

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute 2008 Volume I: Controlling War by Law

# Accountability and Reconstruction after the United States Civil War

Curriculum Unit 08.01.06 by Julia Biagiarelli

## **Objective**

Students will describe the circumstances which existed at the close of the United States Civil War; how these circumstances drove the policies of Reconstruction; and the effectiveness of Reconstruction when the last federal troops left the South in 1879.

# **Educational Standards**

This unit correlates with the New Haven Public Schools Eighth Grade Social Studies Curriculum: Unit VI. The Civil War Era and Reconstruction (1850-1877).

(See Appendix B).

# Introduction

This unit is designed for a class of about 20- 25 eighth grade students that is co-taught by a certified regular education Social Studies teacher and a certified Special Education teacher. About twenty five percent of the students in this class come from surrounding suburban towns, another twenty five percent live in the inner city neighborhood where the school is located and the remaining students come from other areas of the city.

## **Background Information**

The United States Civil War began on April 12, 1861 when Confederate forces attacked a U.S. Military installation at Fort Sumter in South Carolina. It ended when General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865.(7)

In the Civil War, in which there were more than 10,000 specific military engagements, both sides suffered substantial losses. However, the destruction of the South in human casualties, physical devastation, and in their way of life was substantial. More than 600,000 soldiers died in battle, 260,000 from the South. Other human casualties from sickness, accidents, murders and executions from both sides together totaled over 400,000. The wounded totaled approximately 500,000. A significant number of these wounded were permanently disabled amputees.(14)

In January of 1863, the U.S. government estimated that the war was costing \$ 2.5 million per day. By the end of the war the Union had spent over 6 billion dollars and the Confederacy had spent over 2 billion dollars.(14)

The period between 1865 and 1877 when the U.S. Government attempted to resolve the consequences of the Civil War is known as Reconstruction. Some historians mark the beginning of Reconstruction as January 1, 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation.(3)

Before the war was officially over, president Abraham Lincoln issued The Emancipation Proclamation in two executive orders. First, on September 22, 1862, all slaves were freed from any Confederate state that did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863. Then on January 1, 1863 each state where this applied was named. Then, to make the Emancipation Proclamation into Constitutional law, the 13 th Amendment, which stated, "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude... shall exist within the United States..." was ratified on December 6 th 1865.(3)(7)

In addition to those freed by the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13 th Amendment were thousands of blacks who sought refuge in Union encampments in the South. They were officially called "Freedmen" after the U.S. Congress passed the Confiscation Act of 1862. Under this act, Confederates who did not surrender within 60 days of the act's passage were to be punished by having their slaves freed. Also, before this act there was no clear directive for field commanders who were occupying Southern territory. As troops advanced, slaves sought refuge in Union camps, and Federal commanders were confused over their obligations to the refugees. Some freed the slaves, others sent them back to their masters for lack of means to care for them. The Confiscation Act declared all slaves taking refuge behind Union lines captives of war who were to be set free. The Act essentially paved the way for the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13 th Amendment and solved the immediate dilemma facing the army concerning the status of slaves within its jurisdiction.(14)

The 13th Amendment raised many questions about the laws concerning freedom and human rights. How would it affect everyday life? How would freed people become citizens? How would they become voters? Are they really free if they have no jobs, no belongings and no place to live except with their former owners? What about education? How will the newly freed learn to read and write? The United States Constitution and Declaration of Independence had to be reexamined. Especially this statement from the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

Unalienable Rights, meaning everyone has rights and that the government can not interfere with its citizens life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Until the 13 <sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865 these unalienable rights were, for the most part, reserved for men of European descent and usually for those who owned property. A radical program was necessary for this new amendment to work.(3)

An early attempt to support the newly freed was the Freedman's Bureau. In 1863 the war department created the "American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission" to suggest methods for dealing with emancipated slaves. The commission's key conclusion was that no bureau or agency set up to help the ex-slaves should become a permanent institution but should instead encourage the blacks to become self-reliant as quickly as possible.

