

Debating the
DOCUMENTS

Interpreting Alternative Viewpoints
in Primary Source Documents

Why Reconstruction Failed

By 1876, the nation's first attempt to bring the South back into the nation and ensure full equality for all African Americans was over—it did not succeed.

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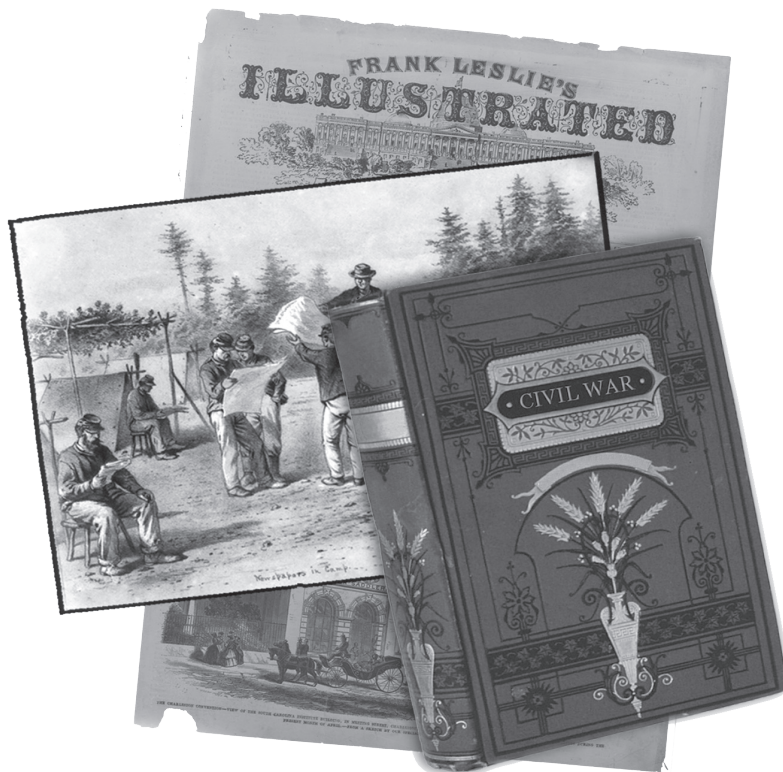
Teacher Introduction

★ Using Primary Sources

Primary sources are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past era or historical event. They are the raw materials, or the evidence, on which historians base their “secondary” accounts of the past.

A rapidly growing number of history teachers today are using primary sources. Why? Perhaps it's because primary sources give students a better sense of what history is and what historians do. Such sources also help students see the past from a variety of viewpoints. Moreover, primary sources make history vivid and bring it to life.

However, primary sources are not easy to use. They can be confusing. They can be biased. They rarely all agree. Primary sources must be interpreted and set in context. To do this, students need historical background knowledge. *Debating the Documents* helps students handle such challenges by giving them a useful framework for analyzing sources that conflict with one another.



*“Multiple,
conflicting
perspectives are
among the truths
of history.
No single
objective or
universal account
could ever put an
end to this endless
creative dialogue
within and
between the past
and the present.”*

From the 2005 Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct of the Council of the American Historical Association.

★ *The Debating the Documents Series*

Each *Debating the Documents* booklet includes the same sequence of reproducible worksheets. If students use several booklets over time, they will get regular practice at interpreting and comparing conflicting sources. In this way, they can learn the skills and habits needed to get the most out of primary sources.

Each *Debating the Documents* Booklet Includes:

- **Suggestions for the Student and an Introductory Essay.** The student gets instructions and a one-page essay providing background on the booklet's topic. A time line on the topic is also included.
- **TWO Groups of Contrasting Primary Source Documents.** In most of the booklets, students get one pair of visual sources and one pair of written sources. In some cases, more than two are provided for each. Background is provided on each source. Within each group, the sources clash in a very clear way. (The sources are not always exact opposites, but they do always differ in some obvious way.)
- **Three Worksheets for Each Document Group.** Students use the first two worksheets to take notes on the sources. The third worksheet asks which source the student thinks would be most useful to a historian.
- **CD-ROM.** The ImageXaminer lets students view the primary sources as a class, in small groups, or individually. A folder containing all of the student handouts in pdf format, including a graphic organizer for use with the ImageXaminer's grid tool, allows for printing directly from the CD.
- **One DBQ.** On page 22, a document-based question (DBQ) asks students to write an effective essay using all of the booklet's primary sources.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

All pages in this booklet may be photocopied for classroom use.

