

Jim Crow Laws

After the Civil War, the question of how the nation would rebuild itself was posed. After the war, Lincoln felt that in order for the United States to recover from a disaster of this magnitude, it was imperative to devise a formal plan of reconstruction for the nation. In his annual message to Congress, he stated:

"With justice towards both... and charity for all, let us strive to build the republic on its rockiest ruins, to build with ourselves a fair and lasting peace."¹

Just weeks after Lincoln passed the reconstruction plan for the United States should include "justice towards both and charity for all," he was assassinated. When President Johnson took office, he did not have the same vision as Abraham Lincoln. Because of Johnson's lack of respect for race and ethnicity other than Lincoln, Lincoln's idea of justice towards both and charity for all became nonexistent. It was through his leadership that Jim Crow Laws were created to separate the different races of people in the United States. The impact of these laws caused an enormous amount of stress and pain for people of color and other minorities that would last for most the century.

In 1867, Congress overrode Johnson's presidential veto and passed the Reconstruction Act. The purpose of the reconstruction act was to give rise to the return of Southern States to the Union. In theory, the act was intended to formalize efficient civilian rule government in the South and to grant the civil rights, or rights as full citizens to equal opportunity and equal treatment of Freedmen, or former slaves, were promised as their transition was made to freedom. Initially, reconstruction was successful. Slaves and whites were equal. Slaves were even allowed to vote. In Mississippi, there were two black men elected as senators. Although there was a period of time in which the ideals of equality were provided, the mood of the south changed when Hayes was elected as president and he brought in the South to see withdrawal. Without the military protecting slaves, things took a turn for the worst. Soon afterwards, the Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act and the Fourteenth Amendment unconstitutional. This decision allowed the outbreak of intense racism in the United States.

One example of the outbreak of racism in the South can be clearly seen through the Jim Crow Laws. Jim Crow laws were laws that imposed racial segregation. They came into being after the collapse of the Reconstruction Plan and mainly existed in the South. The Supreme Court is said to be indirectly responsible for the Jim Crow Laws because of many of its decisions. The Supreme Court's decision to declare the Civil Rights Act unconstitutional and declare that the Fourteenth Amendment did not prohibit individuals or private organizations from discriminating based on race triggered racism. However, it was the Plessy vs. Ferguson case (1896) which could be said to be the embodiment of the Jim Crow Laws and discrimination.

¹ "Speech on the State of the Union," *Abraham Lincoln: Writings*, American Historical Society of Washington, Book 16, (18 March 1862).