

**United States History II Summer Assignment: America  
In the 19th Century**

The Post Civil War era, encompassing Reconstruction and the Gilded Age, which spanned the final three decades of the 19th century, was one of the most dynamic, contentious, and volatile periods in American history. In Reconstruction, the United States pursued some of its noblest values and committed some of its darkest betrayals. Black freedmen discovered that freedom didn't mean citizenship, and angry Southern whites pushed back against federal power. America's industrial economy exploded, generating unprecedented opportunities for individuals to build great fortunes but also leaving many farmers and workers struggling merely for survival. Overall national wealth increased more than fivefold, a staggering increase, but one that was accompanied by what many saw as an equally staggering disparity between rich and poor. Eventually the pervasive insecurity of the original Gilded Age inspired a major period of reform known as the Progressive Era. Many of the solutions earlier advanced by workers and farmers were adopted by middle class activists and reform minded leaders within business and government, all of them anxious to correct what they saw as troubling inequalities in America's economic and political order.

In the first unit, we will be addressing the following question: **Did the benefits achieved at the turn of the 20th century outweigh the costs incurred?**

For your summer assignment, you will be examining these two periods in American history.

Create a Google Document, and title it "USII Summer Assignment - Your Name". Your responses to the two portions of the assignment will be recorded in this document and submitted electronically on the first day of class.

**Part A - The Reconstruction Era**

Read the article summarizing Reconstruction, its goals, and failures, which begins on page 3 of this packet. Alternatively, you may wish to watch the following video clips from the PBS documentary *Reconstruction: America After the Civil War*, hosted by historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr. The documentary first aired in 2019, and contains numerous images, writings, and documents of the era. The clips are linked below. You must be signed into your NDNJ e-mail in order to be able to view them.

- [Introduction to Reconstruction](#)
- [Congressional Reconstruction](#)
- [The Lost Cause](#)
- [Resistance](#)
- [Reasons for Failure - Democrats Gain Power](#)
- [Reasons for Failure - The Supreme Court](#)
- [Reasons for Failure - The Wrong Impression](#)
- [Compromise of 1877](#)

Once you have read the article and reviewed the video clips, use what you have read to write a properly formatted paragraph responding to the question:

|  |
|--|
| Why was Reconstruction unable to effectively and permanently achieve its goals and objectives? |
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Your paragraph must consist of a topic sentence which responds to the question, and at least four

points of specific evidence from the article or videos that support your argument. These specific pieces of evidence MUST BE PARAPHRASED.

### Part B: The Gilded Age

You will be reading an excerpt on the Gilded Age from the online source “Boundless US History,” which can be found at this link: <https://www.collegesidekick.com/study-guides/boundless-ushistory/the-gilded-age> The section is titled “The Gilded Age: 1870-1900”

All students should read the introductory section, titled “The Gilded Age.” In your Google Doc, write a 2-3 sentence summary explaining WHY the Gilded Age is called the Gilded Age. (Don’t just define the term, but explain WHY the term is applicable).

You should then read the subsection assigned to the portion of the alphabet that corresponds to your last name:

- A to D – [The Second Industrial Revolution](#)
- E to H – [The Rise of Immigration](#)
- I to M – [Labor and Domestic Tensions](#)
- N to R – [The Transformation of the West](#)
- S to Z – [The Agrarian and Populist Movements](#)

In your Google Doc, create the following chart:

| Positive Developments | Negative Developments |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                       |                       |

As you read, you should make note in the chart of both positive and negative developments that happened both to individuals and to the nation as a whole, surrounding your particular topic. You must have 10 TOTAL developments in your chart, but the two sides do not necessarily need to be balanced/even.

This should be part of the same document as your summary paragraph on Reconstruction and your 2-3 sentence explanation of why the Gilded Age is called the Gilded Age.

**This is a graded assignment.** This Google Document should contain the following when it is submitted:

- Paragraph on Reconstruction
- 2-3 sentences on why the Gilded Age is called the Gilded Age
- Positives and Negatives chart on your aspect of the Gilded Age

This document will be digitally submitted on the first day of class. You must have it accessible at that time.

## **Reconstruction - A Summary**

Even though the Confederacy lost the Civil War, it succeeded, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in winning the ideological war that determined how Americans viewed the Civil War era. For much of the 20th century, the dominant view of Reconstruction, repeated in many high school and college textbooks, was that it was a period of "bayonet rule," during which vindictive northern carpetbaggers and their white and black puppets engaged in an orgy of corruption and misrule. According to this view, a courageous President Johnson, seeking to carry out Lincoln's policy of reconciliation, was confronted by a hostile Congress trying to punish the defeated South.