1. Have students read “Suggestions for the Student” and the Introductory Essay.

Give them copies of pages 7–9. Ask them to read the instructions and then read the introductory essay on the topic. The time line gives them additional information on that topic. This reading could be done in class or as a homework assignment.

2. Have students do the worksheets.

Make copies of the worksheets and the pages with the sources. Ask students to study the background information on each source and the source itself. Then have them take notes on the sources using the worksheets. If students have access to a computer, have them review the primary sources with the ImageXaminer. You may also ask them to use its magnifying tools to more clearly focus their analysis.

3. “Debate the documents” as a class.

Have students use their worksheet notes to debate the primary source documents as a class. Use the overheads to focus this discussion on each source in turn. Urge students to follow these ground rules:

- Use your worksheets as a guide for the discussion or debate.
- Try to reach agreement about the main ideas and the significance of each primary source document.
- Look for points of agreement as well as disagreement between the primary sources.
- Listen closely to all points of view about each primary source.
- Focus on the usefulness of each source to the historian, not merely on whether you agree or disagree with that source’s point of view.

4. Have students do the final DBQ.

A DBQ is an essay question about a set of primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, students write essays using evidence from the sources and their own background knowledge of the historical era. (See the next page for a DBQ scoring guide to use in evaluating these essays.)

The DBQ assignment on page 22 includes guidelines for writing a DBQ essay. Here are some additional points to make with students about preparing to write this kind of essay.

The DBQ for this Booklet (see page 22):

*Most historians agree that Reconstruction was a failure.
Why do you think it failed?*

- Analyze the question carefully.
- Use your background knowledge to set sources in their historical context.
- Question and interpret sources actively. Do not accept them at face value.
- Use sources meaningfully to support your essay’s thesis.
- Pay attention to the overall organization of your essay.

★ *Complete DBQ Scoring Guide*

Use this guide in evaluating the DBQ for this booklet. Use this scoring guide with students who are already familiar with using primary sources and writing DBQ essays.

Excellent Essay

- Offers a clear answer or thesis explicitly addressing all aspects of the essay question.
- Does a careful job of interpreting many or most of the documents and relating them clearly to the thesis and the DBQ. Deals with conflicting documents effectively.
- Uses details and examples effectively to support the thesis and other main ideas. Explains the significance of those details and examples well.
- Uses background knowledge and the documents in a balanced way.
- Is well written; clear transitions make the essay easy to follow from point to point. Only a few minor writing errors or errors of fact.

Good Essay

- Offers a reasonable thesis addressing the essential points of the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least some of the documents and relates them to the thesis and the DBQ.
- Usually relates details and examples meaningfully to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some relevant background knowledge.
- May have some writing errors or errors of fact, as long as these do not invalidate the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Fair Essay

- Offers at least a partly developed thesis addressing the essay question.
- Adequately interprets at least a few of the documents.
- Relates only a few of the details and examples to the thesis or other main ideas.
- Includes some background knowledge.
- Has several writing errors or errors of fact that make it harder to understand the essay's overall argument or point of view.

Poor Essay

- Offers no clear thesis or answer addressing the DBQ.
- Uses few documents effectively other than referring to them in “laundry list” style, with no meaningful relationship to a thesis or any main point.
- Uses details and examples unrelated to the thesis or other main ideas. Does not explain the significance of these details and examples.
- Is not clearly written, with some major writing errors or errors of fact.

Suggestions to the Student

★ *Using Primary Sources*

A primary source is any record of evidence from the past. Many things are primary sources: letters, diary entries, official documents, photos, cartoons, wills, maps, charts, etc. They are called “primary” because they are first-hand records of a past event or time period. This Debating the Documents lesson is based on two groups of primary source documents. Within each group, the sources conflict with one another. That is, they express different or even opposed points of view. You need to decide which source is more reliable, more useful or more typical of the time period. This is what historians do all the time. Usually, you will be able to learn something about the past from each source, even when the sources clash with one another in dramatic ways.

★ *How to Use This Booklet*

1. Read the one-page introductory essay.

This gives you background information that will help you analyze the primary source documents and do the exercises for this Debating the Documents lesson. The time line gives you additional information you will find helpful.



