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**DOCUMENT 12.13**

**THOMAS NAST, "This Is a White Man's Government"**

1874

In the 1870s, as Southerners sought to remove African Americans by force from participating in politics, many white Northerners lost interest in the pursuit of justice

of every description, particularly the work on fences and ditches, to be done to my satisfaction, and must be done over until I am satisfied that it is done as it should be. No wood to burn, nor light wood, nor poles, nor timber for boards, nor wood for any purpose whatever must be gotten above the house occupied by Henry Beasley—nor must any trees be cut down nor any wood used for any purpose, except for firewood, without my permission.

Grimes Family Papers (#3357), 1882, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media, George Mason University.

### PRACTICING Historical Thinking

**Identify:** Select five details of a sharecropper's job description in this contract and summarize them.

**Analyze:** What is the writer's attitude toward sharecroppers? How do the details you choose reveal this attitude?

**Evaluate:** What other kinds of primary sources would help us understand the economic status of African American Southerners after the Civil War?

## APPLYING HISTORICAL THINKING SKILLS

### SKILL REVIEW | Comparison, Interpretation, and Synthesis

Read the two documents below by historians of Reconstruction. What are the similarities in their arguments? What are the differences? If you were to incorporate a piece of information or a document to support one of these authors, what would you incorporate? In what ways would it support the author?

Army officers had neither the orders nor the desire to provide military protection for the fledgling Republican state governments created by the Reconstruction Acts. Like any other states in the Union, these were expected to provide for their own security. Anxious to gain political legitimacy in the eyes of a white population who largely regarded them as "regimes," these state governments had strong reasons to downplay the subversive activities within their borders. Instead, . . . [t]hey respected the civil liberties of ex-Confederates and, with only a few exceptions, permitted their bitterest foes full participation [in] the political process. They treated the Ku Klux Klan's extensive campaigns of murder, assault, and intimidation as mere criminal activity. Those accused of such acts therefore enjoyed full access to the courts—and often dominated them.

Mark Grimsley, "Wars for the American South: The First and Second Reconstructions Considered as Insurgencies," *Civil War History* 58, no. 1 (2012): 11–12.

The central role of the military has been underappreciated in the histories of Reconstruction. Studies duly note the use of military force and announce that the South experienced "military rule," but scholars rarely give the army its due as the central agents for social and political change. When they do, the focus most often falls on the Freedmen's Bureau agents and not the troops who operated independently and lasted beyond the demise of this agency, which was largely dismantled in 1869. Nor have they often looked beyond the district level to see the dynamic of relationships in communities between lower-level army officers and citizens. With rare exception, the tendency has been to depict soldiers as pawns in the power struggle between the president and the Radicals in Congress. In fact, with the exception of a few known Radicals such as Phil Sheridan, soldiers have been portrayed as trying to remain apolitical and as unbiased as possible in the administration of their duties, although their prejudices toward a certain brand of free labor have been widely recorded. This approach has left unexamined soldiers' own views on the political situation and what they thought about postwar readjustment. Part of the problem has been the tendency to measure the army's impact through what happened to the freedpeople, when soldiers had a broader mission that started with preserving law and order while attempting to nourish loyalty to the national government, especially among white people who had constituted their former enemies.

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William Blair, "The Use of Military Force to Protect the Gains of Reconstruction," *Civil War History* 51, no. 4 (2005): 388–402, 390–391.

### STEP 1 Comparison

Determine the similarities and differences between the two texts. Answer the following questions about the arguments from Mark Grimsley and William Blair:

- What do both texts say about the state of law and order in the reconstructed South?
- How do both texts characterize the difficulties and damages of Reconstruction?

### STEP 2 Interpretation

As you learned from previous chapters, qualifying evidence influences your historical argument. Recall that Frederick Douglass (Doc. 7.9) serves as an exceptional, unusual representative of his demographic, not the norm. For example, the second Thomas Nast image in this chapter (Doc. 12.13) aligns more closely with the renegade world depicted by Grimsley and less closely with the description by Blair. Conversely, Document 12.12, which provides excerpts from two new amendments to the US Constitution, lends fuller support to the claims made by Blair.

Examine the final set of documents in this chapter, and align them to either interpretation by completing the chart on the next page.

Document	Aligns with Grimsley. Why?	Aligns with Blair. Why?
Doc. 12.11, Anti-Reconstruction Cartoon		
Doc. 12.12, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments		X
Doc. 12.13, Thomas Nast, "This Is a White Man's Government"	X	
Doc. 12.14, Sharecropper Contract		

### STEP 3 *Synthesis*

Write a paragraph that contrasts these historians' views of the military in the reconstructed South. Using all of the documents in the chart, determine which of the two interpretations is more compelling, and explain why.