Out of this commission's report on March 4, 1865, came, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, also known as the "Freedmen's Bureau." Heading the bureau was General Oliver O. Howard, a graduate of Bowdoin and West point and a very distinguished Civil War veteran. Despite it's official title it's main purpose was to help the more than four million former slaves, most with any resources or education populating the South after the war. Congress created the Freedman's Bureau, with a life span of just one year, to distribute clothing, food, and fuel to destitute freedmen and to oversee "all subjects relating to their condition" in the South. The famous phrase, "Forty acres and a mule" was the slogan for a Reconstruction land-grant plan that came out of the Freedman's Bureau but in the end only about 2,000 South Carolina and 1,500 Georgia freedmen actually received the land they had been promised. That was less than one percent of the four million ex-slaves populating the South.(14)

Perhaps the most important contribution the bureau made to Reconstruction efforts involved expanding educational opportunities to emancipated African-Americans. Lacking adequate resources, the bureau did not establish new schools itself, but instead acted as a catalyst between Northern relief societies and local governments and individuals. By 1869, about 3,000 new schools serving more than 150,000 pupils, as well as dozens of evening and private schools, had been established. Working with the American Missionary Association and the American Freedman's Union Commission, the bureau also founded and staffed the first black colleges in the South, all of which were initially designed to train black teachers who would teach black students.(8)

Although it officially existed for only one year, experiencing corruption and funding problems and a proposed bill to strengthen it in 1865 was vetoed by President Andrew Johnson the Freedman's Bureau is seen as having made many significant strides toward changing the uncertain lives of the newly freed in a positive manner.

In addition to bringing forth the empowerment of formerly enslaved people was the huge task of rebuilding the infrastructure of southern states. There was enormous physical devastation in the South. Crops and farm animals were destroyed, homes, schools, businesses and other structures were burned to the ground. Roads and bridges were no longer passable. People who had been wealthy all their lives were now living in desperate poverty. The war had radically changed the lives of the southern people. Mark Twain describes it here:

In the North one hears the war mentioned, in social conversation, once a month; sometimes as often as once a week; but as a distinct subject for talk, it has long ago been relieved of duty...The case is very different in the South. There, every man you meet was in the war, and every lady you meet saw the war. The war is the great chief topic of conversation, it is vivid and constant; the interest in other topics is fleeting... In the South, the war is what A.D. is elsewhere: they date from it. (3)

The following excerpts from Sarah Morgan Dawson; A Confederate Woman's Diary give the reader a glimpse into the desperation felt by those who lived in the South:

And these days that are going by remind me of Hal, too. I am walking in our footsteps of last year. The eighth was the day we gave him a party, on his return home. I see him so distinctly standing near the pier table, talking to Mr. Sparks, whom he had met only that morning, and who, three weeks after, had Harry's blood upon his hands. He is a murderer now, without aim or object in life, as before; with only one desire - to die - and death still flees from him, and he dares not rid himself of life.

All those dancing there that night have undergone trial and affliction since. Father is dead, and Harry. Mr. Trezevant lies at Corinth with his skull fractured by a bullet; every young man there has been in at least one battle since, and every woman has cried over her son, brother, or sweetheart, going away to the wars, or lying sick and wounded. And yet we danced that night, and never thought of bloodshed! The week before Louisiana seceded, Jack Wheat stayed with us, and we all liked him so much, and he thought so much of us; - and last week - a week ago to-day - he was killed on the battlefield of Shiloh.

but the survivor will suffer even more than we do now. If we stay, how shall we live? I have seventeen hundred dollars in Confederate notes now in my "running-bag," and three or four in silver. The former will not be received there, the latter might last two days. If we save our house and furniture, it is at the price of starving. This is not living. Home is lost beyond all hope of recovery; if we wait, what we have already saved will go, too; so we had better leave at once, with what clothing we have, which will certainly establish us on the footing of ladies, if we chance to fall among vulgar people who never look beyond. I fear the guerrillas will attack the town to-night; if they do, God help mother!(15)

In that last paragraph Sarah alludes to the inflation of confederate money which had inflated to a rate where more than \$ 60 would be needed to exchange for \$ 1 of gold.(14)

In addition to the trauma of poverty and destruction, fear sprung up due to the change in status quo between white southerners and the people they previously considered property.