2. Study the primary source documents for this lesson.

For this lesson, you get two groups of sources. The sources within each group conflict with one another. Some of these sources are visuals; others are written sources. With visual sources, pay attention not only to the image’s “content” (its subject matter), but also to its artistic style, shading, composition, camera angle, symbols and other features that add to the image’s meaning. With written sources, notice the writing style, bias, even what the source leaves out or does not talk about. Think about each source’s author, that author’s reasons for writing and the likely audience for the source. These things give you clues as to the source’s historical value.

3. Use the worksheets to analyze each group of primary source documents.

For each group of sources, you get three worksheets. Use the “Study the Document” worksheets to take notes on each source. Use the “Comparing the Documents” worksheet to decide which of the sources would be most useful to a historian.

4. As a class, debate the documents.

Use your worksheet notes to help you take part in this debate.

5. Do the final DBQ.

“DBQ,” means “document-based question.” A DBQ is a question along with several primary source documents. To answer the DBQ, write an essay using evidence from the documents and your own background history knowledge. The DBQ is on page 22.

• *Why Reconstruction Failed* •

In 1864 and 1865, Union General William Tecumseh Sherman seized Atlanta and then swept through Georgia and the Carolinas. In his famous scorched-earth march, he destroyed everything in his path that might have aided the South in a last-ditch effort to save the dying Confederacy.

Perhaps it took total defeat and destruction to force the South to accept the reality that its independence and slave-labor system were at an end. Would an equally harsh approach convince Southerners to accept black freedom and full citizenship for the freed slaves?

Lincoln thought not. He hoped to ease the South back into the Union gently. However, Lincoln was killed on April 14, 1865. His successor, Andrew Johnson, was both weak and hot-headed. He was also a Southerner whom Northern antislavery lawmakers mistrusted. These “Radical Republicans” in Congress soon began to ride roughshod over Johnson, even impeaching him in order to remove him from office. They failed to do that, but they didn’t really need to. They had the two-thirds majorities in Congress required to override any presidential veto.

As a result, Congress soon imposed harsh military rule on the South. It did so partly to enforce black equality. By 1866, it was clear the South was not going to grant this equality willingly. Southern state “Black Codes” set up new limits on the ability of former slaves to travel, change jobs, and exercise other ordinary rights. Also, the Ku Klux Klan and other secret groups had begun using terror tactics to keep blacks from voting or exercising other citizenship rights.

To counter this, Republicans won control of Southern state governments largely with the votes of African Americans—and with the protection of the army. The 14th Amendment (ratified in 1868) said that no state could deny any person “life, liberty, or property, without due process of law” or “deny to any person within its

jurisdiction the equal protection of its laws.” The 15th Amendment (ratified in 1870) guaranteed blacks the right to vote.

Many idealistic Northerners went South to work for the Freedmen’s Bureau, which created schools for former slaves. Yet concern for the fate of the former slaves was not the only motive behind Reconstruction. Many Republicans also used black voters to ensure their party’s political dominance. Corruption in these governments and in the Freedmen’s Bureau was widespread, as it was across the nation. As corruption scandals in the Grant administration (1869-1877) grew, many Northerners tired of Reconstruction and came to distrust the idealism used to justify it. In the South, military rule only seemed to add to white racist contempt for black voters and legislators.

The North pulled the last troops out of the South in 1877, after which Southern white “Redeemer” governments soon put an end to black political participation. Lacking property and schooling, the former slaves often had to accept tenant and sharecropping arrangements that did little to help them move ahead. Soon, the full range of “Jim Crow” segregation laws would limit their rights and confine them to decades of second-class citizenship.

Reconstruction ended in failure. Yet it is not clear how much success was possible even under the best conditions. Could Southern attitudes have been altered quickly given the context of defeat and resentment? Did blacks simply need decades of freedom to create churches, businesses, black colleges, and political organizations to fight effectively for full equality? Perhaps the sources for this lesson will help you answer these questions.

Reconstruction Time Line

1865

• • •

The Civil War ends. Lincoln is assassinated. Congress establishes the Freedmen's Bureau to aid the freed slaves. President Andrew Johnson offers a mild Reconstruction plan. The 13th Amendment abolishing slavery is ratified. The first Black Codes are enacted. That winter, the Ku Klux Klan is founded in Tennessee.

1866

• • •

A Civil Rights Act is passed despite Johnson's earlier veto. The 14th Amendment is approved by Congress. Memphis and New Orleans race riots stir anger in the North.

1867

• • •

Three Reconstruction acts are passed over Johnson's veto. Congress divides the former Confederacy into five military districts and requires elections in which African American men can vote.

