

**HISTORY 2112**  
**SAMPLE SHORT ANSWERS**  
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Below is a range of answers to the following short answer question, ranging from high A to low F. Carefully read and compare each answer and my analysis of each to get an idea of how to prepare to answer the essay questions on the actual exams.

1. Question: Identify, describe, and tell the importance of the following: **Black Codes**

*This answer is as close to perfect as it gets. It is well-organized and easy to understand; it includes every speck of relevant information about the Black Codes; It includes not only all the relevant information to be found in the Course Outline but details mentioned only in class. It links in the Black Codes to other events past and future in good cause-and-effect fashion. It leaves out nothing, and it doesn't include anything that doesn't belong. Finally, it tells the importance of the Black Codes (which the question expressly requires): The Black Codes angered the Radicals, led to the passage of laws that Johnson believed unconstitutional, and ultimately put Johnson and the Radicals on a collision course that changed the very nature of Reconstruction. This is as good as it gets.*

*10 points (and more, if I could).*

**ANSWER 1**

*This is a very high-A answer.*

The Civil War was not only about state sovereignty and secession but also about slavery in that the southern states seceded in order to protect slavery and President Lincoln ultimately made the war about slavery's destruction. In 1865, with the South beaten, the nation ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which ended slavery nationwide. But the defeated southern states then passed laws known as Black Codes. (A code is a group of laws on a particular subject, such as a criminal code or a housing code.) The Black Codes gave the former slaves, or freedmen, certain rights that they hadn't had as slaves, such as the right to legally marry, the right to own property, and the right to bring lawsuits in court. But the Black Codes also put restrictions on the freedmen that whites didn't share. For instance, while a state's Black Code might allow the freedmen to bring lawsuits, it might also prohibit them from serving on juries. Some Black Codes even banned freedmen from holding any jobs other than that of field hand. Thus, under the Black Codes, the freedmen were still treated in some ways as slaves, or certainly as people with fewer rights than whites. This angered the Radical Republicans, since it seemed to them that southern whites were acting as if the Confederacy hadn't lost. The Radicals thus began passing federal laws designed to undermine the Black Codes and give freedmen more rights (such as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill in 1866, which gave the Freedmen's Bureau the right to hear cases brought by the freedmen, and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which declared that everyone who had been born in the United States was a citizen with the same rights as all other citizens. President Andrew Johnson believed these laws to be unconstitutional, but Congress overrode his vetoes. This set the stage for a confrontation between Johnson and the Radicals in the congressional elections of 1866 which resulted in the end of Presidential Reconstruction, with its forgive-and-forget policy, and the beginning of Congressional Reconstruction with its much harsher attitude towards the South.

**ANSWER 2**  
*This is an A answer.*

*This is still a very solid answer. It has left off a few details here and there. The biggest difference is that the student hasn't related Black Codes to the Civil War and to the ultimate triumph of the Radical Republicans as the above answer did (although he does mention that they did produce tension between Johnson and the Radicals). Nevertheless, it's still a very good answer.*

*9 or 10 points.*

In 1865, America ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which ended slavery nationwide. But southern states then passed laws known as Black Codes. The Black Codes gave the former slaves, or freedmen, certain rights that they hadn't had as slaves, such as the right to legally marry and the right to bring lawsuits in court. But the Black Codes also put restrictions on the freedmen that whites didn't share. For instance, while a state's Black Code might allow the freedmen to bring lawsuits, it might also prohibit them from serving on juries. Some Black Codes even banned freedmen from holding any jobs other than that of field hand. Thus, under the Black Codes, the freedmen were still treated in some ways as slaves, or certainly as people with fewer rights than whites. This angered the Radical Republicans, since it seemed to them that southern whites were acting as if the Confederacy hadn't lost. The Radicals thus began passing federal laws designed to undermine the Black Codes and give freedmen more rights (such as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill in 1866, which gave the Freedmen's Bureau the right to hear cases brought by the freedmen, and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which declared that everyone who had been born in the United States was a citizen with the same rights as all other citizens. President Andrew Johnson believed these laws to be unconstitutional, but Congress overrode his vetoes.

**ANSWER 3**  
*This is a B answer.*

*This answer is still fundamentally correct, but it leaves out still more details. Like answer 2 above, it also fails to connect the Black Codes backward to the ending of slavery and forward to the tension between the radicals and Johnson, although it does include (cause and effect) the Radicals' immediate response.*

*8 points.*

The Black Codes were southern state laws that gave former slaves, or freedmen, certain rights that they hadn't had as slaves, such as the right to legally marry and the right to bring lawsuits in court. But the Black Codes also put restrictions on the freedmen that whites didn't share, such as prohibiting them from serving on juries. Some Black Codes even banned freedmen from holding any jobs other than that of field hand. This angered the Radical Republicans, who responded by passing federal laws designed to undermine the Black Codes and give freedmen more rights (such as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill in 1866, which gave the Freedmen's Bureau the right to hear cases brought by the freedmen, and the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which declared that everyone who had been born in the United States was a citizen with the same rights as all other citizens.