In this excerpt from the diary of Mary Chesnut, she describes how she no longer feels safe around the slaves she previously trusted:

September 21, 1861...Poor Betsey Witherspoon was murdered!... Murdered by her own people. Her negroes.

September 24, 1861...Somehow today I feel that the ground is cut away from under my feet. Why should they treat me any better than they have done cousin Betsey Witherspoon?

[My sister] Kate and I sat up late and talked it all over...Kate's maid came in-a strong-built mulatto woman. She was dragging in a mattress. "Missis, I have brought my bed to sleep in your room while Mars David is at society Hill. You ought not stay in a room by yourself these times."...

"for the life of me," said Kate gravely, "I cannot make up my mind. Does she mean to take care of me-or to murder me?"...Those black hands strangling and smothering Mrs. Witherspoon's gray head under the counterpane haunted her. So we sat up and talked the long night through.(1)

The task of recovering from financial and human losses, providing for former slaves, rebuilding the south and bringing the country back into a consciousness of being one nation again was great. Challenges came up daily and had to be addressed. There were also those who put energy and influence into going against the positive steps that were being made.

And what about the former military officials from the Confederate army who had trained as U.S. Soldiers before the war? Were they traitors? Should they be welcomed in Congress as lawmakers and representatives? They were still in power in the Southern states. Almost immediately after the war they created "Black Codes." The rules outlined in these codes invaded every aspect of the lives of blacks especially where there would be interactions with whites including personal relationships, marriage, housing and employment. This example from *Mississippi Black Codes 1865* shows how these laws restricted a Black person's freedom to resign from a place of employment.

...any freedman, free negro or mulatto legally employed by said employer has illegally deserted said employment, such justice of the peace or member of the board of police issue his warrant or warrants...commanding him to arrest said deserter, and return him or her to said employer...costs of said warrants and arrest and return, which shall be set off for so much against the wages of said deserter.(12)(13)

These oppressive laws, which sprung up from people's fear of those who were formerly enslaved, were enacted to keep black people disempowered. Many southern whites projected their own feeling of disempowerment after the war onto blacks blaming them for the war. As a result of these "Black Codes" violence erupted. There was rioting in Memphis, Tennessee and New Orleans, Louisiana. Black churches, schools and homes were targeted. The state governments did nothing to prosecute the instigators of the violence.(3)

President Lincoln wanted to reconcile the nation with kindness and forgiveness. He stated that the South had not really left the union, it was only some southern people who had rebelled. He wanted to settle it like a family fight. However, not all Northerners agreed with the President, many people were angry and wanted to see those responsible in the South punished. Others felt that the South had suffered enough through the war.(3)

After Lincoln's assassination in April of 1865, Vice President Andrew Johnson became President and took over control of Reconstruction for the next two years. This time is often referred to as "Presidential Reconstruction." As mentioned earlier, the Freedmen's Bureau, which Congress had created after the Emancipation Proclamation, was already providing food clothing, shelter and schools for the newly freed blacks. But, since it was set up as a temporary solution other laws were enacted.(7)

After the war a series of amendments and legislative reforms from 1865 to 1871 formed the foundation of Reconstruction. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 laid out the process for readmitting Southern states into the Union. In 1868, the Fourteenth Amendment provided former slaves with national citizenship, stating that everyone, including blacks, born or naturalized in the United States is a citizen and that no individual state can take away that citizenship. And, that all men who are at least twenty one years old will be counted when determining a states population to apportion representatives in Congress. In 1870 the Fifteenth Amendment granted African American men the right to vote, stating that all citizens of the United states were able to vote

and that no individual states could interfere with this based on "race, color, or previous condition of servitude." By the mid 1870s many formerly enslaved people were voting and being elected to public office. The first public schools were established in the south through the work of coalitions consisting of both whites and African Americans.(3)