In recent years, this interpretation of Reconstruction has been thoroughly dismantled. It is now clear that Reconstruction was a failed, but admirable, attempt to adjust to the realities of emancipation: To guarantee the civil and political rights of former slaves and forge a more just society out of the ruins of slavery. President Johnson's reconstruction policy, far from being a continuation of Lincoln's, was steadfastly opposed to protecting the rights of African Americans.

Reconstruction was the most daring experiment in American history. It represented an attempt to transform the institutions and patterns of social relations of the Old South. It gave black Americans in the South their first taste of political power. Out of Reconstruction came constitutional amendments that extended citizenship and voting rights to African Americans. This era also witnessed the federal government's first efforts to create social welfare programs.

In the end, Reconstruction failed to establish a less racially divided society. Its failure left the entire country with the unfinished task of achieving full economic and political equality for the descendants of slaves.

Ex-slaves expressed their newly-won freedom in diverse ways. Many couples, forbidden to marry during slavery, took the opportunity to formalize their unions. Others, who had lived apart from their families on separate plantations, were finally free to reside with their spouses and children. As an expression of their freedom, many freedmen dropped their slave names, adopted new surnames, and insisted on being addressed as "mister" or misses." Many ex-slaves left farms or plantations for towns or cities "where freedom was free-er." Shocked at seeing former slaves transformed into free women and men, many southern whites complained of "betrayal" and "ingratitude" when freedmen left their plantations. In many parts of the South, the end of the war was followed by outbursts of white rage. White mobs whipped, clubbed, and murdered ex-slaves.

Immediately following the war, all-white southern legislatures enacted "black codes," designed to force ex-slaves to work on plantations, where they would be put to work in gangs. These codes denied African Americans the right to purchase or even rent land. Vagrancy laws allowed authorities to arrest blacks "in idleness" (including many children) and assign them to a chain gang or auction them off to a planter for as long as a year. The more stringent black codes also barred ex-slaves from owning weapons, marrying whites, and assembling after sunset. Other statutes required blacks to have written proof of employment and barred them from leaving plantations.

During Reconstruction, former slaves--and many small white farmers--became trapped in a new system of economic exploitation known as sharecropping. Lacking capital and land of their own, former slaves were forced to work for large landowners. Initially, planters, with the support of the Freedmen's Bureau, sought to restore gang labor under the supervision of white overseers. But the freedmen, who

wanted autonomy and independence, refused. Ultimately, sharecropping emerged as a sort of compromise.

Instead of cultivating land in gangs supervised by overseers, landowners divided plantations into 20 to 50 acre plots suitable for farming by a single family. In exchange for land, a cabin, and supplies, sharecroppers agreed to raise a cash crop (usually cotton) and to give half the crop to their landlord. The high interest rates landlords and sharecroppers charged for goods bought on credit (sometimes as high as 70 percent a year) transformed sharecropping into a system of economic dependency and poverty.

The failure of Reconstruction was not inevitable. There were moments of possibility when it seemed imaginable that former slaves might achieve genuine freedom. In early 1866, Congressional Republicans, appalled by mass killing of ex-slaves and adoption of restrictive black codes, seized control of Reconstruction from President Johnson. Congress denied representatives from the former Confederate states their Congressional seats, passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866, and wrote the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, extending citizenship rights to African Americans and guaranteeing them equal protection of the laws. The 14th Amendment also reduced representation in Congress of any southern state that deprived African Americans of the vote.

In 1867, Congress overrode a presidential veto in order to pass an act that divided the South into military districts that placed the former Confederate states under martial law pending their adoption of constitutions guaranteeing civil liberties to former slaves. The Reconstruction Act of 1867 gave African American men in the South the right to vote three years before ratification of the 15th

Amendment. With the vote came representation. Freedmen served in state legislatures and Hiram Revels became the first African American to sit in the U.S. Senate. In 1870, the country went even further by ratifying the 15th Amendment, which forbade restricting voting rights on the basis of race.

The Republican governments were seen as extravagant and expensive, but they gave the South its first public school systems, asylums, and roads. Southern Republicans sought to modernize the South by building railroads and providing free public education and other social services. The Reconstruction governments drew up democratic state constitutions, expanded women's rights, provided debt relief, and established the South's first state-funded schools. Meanwhile, the first institutions of higher education for blacks were established in the South. Black colleges founded during Reconstruction included Fisk University in Nashville in 1866, Howard University in Washington in 1867, and Virginia's Hampton Institute in 1868.

