

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview.

Reconstruction Repair Crew (20–25 Minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS

Goal

Students act as a crisis response team tasked with “cleaning up” the disaster left by the North/South War and Reconstruction. They must propose concrete solutions to three specific problems: (a) restoring what the Union Army destroyed, (b) rolling back the military dictatorship to restore individual rights, and (c) healing race relations between whites and former slaves.

Instructions

1. You can have students work as individuals or in pairs/small groups.
2. Read the instructions together as a class.
3. Students complete all three sections in 10–12 minutes.
4. Review as a class, discussing which proposals are most realistic and which problems hardest to solve.

Debrief Questions

- Tough question to answer for Part A: Sheridan said, “The people must be left nothing but their eyes to weep with.” Should your organization refuse to help people who supported the Confederacy? Why or why not?
- Tough question to answer for Part B: The Constitution grants no power to “reinstate militarily conquered states.” If the Constitution is on your side, why can’t you just appeal to the Supreme Court? What might stop them from helping?
- Tough question to answer for Part C: How could churches and religious organizations play a role in healing race relations? What limits might they face?

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The year is 1866. The North/South War is over. The South lies in ruins. Union General Sheridan boasted that the people of the Shenandoah Valley were “left nothing but their eyes to weep with over the war.” Sherman’s army burned a path through Georgia, destroying farms, barns, homes, and food supplies. Families are starving. The Union Army now occupies the South under military rule. Former slaves have been promised land and power but have no real protection. White Southerners are humiliated, angry, and destitute. Race relations are explosive. Corruption is rampant.

You have been hired by a private relief organization to design a plan to fix this mess. You have no control over the federal government. You must work with whatever local leaders, churches, and communities will cooperate. Your goal is threefold.

Part A: Restoring What the Union Army Destroyed (5–6 minutes)

Problem: Sheridan’s troops burned barns and houses, killed or stole farm animals, and destroyed crops just before winter. Sherman’s army destroyed railroads, factories, and entire towns across Georgia. Families have no shelter, food, or means to earn a living. Your task: Propose **three specific actions** your relief organization can take to help restore what was destroyed. Be practical. You have limited money and resources.

Part B: Pushing Back Against Military Dictatorship (5–6 minutes)

Problem: The South is divided into five military zones run by Union generals. Residents can be arrested, tried by military courts, and jailed without civilian trials. The First Reconstruction Act (1867) forces states to create new constitutions and ratify the Fourteenth Amendment before they can rejoin the Union. Senator Chandler said a rebel “has sacrificed all his rights. He has no right to life, liberty, property, or the pursuit of happiness.” Your task: Propose three specific ways to restore individual rights and push back against military rule, without starting another war.

Part C: Healing Race Relations Between Whites and Former Slaves (5–6 minutes)

Problem: Reconstruction has worsened relations between “races.” Northern politicians promised former slaves power over their former masters and encouraged them to take revenge. After 12 years, resentment built up. When Union troops leave, former slaves who acted on that encouragement will be vulnerable to revenge. Neither side trusts the other. Many whites owned no slaves and even opposed slavery before the war, but they are still being punished alongside slave owners. Your task: Propose three actions your organization can take to reduce racial violence and build trust between whites and former slaves.