Break down of this progress began around 1873 with the rise in white paramilitary organizations and antireconstruction political groups. The White League, Red Shirts, and Ku Klux Klan sought to intimidate and terrorize black people to keep them from

participating in elections. Throughout the former confederacy, white democrats calling themselves "Redeemers" regained control over state legislation. The withdrawal of federal troops in 1877, ordered by President Rutherford Hayes, caused a nearly complete reversal of all the the radical reforms of the early years of Reconstruction.(3)

The failure of Reconstruction had a disturbing effect on Southern society and culture and continues well into the 21st Century. It was not until the 1960s that real reforms began.

## **U. S. Presidents during Reconstruction**

Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865. 16 th President of the United States from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. During the U.S. Civil War he enacted the Emancipation Proclamation to free those people who were enslaved in the Southern states.

Andrew Johnson, 1808-1875. The 17 <sup>th</sup> President of the United States from 1865 to 1869. He took office after the assassination of President Lincoln during the closing months of the American Civil War. His lenient Reconstruction policies toward the South embittered the Radical Republicans in congress and led to his political downfall and to his impeachment. He was acquitted.(11)

Ulysses S. Grant, 1822-1885. The 18 th President of the United States from 1869-1876. He was elected because of his popularity as a General during the Civil War. However, his popularity waned as he trusted those around him who turned out to be corrupt. Millions of dollars from public funds were stolen. Economic chaos ensued during his presidency. When he left office people had forgotten about civil rights and elected Rutherford B. Hayes because of his promise to remove federal troops from the South.(11)

Rutherford B. Hayes, 1822-1893. The19th President of the United States from 1877 to 1881. He brought post Civil War Reconstruction to an end in the South by removing Martial Law in 1877.

# **Strategies**

The first part of the unit will introduce students to the themes of equality, negotiation and reconciliation and how these themes manifest in the United States and in world events. The work of Martin Luther King and Desmond Tutu will be presented and discussed.

The next part of the unit will introduce students to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth Constitutional Amendments and other laws designed to empower freed slaves that were enacted during the period of

Reconstruction. Students will describe the positive, although temporary, effectiveness of these laws through researching the successful elections of African Americans to positions in local and national governments. Students will also research the forces that brought down these successes such as The Ku Klux Klan, Black Codes and the oppressive attitudes of some of the politicians who were in power at the time.

To assess students' grasp of the concepts and events as presented they will be assigned daily journal entries written as if they were a particular person living at the time of Reconstruction. The culmination project assigned will be a timeline from 1864 to 1879. The timeline will include several illustrations of events, people and organizations, mini biographies of prominent African Americans of that time period, parallel world events, descriptions of Constitutional amendments and descriptions of organizations opposed to empowering freed slaves.

# Activities

The class of about twenty to twenty five eighth grade students, that is co-taught by a certified regular education Social Studies teacher and a certified Special Education teacher, will be organized into groups of four to five to research basic biographical information about prominent African Americans and one of the three Constitutional Amendments of the time period. Because the class is a mixture of regular education students and students who have special education IEPs, the instructors will set up the groups with students of varying skills and abilities in each. Because eighth graders connect to factual information better when they can relate to it in a personal way, they will be encouraged to find anecdotal personal information as well as facts about their assigned person's development as a lawmaker and how each Amendment affects them personally.

Students will be prompted with suggested websites to use. Research will take place in the school's tech lab since many students do not have Internet access at home. Teachers will work with each group at specific times to be sure that they are finding the necessary facts about each subject. The research sessions will be interspersed with lessons on chronological events of Reconstruction presented by teachers. At the culmination of the research each group will present their information to the class. Because the school is an Arts Magnet school the rubric for presenting information on the timeline will include an artistic component such as visual art, music or theater.

