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# North or South: Who Killed Reconstruction?

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"Is *This* A Republican  
Form of Government?  
Is *This* Protecting Life,  
Liberty, or Property?"



*Harper's Weekly*,  
September 2, 1876

**Overview:** The twelve years after the Civil War proved to be a difficult time for America. Called *Reconstruction* by historians, this era saw an increase of freedom for former slaves. However, there was also great resistance to change. In 1877 attempts to reconstruct the South officially ended, leaving white-only governments in power. This Mini-Q asks you to decide who, North or South, was most responsible for the end of Reconstruction.

## The Documents:

- Document A: Terrorizing "Carpetbaggers" and "Scalawags"
- Document B: Targeting African-American Voters and Government Officials
- Document C: Problems and Scandals in the North
- Document D: Popular Opinion and Racism in the North

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A Mini Document Based Question (Mini-Q)

## Document A

**Source:** Albion Tourgee, Letter on Ku Klux Klan Activities. *New York Tribune*, May 1870.

**Note:** Tourgee was a white, Northern soldier who settled in North Carolina after the War. He served as a judge during Reconstruction and wrote this letter to the North Carolina Republican Senator, Joseph Carter Abbott.

It is my mournful duty to inform you that our friend John W. Stephens, State Senator from Caswell, is dead. He was foully murdered by the Ku-Klux in the Grand Jury room of the Court House on Saturday.... He was stabbed five or six times, and then hanged on a hook in the Grand Jury room.... Another brave, honest Republican citizen has met his fate at the hands of these fiends....

... I have very little doubt that I shall be one of the next victims. My steps have been dogged for months, and only a good opportunity has been wanting to secure to me the fate which Stephens has just met.... I say to you plainly that any member of Congress who, especially from the South, does not support, advocate, and urge immediate active and thorough measures to put an end to these outrages ... is a coward, a traitor, or a fool.

**Source:** *Independent Monitor*, September 1, 1868. Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.



### Document Analysis

1. In the image above, what group or groups is the KKK threatening?
2. According to Tourgee, what types of people are being attacked by the KKK? Why would the KKK attack these people?
3. How does the way that John Stephens was killed support the idea the Ku Klux Klan was a terrorist organization?
4. How does this document help answer the DBQ question?

## Document B

Source: Abram Colby, testimony to a joint House and Senate Committee in 1872.

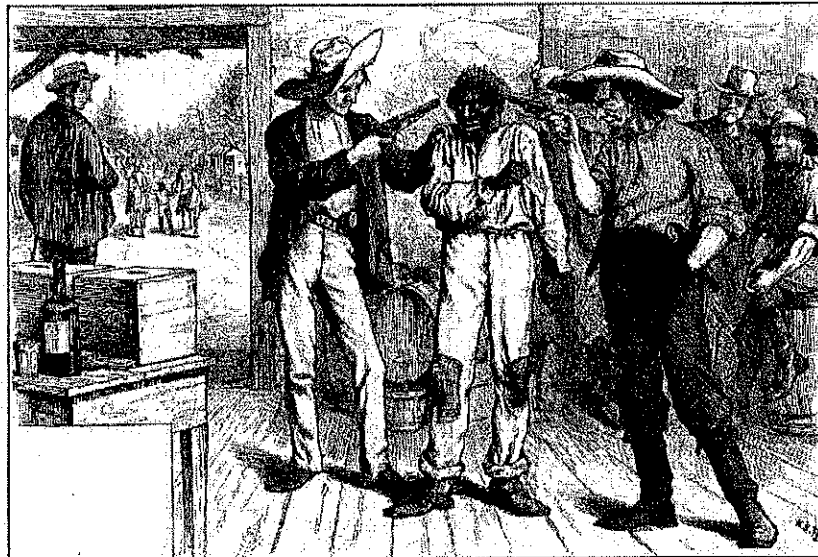
Note: Colby was a former slave who was elected to the Georgia State Legislature during Reconstruction.

**Colby:** On the 29th of October 1869, [the Klansmen] broke my door open, took me out of bed, took me to the woods and whipped me three hours or more and left me for dead. They said to me, "Do you think you will ever vote another damned Radical ticket?" I said, "If there was an election tomorrow, I would vote the Radical ticket." They set in and whipped me a thousand licks more, with sticks and straps that had buckles on the ends of them.

**Question:** What is the character of those men who were engaged in whipping you?

**Colby:** Some are first-class men in our town. One is a lawyer, one a doctor, and some are farmers.... They said I had voted for Grant and had carried the Negroes against them. About two days before they whipped me they offered me \$5,000 to go with them and said they would pay me \$2,500 in cash if I would let another man go to the legislature in my place. I told them that I would not do it if they would give me all the county was worth.... No man can make a free speech in my county. I do not believe it can be done anywhere in Georgia.

Source: *Harper's Weekly*,  
October 21, 1876.



Caption: "Of Course he wants to vote the Democratic ticket"

### Document Analysis

1. Why did the KKK attack Abram Colby?
2. According to Colby, what types of people make up the KKK?
3. What seems to be the ultimate goal of the KKK?
4. What is the main idea of the cartoon?

## Document C

Source: Gerald Danzer et al., *The Americans*, McDougal Littell, 1998.

“...in the 1870s, Northern voters grew indifferent to events in the South. Weary of the ‘Negro Question’ and ‘sick of carpet-bag’ government, many Northern voters shifted their attention to such national concerns as the Panic of 1873 and corruption in Grant’s administration.... Although political violence continued in the South ... the tide of public opinion in the North began to turn against Reconstruction policies.”

Source: *Harper's Weekly*, 1876



Caption: "U.S. 'In For It.' I hope I shall get to the bottom soon."

Note: U.S. are initials of President Ulysses S. Grant.

### Document Analysis

1. Explain the phrases “weary of the ‘Negro Question’” and “‘sick of carpet-bag’ government.”
2. What is President Grant trying to find in the barrel?
3. If President Grant was busy with scandals, what is likely to happen to his focus on Reconstruction efforts in the South?
4. Why might increased anger about corruption in government lead to less interest in government attempts to reconstruct the South?

## Document D

Source: Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction: Race, Labor and Politics in the Post-Civil War North, 1865-1901*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001.

In the fall of 1873, even the staunchly (firmly) pro-Grant and pro-freedman *Boston Evening Transcript* ran a letter ... arguing that "the blacks, as a people, are unfitted for the proper exercise of political duties.... The rising generation of ... blacks needed a period of probation and instruction; a period ... long enough for the black to have forgotten something of his condition as a slave and learned much of the true method of gaining honorable subsistence and of performing the duties of any position to which he might aspire."

Northern artist's portrayal of the South Carolina State Legislature during Reconstruction.



Source: The cover of *Harper's Weekly*, March 14, 1874

### Document Analysis

1. According to the letter from the *Boston Evening Transcript*, why did some people believe blacks were unfit to be government officials?
2. How does the letter from the *Boston Evening Transcript* show that racism existed in the North?
3. How do this cartoon and letter help explain why Northerners lost interest in Reconstruction?
4. How does the image above depict black politicians in the South?