1868

• • •

In President Johnson's impeachment trial, the Senate fails by one vote to remove him from office. The 14th Amendment is ratified. It says all persons born or naturalized in the United States are citizens entitled to equal protection of the laws. In November, Republican candidate Ulysses S. Grant is elected president.

1869

• • •

Tennessee becomes the first state to replace a bi-racial Republican state government with an all-white Democratic government. It is followed in 1870 by Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia.

1870

• • •

Hiram Revels is elected as the first black U. S. Senator. The 15th Amendment is ratified, giving the vote to all male citizens regardless of color or previous condition of servitude. Joseph H. Rainey is the first black sworn in as a member of the U. S. House of Representatives.

1871

• • •

The 42nd Congress includes five black House members.

1872

• • •

The Freedmen's Bureau is abolished. The Credit Mobilier/Union Pacific Railroad scandal involving government officials fuels rising discontent with the Grant administration.

1873

• • •

The "Panic of 1873" is followed by economic hard times, adding to frustration with and disinterest in Reconstruction.

1874

• • •

Blanche K. Bruce is elected to the Senate. Robert Smalls, a black Civil War hero, is elected to Congress as a representative of South Carolina.

1875

• • •

Congress passes the 1875 Civil Rights Act. It grants blacks equal treatment in public places and transportation. The Supreme Court later overrules most of it in its 1883 Civil Rights Cases decision.

1876-77

• • •

After a disputed election, Rutherford B. Hayes is inaugurated President. The last federal troops leave South Carolina. Reconstruction ends as all-white "Redeemer" governments take power throughout the South.

Visual Primary Source Document 1



To the Polls by T. W. Wood. By permission of T. W. Wood Gallery, Vermont College, Montpelier

Information on Document 1

This watercolor by artist T. W. Wood shows citizens waiting at a polling place to vote in the elections of 1866. Four different types of Americans are shown—a well-off businessman, an Irish-American worker, a Dutch coach driver, and a black American, who is probably voting for the first time.

Thomas Waterman Wood was a native of Vermont who was settling into permanent residence in New York City when he painted this scene. It captures the mood of African Americans at a key point in their passage from slavery to freedom.

Visual Primary Source Document 2



A Visit from the Old Mistress, by Winslow Homer. Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington DC/Art Resources, NY

Information on Document 2

Winslow Homer painted this scene in 1876. His painting shows a Southern white lady visiting some of her former slaves for the first time. The former slaves sit and stand in their own home. Their former mistress is now a guest in that home. Clearly, all these women must relate to one another in new and different ways now that slavery is no more. However,

Homer does not make it obvious or easy for viewers to know exactly what all of these figures might be thinking and feeling. Homer was born in Boston in 1836 and got his start as an artist there. Later, he traveled with Union troops during the Civil War and sent sketches to *Harper's Weekly*. He died in 1910.

Study the Document: Visual Source 1

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic

This painting is titled *To the Polls*.
Write your own more complete caption summing up this scene. In your caption, use the term "Reconstruction" in some meaningful way.

2 Visual Features

What features add to the drama of this scene—such as hand gestures, posture, facial expressions, use of light and darkness, etc? How do these features help build the artist's hopeful view of what the future will be like for African Americans as citizens of the republic?

3 Bias

Aside from the black voter on the right, the painting uses specific features to identify the others as, left to right, a businessman (probably British in heritage), an Irish-American worker, and a Dutch coach driver. How does the artist help the viewer identify these men this way? In doing this, is this artist using biased stereotypes in some unfair way? Why or why not?

Study the Document: Visual Source 2

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic

Write a brief dramatic account of what you think is happening in this illustration. Create a dialogue between any two of these figures. Sum up in some notes what you think this former mistress and her former slaves might be thinking.

2 Visual Features

What features add to the drama of this scene? Look at features such as overall composition, hand gestures, posture, facial expressions, use of light and dark, etc. How do these features add to the impact of the painting?

3 Point of View

If Winslow Homer could speak, how do you think he would answer this question: "When you painted this scene, how hopeful were you about the changes in black-white relations brought about by the Civil War and the Reconstruction era?"

Comparing the Documents

★ *The Visual Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the “Comparison Essay” worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

Which of these two primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the era of Reconstruction?



Document 1

☐

Document 2

☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Document _____ because:

I did not choose Document _____.

