

1. Why did the debate over Reconstruction devolve into an institutional struggle between the presidency and the Congress?
2. Before 1865, abolitionists and woman suffragists were generally allies. Why did the Radical Republicans abandon the issue of women's suffrage in 1869? What accounted for the animosity between women's rights advocates and Radical Republicans after that time?
3. To what extent did the emancipation of slaves actually transform southern society after 1865?
How did emancipation alter the organization of southern politics and labor? How did slaves try to shape their own lives and how did white southerners try to limit them?
4. What do you regard as the principal achievements of Radical Reconstruction in the South? Do you think the achievements outweigh the failures?
5. What changes in the North explain why the Republicans abandoned the battle for Reconstruction?

Answer Key

1. *Answer would ideally include:*

- *Constitutional Crisis:* As a constitutional issue, it was unclear whether the president or Congress held primary authority over restoring the nation.
- *The Struggle Between the President and Congress:* Lincoln's assassination placed Andrew Johnson, a racist southerner, into office. He did not agree with his party in terms of its Reconstruction outlook and policies. Johnson prevented the Republican Party, which held a three-to-one majority over the Democrats in Congress, from passing legislation into law. He used his veto power several times in an attempt to kill Reconstruction.

2. *Answer would ideally include:*

- *Background on Relationship Between Abolitionism and Women's Suffrage:* Since the 1830s, women reformers had participated in social movements, including abolitionism, and through that activity identified their own position as a subjugated group exploited by legal, social, and political inequalities. Politicized by abolitionists, they remained loyal to the abolitionist cause even as they organized on their own behalf. Major abolitionist figures, including William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and others, embraced women's suffrage and other feminist demands.
- *Women's Assumptions About Postwar Suffrage:* Northern women played key roles during the Civil War as nurses, participants in the Sanitary Commission and Freedmen's Aid Society, and workers in the growing federal bureaucracy. They expected that they would win the right to vote after the war as a reward for their wartime contributions and sacrifices.
- *Republican Approaches to the Fifteenth Amendment:* In their efforts to pass and ratify the Fifteenth Amendment, Radical Republicans were concerned that the inclusion of women's suffrage might alienate moderates. Republicans thought that this "side issue" would overburden their program for equality for black men. Frederick Douglass and others insisted that women needed to defer to the needs of black men before those of women.
- *Postwar Animosities:* Some woman suffragists, such as Lucy Stone, cooperated with the Republicans and reconciled themselves to disappointment. Others, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, made racist and nativist arguments in their objections to the Fifteenth Amendment. These tensions led to a split in the women's suffrage movement and the creation of two organizations, the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association. The animosities remained until the 1890s.

3. *Answer would ideally include:*

- *Free Labor and Sharecropping:* It was not clear at the end of the war what system would replace slavery. Congressional Republicans envisioned freed slaves as free

laborers, but former slaves envisioned themselves as independent farmers. Former slave owners still envisioned them as servants and inferiors. Ultimately, freed slaves did not receive land grants, but most rejected exploitative wage labor and became tenant farmers who farmed on whites' land in exchange for a share of their harvest.

- *Former Slaves' Pursuits of Personal Freedom*: Freed slaves welcomed emancipation because it provided new personal autonomy. For all its problems, sharecropping did insulate them from whites' intrusion into their private lives. They were happy for the chance to create stable family lives, and women and men both embraced the domestic ideal. They sought to protect women from sexual exploitation by whites, educate their children, and control their private lives.

- *White Efforts to Limit Black Autonomy*: Whites sought to limit black autonomy during Reconstruction by passing the Black Codes. They were tenacious in trying to preserve their power over blacks whenever possible, using exploitative contract arrangements, discrimination, and violence.

- *Freedmen's Political Participation*: In the wake of the Black Codes, Congress reinforced emancipation with the Civil Rights Act of 1866 and the Fourteenth Amendment, which established citizenship for everyone born or naturalized in the United States and guaranteed citizens' civil rights and equal protection under the law. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1869, forbade states to deny the right to vote on the grounds of race, color, or "previous condition of servitude." Black voters and nonvoters supported the Republican Party as the party that would support their rights and became active in local and state governments in the Reconstruction South.

- *Redeemers*: White Southerners were horrified by black political participation and called Reconstruction governments illegitimate. Calling themselves Redeemers, they fought back against black political leaders and voters and were ultimately successful in restoring white supremacist governments in the South.

4. *Answer would ideally include:*

- *Achievements*: Reconstruction's achievements included passage of the Fourteenth Amendment and citizenship for blacks; the distribution of aid through the Freedmen's Bureau; the creation of schools to educate former slaves; the passage of the Reconstruction Act, which nullified southern racist legislatures; federal occupation and protection of freedmen and freedwomen; the creation of Republican governments favoring free-labor values in the South; and the increase of black politicians to organize the black community.

- *Evaluation*: The achievements were considerable, especially given the major challenges of racism, white southern resistance, lack of funding, and the administrative mismanagement that characterized the functioning of the Freedmen's Bureau. Unfortunately, they were not lasting and, after 1877, went essentially unenforced. Freedmen and freedwomen resisted gang labor and worked on their own terms. They gained the right to marry, and established their rights to read and write, worship as they

pleased, and travel. The black community thrived through black churches, schools, and mutual aid societies. Nevertheless, political rights vanished, and it would take ninety years and another civil rights movement before these achievements could be realized in a lasting way.

5. *Answer would ideally include:*

- *Economic Factors:* The North experienced a recession in 1873 and again in 1877. These downturns had a devastating impact on American workers and farmers, and Republicans in government refused to alleviate the suffering by increasing the money supply or providing relief from debt and unemployment. Depression undercut confidence in the industrial economy and Republican policies in the North and the South.

- *Political Factors:* In addition to economic trouble, Republicans faced corruption scandals during the Grant administration that weakened the party and its policies. The Liberal Republicans criticized big government and high taxes and ultimately split from the party. This shifted the debate away from Reconstruction and toward issues that resonated with Democrats. Furthermore, the original Radical Republicans had aged, and the new generation of Republicans was not as interested in the South.

- *Social Factors:* Political and economic changes, the waning of middle-class reform energies, and the passing of the abolitionist generation led to the end of Reconstruction. Northerners lost the will to continue to challenge white supremacy in the South.