
Essay Questions

1. What did freedom mean for the ex-slaves? Be sure to address economic opportunities, gender roles, religious independence, and family security.
2. Why did Radical Republicans believe that Andrew Johnson would support their agenda? Why was Johnson ultimately unable to lend his support to the Civil Rights Act of 1866 or the Fourteenth Amendment?
3. For whites, freedom, no matter how defined, was a given, a birthright to be defended. For African-Americans, it was an open-ended process, a transformation of every aspect of their lives and of the society and culture that had sustained slavery in the first place. Defend this statement.
4. Explain how wartime devastation set in motion a train of events that permanently altered the white yeomanry’s independent way of life, leading to what they considered a loss of freedom.
5. Reconstruction witnessed profound changes in the lives of southerners, black and white, rich and poor. Explain the various ways that the lives of these groups were changed. How were the changes for the better or worse?
6. Stating that he “lived among men, not among angels,” Thaddeus Stevens recognized that the Fourteenth Amendment was not perfect. Explain the strengths and weaknesses of the Fourteenth Amendment. What liberties and freedoms does it extend? Describe how it gave more power to the federal government at the expense of the states.
7. What faults did the Republicans see with Presidential Reconstruction? How did they propose to rectify those deficiencies? Be sure to distinguish moderate Republicans from Radical Republicans in your answer.
8. Who were the redeemers, what did they want, and what were their methods? How did the redeemers feel that their freedom was being threatened? Conclude your essay with a comment on how you think the federal government should have responded to the redeemers.
9. Analyze whether “40 acres and a mule” would have made a difference in the outcome of Reconstruction?
10. Fully discuss the failures of Reconstruction. Who was to blame? Be sure to go beyond the failure of land redistribution, the redeemers, and the Ku Klux Klan. Also look at the northern public and Congress, particularly at the comment President Grant made in 1875 to the governor of Mississippi that the public was “too tired” to care about the South’s problems anymore. How can a nation commit to emancipation and radical Reconstruction, only to become “tired” less than a decade later?
11. Elizabeth Cady Stanton stated that Reconstruction could never be completed until universal suffrage was achieved, yet Frederick Douglass proclaimed, in regard to the Fifteenth Amendment, that it was the “negro’s hour.” Write an essay on this dichotomy. If the Civil War was America’s second War of Independence, how is that so if half of America’s population still remained restricted from many basic freedoms and liberties?