However, a historian still might use the document in the following way:

KEEP THIS IN MIND: Some sources are very "biased." A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

Written Primary Source Document 1

Information on Document 1

This is part of a December 4, 1865, leaflet Anthony M. Dignowity of San Antonio, Texas, sent to Republicans in Congress. In it he repeats and updates an earlier 1861 proposal to bring settlers of German origin to Texas. Here is this leaflet's full title:

Reconstruction!! An appeal to the Patriotic National Republican members of Congress; in behalf of all loyal residents of the South! by one who has been a resident of the South thirty-three years; one who has opposed slavery, and the State-rights heresy, since A. D. 1832; one who finds himself, with other loyal men, politically bound, and surrendered to the control of alien enemies; by a mistaken policy, the effect of which will be, a cruel punishment of loyal men of the South, and a premium upon treason and rebellion.

• Document 1 •

On the 13th day of December, 1861, the Hon. James Harlan, of the United States Senate, presented a memorial in behalf of the loyal citizens of West Texas of German extraction (see Miss. Doc. No. 9, 37th Cong. 1st Sess.). This memorial contained a plan for the reconstruction of Texas... [which was to] enlist volunteers of German origin, for a short term of service, and with a proviso, that they become settlers of Texas, and secure to them grants of land from the vast public domain of that State. The German residents of West Texas would have been strengthened, that State redeemed from the blasting effects of slavery and rebellion, and made the most prosperous section on this continent...

[T]he reconstruction of the rebel States should be left to the collective wisdom of this nation to determine what should be the true policy. Justice to all persons, and due protection to every individual must be secured; there cannot, there must not be any more compromise with wrong. Many years of probation will be required before

a radical change will take place in the minds of men, who were reared under the blasting influence of slavery. The heresy of State-rights was engrafted on the national politics with a view to conserve slavery; it cut off individuals from national protection; it is sectional and local, and has been, and will be again exercised for oppression and wrong. The right of every individual to national protection is self evident, this Government cannot shirk its responsibility, the present condition gives this nation a glorious opportunity, it cost enormous sacrifices, it must not be trifled away, centuries may roll by, ere it may again be possible to do the work, now is the time to do it effectually, nothing less but the political, and legal equality of all persons, and the introduction of free-labor will bring about true and lasting reconstruction of society of the South. Texas, with its vast public lands, and unrivalled climate, offers a rare opportunity to put my plan into practice, all necessary legislation should be done without delay.

Written Primary Source Document 2

Information on Document 2

These are comments by *The New York Herald*, August 12, 1876, about a recent letter from R. Barnwell Rhett of South Carolina. According to the *Herald*, Rhett was "a leader of the extreme State Rights school" during the Civil War. In his letter, Rhett had explained why he supported 1876 Democratic presidential candidate Samuel Tilden. Rhett was angry about the harsh rule of Republicans in the South during Reconstruction. He expected that Tilden and the Democrats would act to end Reconstruction and put white Southerners back in control of their region. In its comment here, the *Herald* explains why it dislikes Rhett's anger and disagrees with his bitter criticism of Republicans and of the North during Reconstruction.

• Document 2 •

When the war was over wise Republicans like Governor Andrew, Horace Greeley and even Governor Morton were anxious to have impartial suffrage, a general law that would make education or property a test, and thus rule out the mass of ignorant slaves who were unfit to vote. But the Southern States, as soon as they began the work of reconstruction, sought to pass laws the effect of which would have been to remand the freedmen again to slavery. Mr. Rhett will find traces of these laws all through the South, in Mississippi more especially. The effect was to overrule the wishes of the moderate Republicans and compel, among other evils, universal suffrage.

Law after law arose out of this antagonism which would not now exist had a different policy prevailed. There was no disposition on the part of any but a few extreme Republicans, like Sumner, Chase and Phillips to force negro suffrage upon the Southern States. They had seen the effects of an ignorant suffrage in the North, and they viewed with apprehension, an apprehension that events have justified, the elevation of the negro to citizenship. But what could they do? The Southern men were resolved upon war. They carried the lost cause from the field to the hustings. They made war upon

every measure proposed by the North. They resisted the military governorships.... They resisted the Freedman's Bureau, although every sensible man must see how necessary such an organization was in dealing with the freedmen. They resisted emigration by treating as an outlaw every Northern man who went South and presumed to vote the Republican ticket or seek office. They resisted all religious union, and threw upon the Northern branch of a body like the Methodist Church the spiritual charge of the negroes. More than all, the truculent element in the South, escaping from the control of wise and prudent men, rushed into riots and massacres, beginning with the appalling butchery in New Orleans in 1866...

