The Problems of Reconstruction
The Southern States had been devastated by the War. The Southern economy and social structure was in ruins.

Over 620,000 people were dead as a result of the Civil War (about 2% of America’s population at the time).

4 million former slaves were now free but now they needed jobs and housing to support themselves and their families. In addition, many former slaves could not read or write. In 1865 African-Americans could not legally vote in most states and did not have citizenship or the legal protections that came with it.

In general the nation faced 4 major problems during the Reconstruction Era.
1. How to Bring the South back into the Union?

- There was nothing in the law or the constitution about bringing a state back into the Union.
- Some people took President Abraham Lincoln’s viewpoint that the Confederacy never legally existed and so the Southern States legally had never left the Union.
- Many Northerners, especially the radical republicans, wanted to punish the South. Lincoln had promised that there would be no revenge after the war but then he was assassinated.
- The debate over whether to forgive or punish the South for the Civil War would soon pit Congress against Lincoln’s successor, President Andrew Johnson.
2. How to rebuild the Southern Economy?

• Without slavery, the old Southern plantation system simply would not work, a new system was needed to replace slavery which had been used in the South since Jamestown.

• Cotton production suffered significantly as a result of the Civil War and Northern textile factories badly needed it to recover soon.

• Many Southern cities also needed to be rebuilt along with the southern railroad system. Southerners also wanted to build more factories to compete with the North.
• In March 1865, the Freedmen’s Bureau was created to meet the needs of former slaves, most of whom had no home, job, or the skills/education necessary to get them.

• The Freedmen’s Bureau was also supposed to provide food and medical assistance to former slaves until they could meet their own needs.

• In addition the Freedmen’s Bureau helped to establish schools for African-Americans in order to teach them the knowledge and skills they had been denied as slaves. The question remained though, could the Freedmen’s Bureau meet the needs of all 4 million former slaves?

3. How to meet the basic needs of former slaves?
In addition to their basic needs, the rights of former slaves were also under threat. African-Americans were still largely denied citizenship which left them vulnerable to laws that purposely discriminated against them.

The main challenge was how could the Federal government extend citizenship to 4 million former slaves all at once?

In addition the Federal government had to consider a way to extend voting rights to African Americans and ensure that this right was protected under the constitution.
The Homestead Act gave families western land at a low price if the family moved to that land and set up a farm or some other kind of economic activity there. This accelerated settlement of the western territories. Many former slaves, soldiers & others took advantage of this.

To help settlers gain the skills to establish farms in the west, Congress passed the Morrill Act to help states set up public colleges. These colleges primarily taught students agricultural and mechanical skills (A&M).

When western settlers started to threaten Native American reservations, Congress passed the Dawes Act which split up reservation land and gave it to individual Native American families. Although this act was originally supposed to protect Indian property rights, it instead forced tribes to divide ownership of their land and disrupted their culture.
Both the Homestead and Morrill Acts were important to the settlement of the west after the Civil War. Former soldiers, factory workers, and freedmen frequently took advantage of these acts.

- Read the article at the Homestead and Morrill Acts. In your journal create a pamphlet or advertisement in which you explain to Americans how the Homestead Act and the Morrill Act could help them move out west and start a new life for themselves. Be creative.

- This assignment will be part of the 4th Nine Weeks Journal Check.