

OLLI at DU Syllabus

Course Title: The Reconstruction Era (1865-77): America's first attempt to form a multiracial democracy.

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Site: OLLI West

Term: Winter 2025

Course Sessions: 6 Weeks

Recommended Readings: Eric Foner, *Forever Free* Eric Foner, *The Second Founding*, WEB Du Bois *Black Reconstruction in America*

Week 1 Identity and Agency: We will establish our class norms and introduce ourselves. We will then look at the critical role African Americans played in the Civil War, and how the war aims of the North changed in response.

Week 2 The first draft. The 13th Amendment and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address were the first attempts to balance accountability and reconciliation as the war ended. Sherman's meeting with African American leaders in Charleston led to Special Field Order #15, which redistributed land from planters to newly freed African Americans. Congress established the Freedmen's Bureau to support African Americans economically and politically

Week 3 Radicals at the helm. After Lincoln's assassination, Tennessee Democrat Andrew Johnson became President. His vision of reconstruction was very different from that of Thaddeus Stevens, Charles Sumner, and other Radical Republicans in Congress. White supremacists fought efforts to enfranchise African Americans with terrorism, especially in Memphis and New Orleans. The election of 1866 was voters' opportunity to weigh in on what type of reconstruction they wanted.

Week 4 Amend this. The 14th Amendment addressed a broad array of issues after the end of the war and is arguably the most important Amendment today. African Americans enthusiastically entered the political arena, with the support of white allies from the north and south.

Week 5 The peak. The late 1860's and early 1870's, African Americans were elected to the US Senate, Congress, and a myriad of state and local offices. Women, however, did not gain the right to vote, splitting the women's rights movement. White Terrorist violence was addressed by Congress with a series of Enforcement Acts. Grant's Administration was beset by corruption, providing an opening to Democrats to "redeem" southern states.

Week 6 Ending and memory. The Supreme Court severely undercut the Enforcement Acts with a series of rulings that helped terrorists get away with murder. The economy slid into a depression after the Panic of 1873, weakening Republicans. The disputed election of 1876 was resolved in part with the removal of federal troops from the south, abandoning African Americans and their allies to white supremacists. How can we best honor the memory of that time?