

HIST 212
Assessment Unit 1: Reconstruction
Guide to Responding

1. Both Johnson and the Radical Republicans wished to see the former Confederate States rejoin the Union, but they differed on how to accomplish this goal. Johnson, a southern Unionist from the former Confederate state of Tennessee, wanted to see the southern states readmitted to the Union quickly. He maintained, like Lincoln, that the Union was “indestructible,” so that the southern states had never really seceded from the Union since secession was unconstitutional. Under the “Presidential Reconstruction” plan in May 1865, all former Confederates would receive amnesty with the exception of persons whose taxable property exceeded \$20,000. Such persons, however, were eligible to receive a presidential pardon. All former Confederate states would be readmitted to the Union after holding a special state convention in which they invalidated their earlier secession decree, abolished slavery, and repudiated their debts arising from the war. Radical Republicans, however, sought revenge for the war and/or wanted to bestow equal rights to the African American freedmen. Radical Republicans viewed the former Confederate states as conquered territories and subject to the authority of Congress. Under “Congressional Reconstruction” implemented in 1867 in the Military Reconstruction Act, the former Confederate states were divided into five military districts. To rejoin the Union, each state had to draft a new state constitution that allowed all adult males in the state to vote. Each new state constitution had to be approved by popular vote and Congress before that state could be readmitted into the Union. In addition, each state had to ratify the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution, which forbade states from depriving persons of their rights without due process of law.
2. It is possible to see the legacy of Reconstruction in both a positive and negative light in respect to the standing of African Americans in American society. In a negative sense, Reconstruction failed to provide much economic relief for the freedmen. Despite the well-intentioned efforts of the Freedmen’s Bureau, freedmen owned little or no property and received scanty education or job training. Consequently, many freedmen across the South became sharecroppers, whose economic and social status was scarcely better as when African Americans had been slaves. Also, in the decades after the collapse of Reconstruction governments in the South, southern states passed laws that implemented legal segregation and deprived most African Americans of the right to vote. Moreover, the heavy-handed treatment of the southern states by the victorious North and the reputation of Republican “Carpetbaggers and Scalawags” in the South resulted in terrorist resistance groups such as the Ku Klux Klan, which fomented racial violence against African Americans. On the other hand, Radical Republicans in the Reconstruction Era did push through the ratification of the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the

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Constitution, which became the legal basis for the Civil Rights Movement of the second half of the twentieth century.

