

THE AFTERMATH

=====

Reconstruction.

That was the word used to describe how Southerners and their states were to be assimilated into the American mainstream. Lincoln's plan, well thought out before his death and publicly announced or implied on numerous occasions, was a liberal policy of amnesty, based on the idea that the Southern states had never legally left the Union because the Constitution forbade it. It was believed that certain radical politicians had caused the secession trouble, and once clearer heads were in power the Southern states could resume roles in government. No punitive measures were ever a part of Lincoln's plan.

This did not appeal to his Radical Republican contemporaries, who sought to punish the South and bar ex-Confederates from involvement in government at any level.

President Andrew Johnson - an irony of the sectional conflict just ended, being a North Carolinian by birth who called Tennessee home - carried out Lincoln's plan much the way the martyred president would have done, except that Johnson lacked the political skills Lincoln possessed. He clashed with the Radicals and narrowly escaped removal from office in impeachment proceedings in 1868. Such conflict led to more turmoil as occupation troops nested in the South with no end in sight. Carpetbaggers' - Northern opportunists - picked at the Southern economy like vultures, often aided by Southerners who earned the name Scalawags. Reconstruction, rather than being remembered as a period of reunion and rebuilding, came to be called the 'Tragic Era' in the South.

But wounds began to heal. Jefferson Davis was released from prison in 1867, and Rebel generals such as Lee, Johnston and Forrest never saw a prison, let alone a noose, the usual price of unsuccessful civil uprising. Only Captain Henry Wirtz, commandant of the Andersonville prison camp, was hanged for war crimes. The first state to secede, South Carolina, was readmitted to the Union June 25, 1868, but military occupation of the South remained until 1877, when home rule was restored during the administration of President Rutherford B. Hayes, a former Union general. This act has come to signify the end of Reconstruction - the final chapter of the American Civil War.

According to the 1860 census, there were four million slaves in America and almost a half-million free Negroes. In 1865, ex-slaves had little concept of their new-found freedom. Some still clung to their former owners, knowing no other life but servitude. Others took advantage of their freedom and embarked on their own pursuits of the American Dream. The 13th Amendment to the Constitution, enacted in 1865, ended slavery once and for all. The 14th Amendment in 1868 granted citizenship, due process, and equal protection under the law to blacks, followed in 1870 by the 15th Amendment which granted them the right to vote. The sudden enfranchisement of the Negro forced radical adjustments on the South, and it would take some time for matters to settle. Resistance to such change as well as the whole concept of Reconstruction and all the political, economic and social baggage it carried, gave rise to secret societies like the Ku Klux Klan, whose tactics ran the gamut from merely scaring blacks away from the polls to outright lynching's.

As the nation looked back on the tragic period of the 1860s one aspect stood out starkly against the light of reason - the dead, the many men and boys who died wearing Union blue or Confederate gray. Not until Vietnam was added in did American losses in all other wars finally surpass the loss of Americans in the Civil War, or the War Between the States, as Southerners preferred to call it. An estimated 600,000 deaths occurred in the war, with another 500,000 wounded who survived; the majority of deaths were from disease. Diarrhea and dysentery, typhoid fever, smallpox, measles, and pneumonia were the leading killers, while drunken battlefield surgeons with filthy equipment claimed their share of deaths. Many horrible disfigurements and deaths resulted from amputations, the prescribed treatment for most battlefield wounds, but many miracles were performed and would-be mortalities lived to become old veterans, marching down Main Street, USA, on patriotic holidays, sometimes arm in arm with their former enemies.

The enduring legacy of the men in blue and gray is the commitment to principle they made, that hurled names such as Manassas, Shiloh, Jackson and Lee, Sherman and Grant, Gettysburg, Chickamauga, and Appomattox into international prominence. Except for the color of their uniform, these men were more alike than different, speaking the same

language, worshipping the same God, and interpreting the same document of constitution.

At Appomattox, after the question of the Union had been settled by force of arms, a Southern soldier pointed to the Stars and Stripes and pro-claimed that he would fight just as hard to protect and defend that banner as anyone present, regardless of uniform. And it is on this sort of positive note that Americans can draw hope and inspiration from what was truly the saddest and most tragic episode in American history, when brother fought brother. A new nation emerged, forged in battle, and baptized in the blood of her youth - a new nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.