

Reconstruction: Success or Failure? DBQ

Background:

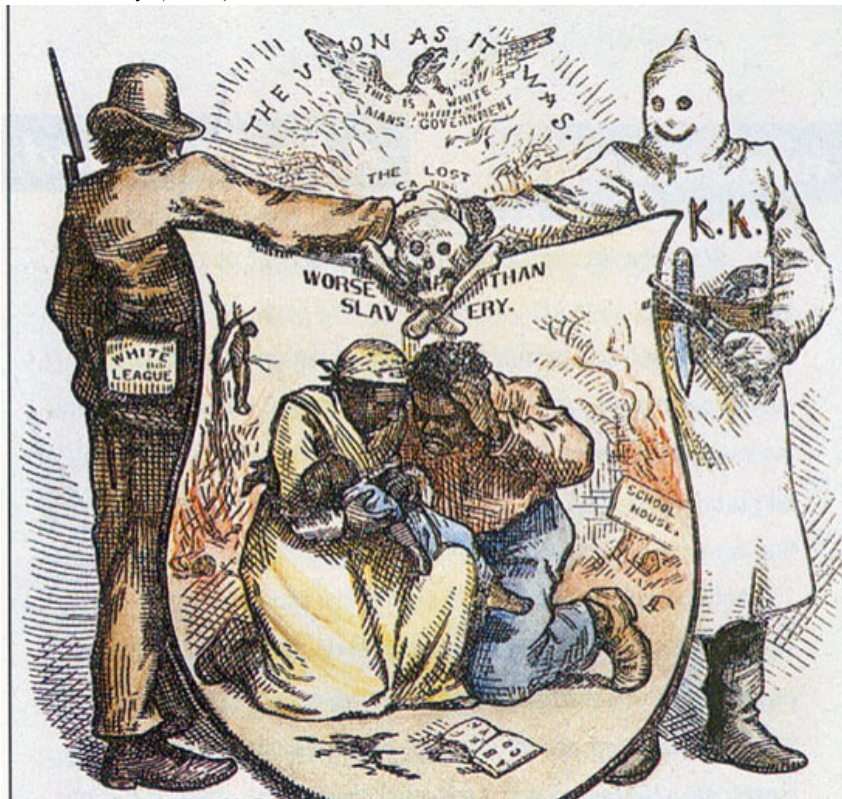
After the Civil War ended in 1865, the United States faced the enormous challenge of rebuilding the South and integrating millions of newly freed African Americans into society. Reconstruction (1865–1877) attempted to address these issues through new laws, amendments, and federal programs. While Reconstruction brought important changes, it also faced fierce opposition, economic struggles, and political compromises that left many promises unfulfilled. Historians continue to debate whether Reconstruction was ultimately a success or a failure.

Directions

Analyze each of the documents and answer the questions that follow.

Document 1

Source: *Worse Than Slavery* (1874) Artist: Thomas Nast



How does this cartoon depict the threats faced by freedmen during Reconstruction?

What does the image suggest about the role of white supremacist groups in undermining Reconstruction?	
Why might the artist argue that conditions after the Civil War were “worse than slavery”?	

Document 2

Source: The Freedmen’s Bureau Report (1866). Report from a U.S. government agency created to help former slaves adjust to freedom.

“The Bureau has established schools throughout the South, where thousands of freed men, women, and children are learning to read and write for the first time. Contracts between freedmen and landowners are being supervised to prevent abuses, and rations are provided to those in need. Yet the task is difficult. Resistance from former slaveholders is strong, violence against freedmen is common, and the resources of the Bureau are far too limited to meet the need. Progress is made, but it is slow and uncertain.”

What services did the Freedmen’s Bureau provide to newly freed African Americans?	
What challenges did the Bureau face in carrying out its mission?	
How does this document show both successes and limitations of Reconstruction?	

Document 3

Source: Excerpt from the Fourteenth Amendment (1868). Part of the U.S. Constitution passed during Reconstruction.

“All persons born or naturalized in the United States... 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... nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

What rights are guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment?	
How does this amendment aim to protect African Americans after the Civil War?	
Why might this amendment be considered one of Reconstruction's greatest achievements?	

Document 4

Source: Excerpt from Mississippi Black Codes (1865). Laws passed in Southern states after the Civil War.

“No freedman shall be allowed to rent or keep a house within the limits of any town unless by special permission of the police authorities. Every freedman shall have a lawful home or employment... If found with no lawful employment, such person shall be deemed a vagrant, and upon conviction fined and hired out to any white person who will pay the fine.”

How did the Black Codes restrict the freedom of African Americans?	
What do these laws suggest about resistance to Reconstruction in the South?	
How might documents like this support the argument that Reconstruction failed?	

Document 5

Source: Excerpt from Frederick Douglass's Speech "What the Black Man Wants" (1865). Delivered by Douglass shortly after the Civil War.

“What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice. The American people have fought a great war to secure liberty, and now we ask only for the practical recognition of this liberty. If we are to remain free, we must have the ballot. Without the right to vote, liberty is a mockery; without the right to vote, we are left defenseless against injustice.”

What does Douglass say African Americans need in order to secure their freedom?	
Why does Douglass emphasize the right to vote?	
How does this document reflect both the hopes and the challenges of Reconstruction?	

Document 6

Source: Excerpt from a Report on Ku Klux Klan Violence (1871). Congressional testimony about violence in the South.

“Bands of disguised men ride at night through the countryside, armed with rifles and whips. Their purpose is to intimidate freedmen from voting, attending school, or asserting their rights under the law. Families have been driven from their homes, churches burned, and teachers of Negro children beaten. Though the federal government has attempted to intervene, fear spreads, and many freedmen dare not exercise their rights for fear of violence.”

What actions did the Ku Klux Klan take to resist Reconstruction?	
How did this violence affect African Americans' ability to exercise their rights?	
How does this document support the argument that Reconstruction failed?	

Writing Activity

Write a Three-paragraph response to the following question:

Was Reconstruction effective in rebuilding the South and protecting the rights of freedmen?

In your paragraph, you must:

- Create a claim (argument) that will be your topic sentence.
- Use evidence from at least 2 of the documents to support your claim.
- Explain how your evidence from the documents supports your claim.
- Write a minimum of 6 sentences.

Here are some fill-in-the-blank examples to help you get started with your paragraph.

1. **Claim (Topic Sentence):** Reconstruction was effective/ineffective because _____.
2. **Evidence:** In document ____ it states _____.
3. **Explaining Support:** This shows _____.

Write your paragraph in the box below.