The lessons on the chronology of Reconstruction will be based on the information in the textbook currently being used in the classroom; primary sources such as personal letters and journals, law documents, propaganda and advertisements; art and literature of the time period; and teacher made materials. Students will be taught the events of Reconstruction in a cause and effect direct instruction model with oral participation based on student research, and exposure to primary sources, art and literature. Through class participation and written assignments students will be able to describe obstructions, attitudes and perceptions that prevented the success of Reconstruction.

Each student will choose several different "writers" for their journal entries. Teachers will provide them with specific choices for these actors depending on the situation which they will be responding to. These characters could include an actual person such as President Andrew Johnson or Frederick Douglass; or a fictitious person based on their historical situation such as: a freed slave, a southern widow living on a plantation who formerly owned slaves, a northern merchant or a member of the Ku Klux Klan. Students will compose journal entries

from two different actors for each journal writing assignment. Most entries will be assigned daily as homework and should be a reflection of the lesson presented in class that day.

## Sample Journal Writing Lessons :

Objective: Students will demonstrate knowledge of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution. Students will be assigned a journal entry written in response to the news of the Emancipation Proclamation and a journal entry written in response to the news of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment as seen through the eyes of one of the following characters: a newly freed plantation worker, a plantation owner, a member of Congress who voted against these changes, or a northern abolitionist. Through this exercise students should express their knowledge of what these acts entailed as well as their "writers'" hopes or fears for the future based on these changes.

Objective: After reading section 4 of : An Act to Regulate the Relation of Master and Apprentice, as Relates to Freedmen, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes from the Mississippi Black codes of 1865, (see Appendix A)students will demonstrate knowledge of these laws and reflect upon how they impacted citizens of that state through journal writing as one of the following actors: A former slave, a white landowner and former slave owner, a Union soldier sent to keep order, or a widow of a confederate soldier.

Objective: Students will demonstrate knowledge of a riot that took place on July 30 th 1866 in New Orleans during the time of Martial Law after the Civil War by writing a journal entry as it may have been written by one of the following people: President Andrew Johnson, General Philip Sheridan (The Union General who witnessed the riots), the Governor of Louisiana (James Madison Wells, a Unionist Democrat), a member of the angry white mob, a white person who was standing along side the blacks who were being attacked, or a black person who was being attacked by the mob.

Objective: Students will evaluate the necessity of Northern troops occupying Southern states through the eyes of those involved. They will choose from the following actors: President Johnson, General Robert E. Lee, a former confederate soldier who is now attending West Point Academy, an unemployed, amputee, former confederate soldier, a southern women who runs a dress shop in Virginia or a formerly enslaved person (man or woman) who is trying to start a grocery business in a busy town in Tennessee. Their writing should reflect the tensions between different groups of people involved as well as the personal opinions and feelings of their "writers."

Objective: Students will demonstrate an understanding of different viewpoints on the education of former slaves by writing a journal entry in reaction to the opening of an inclusive (for blacks and whites) public school in their town or city. As a group, the students will read aloud the following quote from abolitionist Charlotte Forten:

A truly wintry day. I have not had half as many scholars as usual. It was too cold for my "babies" to venture out. But altogether we had nearly a hundred. They were unusually bright today, and sang with the greatest spirit...After school the children went into a little cabin near, where they had kindled a fire, and had a grand "shout."(3) Students will choose "writers" from the following people: a Northern missionary traveling to the South to teach, a former slave owner who has hired several of his former slaves to work on his farm, a formerly enslaved person, a Northern merchant who sells school books, a poor white Southern teenager who never learned to read. Entries should reflect the impact of the opportunity to educate or the opportunity to receive an education on the people involved. This lesson can be assigned in two parts. Part one as the initial

reaction to the school opening and part two as the reflection on the changes brought to the area.

Objective: Students will describe the impact of the removal of Union troops from the south in 1877. This assignment is in two parts. Part one is the initial reaction of their "writers" to the removal of Martial Law. Part two will describe the impact on their "writers'" life several months later. Students may choose any "writers" offered in previous assignments that they have not used before. This assignment should contain a summary of the students' cumulative knowledge of the events of Reconstruction as well as their opinion of the success or failure of Reconstruction as seen through the eyes of their chosen "writers."