Reconstruction was overthrown by a political movement known as Redemption, which reestablished white supremacy in the South. The main strategy used to overthrow Reconstruction was economic intimidation and physical violence. Secret organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, founded in Tennessee in 1866, and the Knights of the White Camellia were dedicated to ending Republican rule and preventing blacks from voting. Members of these organizations included judges, lawyers, and clergymen as well as farmers and poor whites. In 1870 and 1871, Congress passed the Force Act and the Ku Klux Klan Act which gave the president the power to use federal troops to prevent the denial of voting rights. Activities of groups like the Ku Klux Klan declined, but the campaign of intimidation was successful in keeping many African Americans from the polls. By 1876, Republican governments had been toppled in all but three states.

On average, the South's bi-racial Republican state governments lasted just four-and-a-half years. During the 1870s, internal divisions within the Republican Party, white terror, and northern apathy

allowed southern white Democrats to return to power. As early as 1872, many former abolitionists believed that their aims had been achieved. Slavery had been abolished and citizenship and voting rights had been established by Constitutional Amendment. The financial panic of 1873 and the subsequent economic depression helped bring Reconstruction to its eventual end. Bank failures, corporate collapses, and rising unemployment helped Democrats regain a majority in the House of Representatives in 1874. No further money would be spent on Reconstruction, and Northern attention turned away from Reconstruction efforts to their own economic struggles.

The Election of 1876, between Democrat Samuel Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, was plagued by accusations of voter fraud, intimidation, and competing sets of results from several southern states. A government committee voted on party lines, 8-7, to certify Hayes' electoral votes and give him the election. Despite Democratic outrage and threats of a filibuster, a deal was struck at a meeting in February 1877. Democratic leaders accepted Hayes's election in exchange for Republican promises to withdraw federal troops from the South, provide federal funding for internal improvements in the South, and name a prominent Southerner to the president's cabinet. When the federal troops were withdrawn, the last remaining Republican governments in Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina collapsed, bringing Reconstruction to a final end.

Under the so-called Compromise of 1877, the national government would no longer intervene in southern affairs. This would permit the imposition of racial segregation and the disfranchisement of black voters.

In many ways, the years of Reconstruction failed to deliver on the promises it offered. Despite a four year civil war that had freed four million slaves and destroyed half the South's farm implements and livestock, ratification of constitutional amendments abolishing slavery, guaranteeing equal rights, and extending the vote to African Americans, much would appear unchanged. Southern representatives had returned to Congress, and they were similar to those who had served before the war. Many had served in the army and government of the Confederacy. In each of the southern states, the Democratic Party was securely in control. The overwhelming majority of African Americans would still be living in the South, working as farm laborers on land that they did not own.

Fundamental changes had taken place. Chattel slavery had been defeated. The gang system of labor, enforced by the whip, was dead. Incredibly, about 20 percent of African Americans in the South managed to acquire land by 1880. And through the 1880s, sizable numbers of African American men in the South would continue to vote. Real gains had been won, even though full equality remained an unfulfilled promise.

Like an earthquake, Reconstruction shook southern society's foundations then subsided. But it left the national landscape forever changed. The first black institutions of higher learning were founded. Equally important, it was during Reconstruction that the institutional foundations of the modern black community in the South were laid, including independent black churches and a growing number of black landowners, businessmen, clergymen, and teachers. With the passage of the 14th Amendment, mandating equal rights for all citizens, and the 15th Amendment, forbidding states to deny the right to vote because of race, the possibilities for later attacks on discrimination had been established.

Reconstruction's failure also carried long-term negative consequences. Racism became more deeply embedded in American society. An increasing number of Southerners were reduced to tenant farming. One political party, the Democratic Party, monopolized political power. Violence kept

immigrants from migrating to the region. The roots of half a century of southern poverty had been planted.

By 1877, northerners were tired of Reconstruction; weary of battling southern elites, scandal, and radicalism; and had largely lost interest in supporting black civil rights. Theoretically, North and South reached a compromise: black civil liberties and racial equality would be set aside in order to put the Union back together. Historian Eric Foner noted, "What remains certain is that Reconstruction failed, and that for blacks its failure was a disaster whose magnitude cannot be obscured by the genuine accomplishments that did endure." As it turned out, blacks would not regain the support of the federal government until the civil rights movement of the 1960s.