Of course men are men, and the North came out of the war with passions as well as the South. So passion on one side was answered by passion on the other, and those who, like the *Herald*, esteemed the South and longed for the hour when her old Commonwealths would rise from the dust, were compelled to stand by and look on, while the Rhetts on one side and the Thaddeus Stevenses on the other continued their unequal war. In every contest the North won, as was inevitable.

Study the Document: Written Source 1

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic

In a few sentences, sum up Dignowity's plan for Reconstruction and what he thinks it will accomplish.

2 Author, Audience, Purpose

From what you can learn about Dignowity, what surprises you most about his appeal?

3 What Else Can You Infer?

What is suggested or implied in the document? For example, Dignowity says: "Many years of probation will be required before a radical change will take place in the minds of men, who were reared under the blasting influence of slavery?" What does this imply about general attitudes in the South at the time?

4 Point of View

In speaking of Reconstruction, Dignowity says "the present condition gives this nation a glorious opportunity." Would Winslow Homer have agreed with this claim? Why or why not?

Study the Document: Written Source 2

Instructions: Take notes on these questions. Use your notes to discuss the documents and answer the DBQ.

1 Main Idea or Topic

In this comment, *The Herald* opposes giving most former slaves the right to vote. Why? Who does it blame for the fact that the former (male) slaves did get the right to vote?

2 Author, Audience, Purpose

From what you can tell about this source and its audience, what most surprises you about its overall attitude? Why?

3 What Else Can You Infer?

What does this comment seem to suggest about the range of opinion in the North regarding the ability of former slaves to take on the burdens of citizenship?

4 Background Knowledge

Re-read the second paragraph in this document. Based on what you know about the South after the Civil War, do you agree with the charges *The Herald* makes about the South in that paragraph? Why or why not?

Comparing the Documents

★ *The Written Sources*

Answer the question by checking one box below. Then complete the statements on the “Comparison Essay” worksheet. Use all your notes to help you take part in an all-class debate about these documents—and to answer the final DBQ for the lesson.

Which of these two primary source documents would be most useful to a historian trying to understand the era of Reconstruction?

Part of an 1865 leaflet by Anthony M. Dignowity of San Antonio, Texas, sent to Republicans in Congress and proposing to settle German immigrants in Texas as a way to aid in Reconstruction.

Document 1 ☐

Some comments by The New York Herald on August 12, 1876, about a recent letter from a man in South Carolina. In this comment, The Herald explains why it disagrees with this man’s criticism of Republicans and of the North during Reconstruction.

Document 2 ☐

Comparison Essay

I chose Document _____ because:

I did not choose Document _____.

However, a historian still might use the document in the following way:

KEEP THIS IN MIND: Some sources are very "biased." A biased source is one that shows you only one side of an issue. That is, it takes a clear stand or expresses a very strong opinion about something. A biased source may be one-sided, but it can still help you to understand its time period. For example, a biased editorial cartoon may show how people felt about an issue at the time. The usefulness of a source depends most of all on what questions you ask about that time in the past.

Document-Based Question

Your task is to answer a document-based question (DBQ) on the failure of Reconstruction in the 1860s and 1870s. In a DBQ, you use your analysis of primary source documents and your knowledge of history to write a brief essay answering the question. Using all four documents, answer this question.

Document-Based Question

**Most historians agree that Reconstruction was a failure.
Why do you think it failed?**

Below is a checklist of key suggestions for writing a DBQ essay. Next to each item, jot down a few notes to guide you in writing the DBQ. Use extra sheets to write a four- or five-paragraph essay.

- *Introductory Paragraph*

Does the paragraph clarify the DBQ itself? Does it present a clear thesis, or overall answer, to that DBQ?

- *The Internal Paragraphs — 1*

Are these paragraphs organized around main points with details supporting those main ideas? Do all these main ideas support the thesis in the introductory paragraph?

- *The Internal Paragraphs — 2*

Are all of your main ideas and key points linked in a logical way? That is, does each idea follow clearly from those that went before? Does it add something new and helpful in clarifying your thesis?

- *Use of Primary Source Documents*

Are they simply mentioned in a “laundry list” fashion? Or are they used thoughtfully to support main ideas and the thesis?

- *Concluding Paragraph*

Does it restate the DBQ and thesis in a way that sums up the main ideas without repeating old information or going into new details?