

Frederick Douglass and the Reconstruction of Meaning

“While I am not indifferent to the claims of generous forgetfulness, but whatever else I may forget, I shall never forget the difference between those who fought for liberty and those who fought for slavery; between those who fought to save the Republic and those who fought to destroy it.”

--Frederick Douglass, 1894



b. 1818

1855

1864

1879

d. 1895

Two Views, One Person

“Abraham Lincoln, while unsurpassed in his devotion to the white race, was also in a sense hitherto without example, emphatically the black man's President: the first to show any respect for their rights as men.” (Frederick Douglass, 1865)

“Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men.” (Frederick Douglass, 1876)

Reconstruction Timeline

1865 -1870 Reconstruction Amendments (13th, 14th, and 15th)

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the state wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.” (Section 1, 14th Amendment, 1868)

1866 Edward A. Pollard publishes *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History*

“The South held political power at Washington for a long time; but that power threatened nothing in the North, sought nothing from it, desired to disturb nothing in it. It had no aggressive intent: it stood constantly on the defensive. It had no sectional history: it was associated with a general prosperity of the country.” (p. 81)

1883 Civil Rights Cases, 109 U.S. 3 (1883)

“Constitutional provisions, adopted in the interest of liberty and for the purpose of securing, through national legislation, if need be, rights inhering in a state of freedom and belonging to American citizenship have been so construed as to defeat the ends the people desired to accomplish, which they attempted to accomplish, and which they supposed they had accomplished by changes in their fundamental law.” (Dissenting opinion, John Marshall Harlan)