

Selecting Facts Assignment

“Reconstruction of the best of times for African Americans.” How far do you agree?

Reconstruction could be considered best of times for African Americans because it changed the position of former slaves for the better and offered new opportunities for blacks in society; however, some believe that it was actually the worst of times for African Americans due the Black codes, and the lingering feelings of hate, fear, and prejudice that lead to other instances of injustice.

Reason 1: Changed the position of the former slaves in society

Ex. 1: The 13th Amendment was passed on January 31, 1865, stating that, “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

Ex. 2: The veto on the Civil rights bill was overridden in April 1866, making it a law, declaring that all persons born in the United States were now citizens, without regard to race, color, or previous condition (although excluding Native Americans).

Ex. 3: The Civil rights bill also overturned the 1857 Dred Scott decision that stated that slaves had no right to be a citizen and that they were bound by the laws of the state in which they lived in.

Ex. 4: The 14th Amendment passed soon after, on June 8th, 1866, solidified the Civil Rights Act, guaranteeing all citizens equality before the law (equal rights).

Ex. 5: The 15th Amendment in 1870 was adopted to the Constitution, stating that “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

Ex. 6: More than half a million black men became voters in the 1870s changing the political scene from then on.

Reason 2: Offered new opportunities for African Americans during the Reconstruction era

Ex. 1: Due to being newly freed many former slaves could move to wherever they wanted, so many chose to move away from their former owners and predominately white counties for predominately black communities.

Ex. 2: Between 1865 and 1870, the African American population of the South's ten largest cities doubled, while the white population increased only by ten percent.

Ex. 3: Thousands of African American couples who had lived together under slavery streamed to military and civilian authorities and demanded to be legally married, because due to slavery many couples were forced to be separated, thus allowing more families to have two parents.

Ex. 4: 90% of the South's adult African American population was illiterate by 1860 causing the rapid spread of schools and the movement for education.

Ex. 5: Throughout 1865 to 1866 in the South, many African Americans sought to raise money to build schoolhouses, buy supplies, and pay teachers.

Ex. 6: African Americans could now own and buy land, such as on the Sea Islands blacks were able to buy plots of land.

Reason 3: The South created Black Codes

Ex. 1: African Americans who were deemed to be unemployed could be forced into work (of the white employer's choosing).

Ex. 2: African American children could be forced into work on plantations as 'apprentices' without pay.

Ex. 3: African Americans could also be stopped from buying, owning, and renting land.

Ex. 4: The legal system was already predetermined against African Americans who came to the court of law for their complaints or grievances.

Ex. 5: Black codes tried to prevent African Americans from receiving an education, serving on juries, and prohibited interracial marriages.

Ex. 6: Laborers who left their jobs before contracts expired would forfeit wages already earned and be subject to arrest by any white citizen.

Reason 4: Lingering feelings of hate, fear, and prejudice lead to more instances of injustice.

Ex. 1: Despite being freed, in 1865 only five free states allowed blacks to vote on equal terms with whites.

Ex. 2: Kentucky still had 65,000 blacks in bondage in April 1865. Slavery survived in the state until December 1865.

Ex. 3: Many groups in 1866 such as the Ku Klux Klan formed in order to fight for white rights and fight against the Republicans, targeting blacks, especially those in office.

Ex. 4: The Colfax massacre of 1873 is an example where about 100 African Americans were murdered by Klansmen after they failed to hold a besieged courthouse during a contested election.

Ex. 5: In the 1876 case of *US v. Reese* and *US v. Cruikshank*, the Court ruled that the 14th Amendment extended to the federal power to protect civil rights only in cases involving discrimination by states, individuals, and others not covered, which lead states to deprive African Americans the right to vote.

Ex. 6: During 1870s African Americans were trapped by poverty and racism so many were forced to work as sharecroppers with little pay and white superiors, a situation that somewhat was along the parallels to slavery.