Rights and Rules

Read how laws and elections changed Alabama during Reconstruction.

SS24.4.15a "Explain political changes in Alabama during Reconstruction, including new state constitutions, Black Codes, changes in political parties, voting rights, and citizenship rights for Black Americans."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Circle each year in the passage. Underline the words that explain how laws or elections changed Black Alabamians' rights or political power.

Changing Rules in Alabama

1. In 1865, Alabama leaders wrote a new state constitution after the Civil War. It ended slavery in the state, but it did not give Black men the vote. Leaders also passed Black Codes, laws that limited Black people's freedom. For example, these laws restricted Black workers' choices about jobs and punished people who did not have work. Ending slavery changed Alabama, but these rules kept unfair limits in place.

2. In 1868, Alabama adopted another state constitution. It gave Black men the right to vote and created a system of public schools. That same year, the Fourteenth Amendment made most people born in the United States citizens, including formerly enslaved Black people. Black voters could now help choose leaders. These changes gave Black Alabamians a stronger voice in state government than they had in 1865.

3. Alabama's political parties changed, too. Many Black voters and some white voters supported Republicans, who backed new rights. Many Democrats opposed these changes. In 1870, the Fifteenth Amendment said citizens could not be denied the vote because of race. Democrats won control of the state government in 1874. Even then, threats and violence kept many Black men from voting. A right on paper was not always safe to use.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the 1865 constitution and the Black Codes affect Black Alabamians in different ways?

2. How did the 1868 constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment change Black Alabamians' rights?

3. How did support for political parties change who held power in Alabama by 1874?

4. What voting right did the Fifteenth Amendment protect, and why could voting still be difficult?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence letter from an Alabama resident in 1874 to a friend in another state. Connect a change in law and a change in party power to what Black residents might hope for or worry about.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each year in the passage. Underline the words that explain how laws or elections changed Black Alabamians' rights or political power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the 1865 constitution and the Black Codes affect Black Alabamians in different ways?	**The constitution ended slavery but did not give Black men the vote. The Black Codes limited freedom by restricting work choices and punishing people without work.**
2	How did the 1868 constitution and the Fourteenth Amendment change Black Alabamians' rights?	**The state constitution gave Black men the vote. The Fourteenth Amendment made formerly enslaved Black people citizens.**
3	How did support for political parties change who held power in Alabama by 1874?	**Many Black voters supported Republicans, who backed new rights, but Democrats won control of the state government in 1874.**
4	What voting right did the Fifteenth Amendment protect, and why could voting still be difficult?	**Citizens could not be denied the vote because of race, but threats and violence kept many Black men from voting.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear friend, the 1868 constitution gave Black men the vote, and the Fourteenth Amendment made formerly enslaved Black people citizens. These changes gave many Black neighbors hope that they could help choose leaders. Now Democrats have won control of the state government. I worry that threats and violence will keep Black voters from using their rights.

Accept letters that accurately connect at least one legal change and the 1874 change in party control to a hope or concern for Black Alabamians. Students may describe hopes or worries without claiming that every resident felt the same way.