Freedom Under Pressure

Work, voting, and power in the Reconstruction South

SS24.US1.13 "Evaluate how Reconstruction affected the economic, political, and social landscape of the South. 13a Describe the roles of key groups in seeking to influence or resist economic, political..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two federal actions that expanded rights, circle two limits on freedom, and number two ways people organized for or against political change.

What Did Freedom Change?

1. The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery in 1865, but emancipation raised a practical question: who would control work and land? Freedpeople sought wages, family farms, and the right to refuse an employer. Many former plantation owners kept their land. Under sharecropping, families farmed an owner's land for a share of the crop; debts to stores could trap them there. Southern lawmakers also passed Black Codes that restricted Black people's movement and work choices. Legal freedom did not automatically bring economic independence.

2. President Andrew Johnson offered pardons to many former Confederates and let Southern states form new governments after they abolished slavery. His plan did not guarantee Black men voting rights. Congress challenged those governments: it passed the Civil Rights Act of 1866 over Johnson's veto and proposed the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed equal protection. The Reconstruction Acts of 1867 placed most former Confederate states under military authority and required new constitutions allowing Black men to vote. Congress later secured ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, which barred race-based voting restrictions.

3. Black churches and schools became meeting places where freedpeople organized for change. Union League chapters helped Black voters register and support candidates; Black men won seats in state legislatures and Congress. White supremacist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, used threats and murder to suppress that participation. After the economic depression of 1873, Northern support for continued federal intervention weakened. Following the disputed election of 1876, federal troops left the remaining Southern statehouses in 1877. Violence and declining federal enforcement helped end Reconstruction.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Johnson's plan and Congress's actions differ on Black men's voting rights?

2. Why did freedpeople seek control of their labor and land, and how could sharecropping limit that freedom?

3. How did Black communities build political power, and how did opponents try to stop them?

4. What two developments helped bring Reconstruction to an end?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a Black voter who sharecrops in 1870. Write one paragraph arguing whether Reconstruction's political gains outweighed its economic limits for this person. Use a law or amendment, an institution or group, and a labor system from the passage, and explain how each supports your judgment.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom Under Pressure

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.13

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two federal actions that expanded rights, circle two limits on freedom, and number two ways people organized for or against political change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Johnson's plan and Congress's actions differ on Black men's voting rights?	**Johnson's plan did not guarantee Black men voting rights. Congress required new state constitutions allowing them to vote and secured ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment.**
2	Why did freedpeople seek control of their labor and land, and how could sharecropping limit that freedom?	**They wanted to choose their work and own farms. Sharecropping left land with owners, while store debts could trap farming families.**
3	How did Black communities build political power, and how did opponents try to stop them?	**Churches, schools, and Union League chapters supported organizing, voter registration, and candidates. White supremacist groups used threats and murder to suppress participation.**
4	What two developments helped bring Reconstruction to an end?	**Northern support for federal intervention weakened after the depression of 1873, and federal troops left the remaining Southern statehouses in 1877. White supremacist violence also undermined Reconstruction.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

For this voter, Reconstruction's political gains mattered greatly, but they did not outweigh the limits on economic freedom. The Fifteenth Amendment barred voting restrictions based on race, giving this person a stronger claim to a voice in government. A Union League chapter could help the voter register and support a candidate. Yet sharecropping meant the family worked land someone else owned, and store debts could make leaving difficult. Voting offered a way to seek change, but it did not give the family control of its land or work.

Accept either judgment in Part 3 if the paragraph explains how all three required examples support it. For question 4, accept white supremacist violence as one of the two developments.