

# Course Description

## **HUM 3310: American Reconstruction**

The historical period referred to as “reconstruction” is often undervalued in the historical and cultural discourse of the black experience as the more vivid periods of slavery and, later, the Civil Rights Movement, take the foreground. The period of 1865 to roughly 1877 is worthy of more study as it retained so much of the injustices present during the slavery period and produced volumes of text that cemented the failure of the United States to reconstruct or really ever construct, equitable standards of living for thousands of former slaves.

The cultural, social, and political rhetoric of the time period is the primary focus of the course as students seek to discover the voices of reconstruction. While students may gain knowledge of important dates, people, and places in social science and history courses, this course gives dimension and authenticity to that information. Students will read speeches, journal entries, legislation, and articles written by and about historical figures they know of, as well as some they have yet to “meet.” Texts are complemented by documentaries, film, audio recordings, and other multimedia that provide further context and authenticity for historical texts. While discovering the rich content, students analyze diction and syntax as tools for communicating an author’s purpose to his or her intended audiences. More specifically, we investigate evidence of the authors’ biases and social-political agendas.

We examine texts written during the American Reconstruction period. Students learn and analyze use of rhetorical strategies by studying exemplars and, in turn, crafting original written and oral discourse based on their understanding. Paired texts are implemented throughout the unit for a variety of purposes. For example, in one learning activity, students compare Black Codes with the U.S. Constitution in order to delineate the precise inhumanity and unconstitutionality of Black Codes. The course concludes with students presenting a speech, hands-on activism project, and/or multimedia project in which they use rhetorical skills to appeal to decision-makers regarding a self-selected social issue.