Objective: Students will apply their knowledge of the Truth and Reconciliation

proceedings in South Africa to similar, hypothetical, proceedings that could have occurred during the Reconstruction Era. This entry will be written from the view point of an observer of these proceedings. As their "writers," students can choose any of the ordinary citizens, black or white, from previous journal assignments ie: A formerly enslaved person, a former confederate soldier, a northern missionary traveling to the south to teach at a black school, etc. This assignment will be in three parts. Part one will be an observation of the actual proceedings. Parts two and three will be the writer's observation of relations between blacks and whites in the town or city where the writer lives at two different times in the year following the proceedings. This entry should create a picture of what true reconciliation would have looked like in the South.

# **Final Project Rubric**

### **Reconstruction Timeline 1865-1877**

Timeline must contain:

8-10 events of the Reconstruction Era

5-8 world events (1865-1877)

5-8 illustrations

profiles of at least 3 major players in Reconstruction

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8. African American Odyssey-Reconstruction and its Aftermath.

www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/aaohtml/exhibit/aopar5.html

### 9. Reconstruction Timeline

www.chmn.gmu.edu/courses/122/recon/chron.html

### 10. About.com: African-American History

http://afroamhistory-about.com

**11.** http//www.biography.com

12. Black Codes in the USA

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\_Codes\_in\_the\_USA

## 13. Cornell University Law School - LII/ Legal Information Institute

www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.amendment

**14.** http://www.civilwarhome.com

**15.** Dawson, Sarah Morgan. *A Confederate Girl's Diary*. First edition. 1997.© This work is the property of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It may be used freely by individuals for research, teaching and personal use as long as this statement of availability is included in the text.

## **Excerpt From Mississippi Black Codes - 1865**

# An Act to Regulate the Relation of Master and Apprentice, as Relates to Freedmen, Free Negroes, and Mulattoes

Section 4. If any apprentice shall leave the employment of his or her master or mistress, without his or her consent, said master or mistress may pursue and recapture said apprentice, and bring him or her before any justice of the peace of the county, whose duty it shall be to remand said apprentice to the service of his or her master or mistress; and in the event of a refusal on the part of said apprentice so to return, then said justice shall commit said apprentice to the jail of said county, on failure to give bond, to the next term of the county court; and it shall be the duty of said court at the first term thereafter to investigate said case, and if the court shall be of opinion that said apprentice left the employment of his or her master or mistress without good cause, to order him or her to be punished, as provided for the punishment of hired freedmen, as may be from time to time provided for by law for desertion, until he or she shall agree to return to the service of his or her master or mistress: Provided, that the court may grant continuances as in other cases: And provided further, that if the court shall believe that said apprentice had good cause to quit his said master or mistress, the court shall discharge said apprentice from said indenture, and also enter a judgment against the master or mistress for not more than one hundred dollars, from the use and benefit of said apprentice, to be collected on execution as in other cases.

# **Appendix B**

### New Haven Public Schools Curriculum Standard

### Unit VI. The Civil War Era and Reconstruction (1850-1877)

Students will study the Civil War and Reconstruction and describe the struggles that faced our nation when unresolved issues divided the people (5.7, 4.6). Students will show how the nation was forced to confront the evils of slavery and will analyze its legacy and the impact on American society that persists to this day. (2.8, 5.7) students will explain the significance of the Civil Rights Amendments (due process, equal protection, voting rights) and evaluate the persistent struggle required to apply and protect these right for all groups in American society. (1.5,5.5)

At the end of the unit the students will be able to identify the Civil War as a momentous event in American history. Students will understand that the Constitution protects individual rights yet the struggle to implement those protections continues into the present day. Students will explain the impact that Reconstruction programs had on transforming social relations in the South and the success and failures of those programs on improving economic and political positions of African Americans after the Civil War.

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