for Reconstruction plummeted. Reconstruction in the south was hard enough, but being a part of a tribe in Oklahoma was harder. When Andrew Johnson took over as president he abandoned his predecessor's plans for reconstruction. Some Oklahoma tribes flourished and others did not. The effects of the reconstruction period would shape the Southern United States to this very day.

The reconstruction era began after the Civil War. Lasting from 1865-1877, the reconstruction era was an attempt to unite everyone after the harsh Civil War. Its primary focus was to bring Southern States back into full political participation. The purpose was to outlaw racial discrimination. Southern States did not believe in everyone having equal rights. This often meant racial prejudice against anyone different from white people. Including people from the Five Nations, people who were in the Southern States before white people.

President Lincoln was a compassionate, kind hearted, and immodest person. His plans for reconstruction were going to bring drastic changes in our nation. That was the motive for Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth to assassinate Lincoln. Confederates wanted to keep our nation the way it was. On the other hand Lincoln acknowledged the fact that both Southerners and Northerners had to come together in agreement for the Nation to thrive. Lincoln's first change was the Oath of Allegiance, an oath that was required by citizens in

Confederate States to begin the process of reunification with the Union States. After swearing the Oath of Allegiance they could author a new state constitution, thereby forming a new state government. This meant the permanent freedom of slaves. Lincoln stated he opposed harsh treatment in the South. That's why it was easier to assassinate him rather than to try to bring equality to our broken Nation.

After President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated on April 15, 1865, the Nation's hopes for reconstruction plummeted. As Vice President, Andrew Johnson got handed the "President" role in a blink of an eye. Johnson abandoned Lincoln's plans for reconstruction. He did very many good things like laying the foundation for democracy, paid off our national debt, acquired new lands for America, and he helped strengthen our allegiances to foreign nations. Johnson was with the people of color, he wanted them to have rights but on the other side he did not have a real plan for reconstruction. He did not intend to punish the South for its horrible actions but instead he believed that each state should have the right to decide the best course of Reconstruction for itself.

Senator James Harlan was a Former United States Secretary of the Interior. Harlan replaced John Usher as Secretary of Interior in the Spring of 1865 and only served until 1866. In his year as Secretary he accused the Indians of "Flagrant violation of treaties which had been observed by us with scrupulous good faith" and waging an "unprovoked war". Believe it or not these accusations thrown at the Indians during the Reconstruction period had an effect on how people viewed them and treated them. Lincoln has always opposed harsh treatment in the South. This also included harsh treatment towards the Indians of Oklahoma. After Harlan threw these accusations towards Indians things started to change for the tribes.

No tribe suffered more than the Cherokee Nation. After suffering with military action in their territory, they had to deal with remorseless fighting. At the end they multiplied the loss of life and territory. When the Removal Treaty of New Echota was reignited many conflicts created retaliation. This continued after the Civil War and stopped multiple Cherokee families on both sides from coming back to their land, homes, and peacetime lives. Sallie Manus, a young teenager said "Conditions following the War were absolutely indescribable: no law, no respect, life worth nothing, property rights wiped away, no food or clothing." This was until a man named John Ross came into the picture.

After finally having enough of the Cherokee tribe being mistreated, John Ross the principal chief of the Cherokee tribe helped his nation with political skill. Ross was slowly dying in a hotel while guiding Cherokee representatives. He made sure the Representatives negotiated the Reconstruction Treaty of 1866 with federal officials. He was too far too ill to negotiate in person. A few days before his death, John Ross prohibited a "territorial plan" to allow the Nation to white settlement and eventual statehood. He felt as this was going to be his grand final service to his tribe. Ross' preservation of tribal solidarity and sovereignty was a remarkable feat.

The Chickasaw tribe decided to go the easier route hiring lawyers to negotiate their treaties. When Isaac Warrior the chief of the tribe Senecas met with Albert Pike, a man who defended the Creeks. Together they felt surrounded and this caused them to sign the treaty during a time of duress. The government found no sign of any injustice. The Choctaws and Chickasaws did not plead under duress like both of the other tribes. Without a doubt the Chicasaw signed the treaties with the many confederate states and claimed themselves as a whole separate nation.

With this treaty they could deem necessary for the survival of their own nation for their own benefit. The Chickasaws negotiations went smoothly unlike the Cherokees whose leader, John Ross was dismissed out of fear of him being able to do things subtly. After the negotiations were dismissed, leaders of the five tribes were told to resume in January, 1886. Around this time the government softened from their harsh point of view. In place of treating the five civilized tribes as southerners, federal officials required some damages paid to the loyal union Indians. People say it as a win but this meant very little to the tribes.

The reason why reconstruction had such a negative impact on the five tribes was because it was Indian fighting Indians. Imagine that, fighting against your own kind when you're supposed to be a family. There was no tribe that did not fight against their own kind. Every tribe had an impact on its land, whether it was land being destroyed or taken, they lost a part of their territory. This forced refugees to roam around on other land causing more destruction like being killed just for their skin color. Warfare was everywhere, peoples homes were burned, livestock was hunted down, and livestock were forced to flee the terrible troubles. Confederate states may not have won many wars but they most definitely had a toll on the main war.

The aftermath of the Reconstruction period is still going on. People are still facing racism whether it's whites, blacks or Indians. A way to come back from all of this is to think of everyone as your family. No matter what circumstance you would not allow your sibling to get racially criticized, that is how we should look at the world. As Americans we may not be related but under our flag we are all a big family who will deal and get through tough times together. "If we cannot give freedom to every creature, let us do nothing that will impose slavery upon any other creature."-Abraham Lincoln

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