# Freedom Under Pressure

How groups shaped change during Reconstruction

**SS24.US1.13a** "Describe the roles of key groups in seeking to influence or resist economic, political, and social change throughout the Reconstruction era in the United States."

NAME _____ DATE _____

## 1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

**YOUR JOB** Circle each group named in the passage and underline an action it took. Write 1 beside an underlined action seeking change or 2 beside one resisting change.

### Who Would Shape Freedom?

1. In 1866, a freed family in Mississippi might face three linked choices: where to work, whether to send children to school, and how to claim a voice in government. Formerly enslaved people sought wages, family stability, land, and education. Many organized churches and schools, negotiated labor contracts, and attended political meetings. Black women helped build schools and mutual aid networks, although they could not vote. Black men later voted and held office where federal protection allowed it. These efforts aimed to make freedom more than a change in legal status, but the families making these choices faced powerful opponents.

2. The Freedmen's Bureau, created in 1865, offered aid and helped establish schools while mediating some labor disputes. Its resources and authority were limited. Congressional Republicans pushed for the Fourteenth Amendment, which established birthright citizenship and equal protection, and the Fifteenth Amendment, which barred denying the vote on account of race, color, or previous enslavement. Federal troops and enforcement laws sometimes protected Black voters and officeholders. Black communities and federal officials did not always agree on priorities: many freedpeople wanted land of their own, but the federal government did not provide land to most families. Legal gains therefore left economic independence uncertain.

3. Former Confederate leaders and many white landowners resisted changes that threatened their control. Southern governments passed Black Codes that restricted freedpeople's choices, including where and how they could work. Landowners used sharecropping contracts that often left families in debt, even as those contracts gave some families a way to farm. White supremacist groups, including the Ku Klux Klan, used threats and violence to suppress Black voting and Republican organizing. Black communities kept organizing despite the danger. As northern support for federal intervention weakened, the withdrawal of the last federal troops supporting southern state governments in 1877 made resistance to racial equality easier to sustain.

## 2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Black women help bring about social change, even though they could not vote?

2. How did Congressional Republicans and federal troops each support Black political rights?

3. How did landowners use sharecropping to maintain economic control, and what opportunity did it still offer some families?

4. What change did white supremacist groups resist, and how did they try to stop it?

## 3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are advising a freedpeople's community group in 1870. In 5 to 6 sentences, propose a plan in which two groups work together to advance one economic, political, or social change, then explain one likely form of resistance and how the groups could respond.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.13a

## PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Circle each group named in the passage and underline an action it took. Write 1 beside an underlined action seeking change or 2 beside one resisting change. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

## PART 2 · ANSWERS

| # | QUESTION | ANSWER |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | How did Black women help bring about social change, even though they could not vote? | **They helped build schools and mutual aid networks.** |
| 2 | How did Congressional Republicans and federal troops each support Black political rights? | **Congressional Republicans pushed for amendments protecting citizenship and voting rights. Federal troops sometimes protected Black voters and officeholders.** |
| 3 | How did landowners use sharecropping to maintain economic control, and what opportunity did it still offer some families? | **Sharecropping contracts often left families in debt, but they also gave some families a way to farm.** |
| 4 | What change did white supremacist groups resist, and how did they try to stop it? | **They resisted Black political participation by using threats and violence to suppress Black voting and Republican organizing.** |

## PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

In 1870, our community group could work with the Freedmen's Bureau to expand schooling for freed children. Families could form a school committee and find a building, while bureau agents could seek teachers and supplies. Some landowners might object because they want children working instead of studying. The committee could arrange classes around work hours and ask bureau agents to help keep the school open. This plan would not end unequal power, but it would use community organizing and federal aid to widen access to education.

Accept other passage-supported descriptions of each group's role. For Part 3, accept historically plausible plans that name two cooperating groups, identify a form of resistance, and propose a response.