Reconstruction: a Success or Failure?

A common thread in the historiography of the era of Reconstruction, 1865-1877, is a question of success or failure. Historians have debated whether Reconstruction was successful in binding the torn nation back together after the Civil War and elevating the status of newly freed African-Americans or if it failed in those goals. Many prominent and distinguished historians have produced quality scholarship on both sides of this issue. You are going to join this historical debate.

STEP I:  
Read ALL of: Chapter 15 Reconstruction, 1865-1877

STEP II:  

STEP III:  
Read primary source documents 15-1 through 15-12 in Samuel T. McSeveney (ed.), Selected Historical Documents to Accompany America's History Volume 2: Since 1865 (Dallas, Bedford/St. Martin’s Press, 2011), 1-30. These primary sources should be the foundation of your analysis and interpretation of Reconstruction.

STEP IV:  
Complete The Failure of Reconstruction activity.

STEP V:  
Class debate: Was Reconstruction a Success or Failure? Prior to the debate you will be assigned one of two groups: “Reconstruction was Successful” or “Reconstruction was a Failure.” Your debate must be supported by analysis of the primary and secondary sources you have read for this unit. On the day of the debate you are required to have written notes with you so you can engage in a lively, thoughtful, and factual debate. Your notes may be written on paper or index cards. Everyone will speak.

STEP VI:  
Research Paper: “Was Reconstruction a Success or Failure.” For your paper you may take either position; success or failure. The paper should utilize the primary and secondary source documents you read for this unit as well as a minimum of two other sources, only one of which may be an online source. The paper must be no less than two pages and no more than five pages in length, not including the bibliography page. Margins must be one inch, font size of 12 Times New Roman. You MUST utilize the ‘Chicago’ documentation method.

ASSESSMENT RUBIC

On-task research time: 20 points  
The Failure of Reconstruction activity: 30 points  
Class Debate Notes: 50 points  
Research Paper: 100 points