*This answer is identical to the superb Answer 1 above, with one huge exception; it omits the passage that tells the importance of the Black Codes, i.e. how they influenced or reflected the development of history. Since the instructions require the student to “identify, describe, and tell the importance” of the term, this student has failed to follow the instructions and left out a crucial part of the answer, no matter how good the rest of it is, immediately knocking down from a high A to a C. This is one of the most common mistakes that students make on short answer questions. Be careful that you don’t make it!*

*7 points.*

#### **ANSWER 4**

*This is a C answer. It’s a variation on Answer 1 above.*

In 1865, with the South beaten, the nation ratified the Thirteenth Amendment, which ended slavery nationwide. But the defeated southern states then passed laws known as Black Codes. (A code is a group of laws on a particular subject, such as a criminal code or a housing code.) The Black Codes gave the former slaves, or freedmen, certain rights that they hadn’t had as slaves, such as the right to legally marry, the right to own property, and the right to bring lawsuits in court. But the Black Codes also put restrictions on the freedmen that whites didn’t share. For instance, while a state’s Black Code might allow the freedmen to bring lawsuits, it might also prohibit them from serving on juries. Some Black Codes even banned freedmen from holding any jobs other than that of field hand. Thus, under the Black Codes, the freedmen were still treated in some ways as slaves, or certainly as people with fewer rights than whites.

*This answer starts leaving out some fundamental things, such as the fact that the Black Codes were laws passed by the southern state governments (based on the student's description, it might be possible to think that they were laws of Congress.) The student simply assumed I would know she was talking about the southern states, but I never assume anything when reading an answer—it's the student's job to tell me. Additionally, the student states that the Radicals passed the freedmen's Bureau Bill in 1867 (by which time Congressional Reconstruction had begun), rather than in 1866, when it was one of the points of conflict between the radicals and Johnson.. While explaining the Black Codes' importance to a degree, the student doesn't take it as far as answer 1 did, instead leaving it more like answers 2 and 3.*

*6 or 7 points.*

*This answer leaves out a lot of fundamentals and does almost nothing to relate the Black Codes to the larger picture, although it does include the hugely important point that it was key to the conflict between Johnson and the Radicals.*

*5 or 6 points.*

### **ANSWER 5**

*This is a borderline-C answer.*

The Black Codes were laws that gave former slaves, or freedmen, certain rights that they hadn't had as slaves, such as the right to legally marry. But the Black Codes also put restrictions on the freedmen that whites didn't share, such as prohibiting them from serving on juries. This angered the Radical Republicans, who responded by passing federal laws designed to undermine the Black Codes and give freedmen more rights (such as the Freedmen's Bureau Bill in 1867, which gave the Freedmen's Bureau the right to hear cases brought by the freedmen.

### **ANSWER 6**

*This is a borderline D answer.*

The Black Codes were laws that put restrictions on the freedmen, such as prohibiting them from serving on juries. This angered the Radical Republicans, who responded by passing laws designed to undermine the Black Codes and give freedmen more rights. Johnson thought that these laws were unconstitutional, which led to a fight between Johnson and the radicals.

*This answer is like the one just above, except that it leaves out that critical “importance” aspect. Maybe it implies that aspect, but the student needs to come right out and say it, and he hasn’t done that here.*

*4 points.*

**ANSWER 7**  
*This is an F answer.*

The Black Codes were laws that put restrictions on the freedmen, such as prohibiting them from serving on juries.

*This answer is strange in that the only thing it does is to tell the importance of the Black Codes, without identifying or describing the rig at all. In that regard it’s the opposite of Answer 4 above.*

*3 points.*

**ANSWER 8**  
*This is an F answer.*

The Black Codes led to a fight between Johnson and the Radical Republicans, which the Radical Republicans won.

*This is as stripped down as it gets, omitting the importance and any relation to the Civil War, the ending of slavery, or the reactions of the radicals or the fight between the Radicals and Johnson. The statement isn’t even entirely correct—the Black Codes gave the freedmen rights as well as putting restrictions on them.*

*3 points.*

**ANSWER 9**  
*This is an F answer.*

The Black Codes were laws that put restrictions on the freedmen.

*The only positive thing about this answer is that it does correctly identify the Black Codes as laws, although the student fails to tell me which government(s) passed them or what those laws did. The student fails to relate the Black Codes to the tension between Johnson and the Radicals, other than implying (not expressly stating) that they may have contributed to that tension (for all the student tells me, the Radicals could have been the ones passing the Black Codes!) And what are the Industrial Revolution and the Homestead Strike doing here?*

*2 or 3 points.*

**ANSWER 10**  
*This is an F answer.*

The Black Codes were laws passed after the war. Johnson and the Radicals passed a lot of laws and fought about them. A lot of such fighting took place in the Industrial Revolution such as in the Homestead Strike.

*This answer is similar to Answer 8 but even more deficient.*

*2 points.*

**ANSWER 11**  
*This is an F answer.*

The Black Codes were laws that people disagreed about.

*Does this answer even need comment? You have your choice of questions (if this isn't a makeup exam), and this is the best you've got?*

*1 point, tops.*

**ANSWER 12**  
*This is an F answer.*

Black Codes were secret codes that slaves used.

*You have had every possible short answer question in your possession (along with, on the Course Outline, a lot of the information needed to answer each and every one of those questions) since the very first day of class. Is there any excuse for this? Zero points.*

**ANSWER 13**  
*This is an F answer.*

[nothing in the bluebook but a blank page where a short answer is supposed to be]

