Interpretation: Reconstruction

A: The process of creating a new electorate and through it a new government in each of the ten states was carried on by the . . . radical spirit of the reconstruction acts. The registration of voters was so directed as to insure beyond all peradventure the fullest enrollment of the blacks and the completest exclusion of disfranchised whites. . . . The most conspicuous feature of maladministration was that of the finances. . . . all these works absorbed large sums and were unopposed by the conservatives, save where extravagance and corruption were manifest or suspected. . . . In most of the reconstructed states the very first term of the radical administration developed a schism in the party in power. In a general way the line of this cleavage was that dividing the southern white from the northern white element. . . . As the negroes caught the spirit of politics and demanded more and more of the positions and essential power in their party, the southern whites could not bring themselves to the same amount of concessions [as northerners] . . . the negro had no pride of race and no aspiration or ideals save to be like the whites. With civil rights and political power, not won, but almost forced upon him, he came gradually to understand and crave those more elusive privileges that constitute social equality. . . . But every form and suggestion of social equality was resented and resisted by the whites with the energy of despair. The dread of it justified in their eyes modes of lawlessness which were wholly subversive of civilization.—William A. Dunning, Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865–1877, 1907

B: Thus radical rule, in spite of its shortcomings, was by no means synonymous with incompetence and corruption; far too many carpetbagger, scalawag, and Negro politicians made creditable records to warrant such a generalization. Moreover, conditions were improving in the final years of reconstruction. . . . Finally, granting all their mistakes, the radical governments were by far the most democratic the South had ever known. They were the only governments in southern history to extend to Negroes complete civil and political equality, and to try to protect them in the enjoyment of the rights they were granted.—Kenneth M. Stampp, The Era of Reconstruction, 1965

Explain the differences between Interpretation A and Interpretation B:

Specific Historical Evidence to Support A (not mentioned in passage):

Specific Historical Evidence to Support B (not mentioned in passage):
Interpretation: Reconstruction II

A: In the end . . . neither the abolition of slavery nor Reconstruction succeeded in resolving the debate over the meaning of freedom in American life . . . And in the United States, as in nearly every plantation society that experienced the end of slavery, a rigid social and political dichotomy between former master and former slave, an ideology of racism, and a dependent labor force with limited economic opportunities all survived abolition . . . Yet by the same token . . . the United States, for a moment, offered the freedmen a measure of political control over their own destinies. However brief its sway, Reconstruction allowed scope for a remarkable political and social mobilization of the black community. It opened doors of opportunity that could never be completely closed. Reconstruction transformed the lives of Southern blacks in ways unmeasurable . . . It raised their expectations and aspirations, redefined their status in relation to the larger society, and allowed space for the creation of institutions that enabled them to survive the repression that followed. And it established constitutional principles of civil and political equality that, while flagrantly violated after Reconstruction, planted the seeds of future struggle. Eric Foner, "The New View of Reconstruction." 1983

B: Had Lincoln in the course of a second term succeeded in obtaining a far broader consent from the white South to terms that would satisfy northern Republican opinion than did Congress in 1867-1869, ultimate victory in the battle over the ex-slave's status as free man would not necessarily have followed. There would still have been the need to build institutions that could safeguard and expand what had been won—laws that the courts would uphold, and economy offering escape from poverty and dependency, a Union-Republican part in the South recognized by its opponents as a legitimate contestant for political power. The opportunities open to Lincoln for institutionalizing gains made toward equal citizenship irrespective of color were limited . . . The concepts and perceptions then dominant, although not unreasonable on the basis of past experience, were inadequate to meet the challenge of transforming the South. LaWanda Cox, Lincoln and Black Freedom: A Study in Presidential Leadership, 1981

Explain the difference between Interpretation A and Interpretation B:

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Specific Historical Evidence to Support A (not mentioned in passage):

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________

Specific Historical Evidence to Support B (not mentioned in passage):

___________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________