Organizing for a Vote

How Black communities built political power during Reconstruction

SS24.US1.13d "Describe how Black Americans in the former Confederacy established new institutions and organizations to mobilize grassroots support for political participation and elect Black politicians to office."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the institutions and organizations Black communities built or used, circle what people did through them, and number the actions that led toward voting or winning office.

From Meeting Places to Elected Office

(1) In South Carolina after the Civil War, freedom did not automatically bring political power. Under Reconstruction laws, Black men could register to vote, but registration was only a beginning. Many formerly enslaved people built independent churches that offered more than worship. Their buildings became places to announce meetings, discuss candidates, and plan trips to registration offices. Black women, who could not vote, also organized gatherings and shared political news. In a community where many white employers opposed Black voting, a trusted meeting place helped neighbors find one another and act together.

(2) Local chapters of the Union League, an organization allied with the Republican Party, helped turn conversations into coordinated action. Members explained new voting rules, held meetings about candidates, and urged eligible men to register and vote. They could also arrange group travel to polling places. Freedpeople established schools, often with aid from the Freedmen's Bureau and northern groups. Learning to read gave some voters better access to political notices and laws. These efforts did not remove threats of violence or retaliation, but they created ways to share information and stand together.

(3) These networks mattered in elections. Robert Smalls, who had escaped slavery during the war, won a seat in South Carolina's state House of Representatives in 1868. His election showed what newly organized voters could achieve. Across the state, churches offered gathering spaces, Union League chapters helped bring voters together, and schools widened access to political information. Voters still had to make their own choices and cast their ballots. By connecting neighbors to meetings, registration, and election-day action, Black communities helped send Black representatives into government, where those representatives could argue for public education and equal rights.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did independent churches help neighbors move from discussing politics to taking part in an election?

2. How did Union League chapters help turn the right to vote into action at the polls?

3. How could schools support political participation without making reading a requirement for voting?

4. How does Robert Smalls's election show the result Black communities sought through their organizing? Name two actions from the passage that supported that goal.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence announcement to neighbors in a South Carolina town in 1868. Propose a plan that uses two institutions or organizations from the passage, gives a role to someone who cannot vote, and explains how the plan could help elect a Black candidate despite opposition.

ANSWER KEY

Organizing for a Vote

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.13d

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the institutions and organizations Black communities built or used, circle what people did through them, and number the actions that led toward voting or winning office. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did independent churches help neighbors move from discussing politics to taking part in an election?	**Churches provided trusted places to discuss candidates, announce meetings, and plan trips to registration offices.**
2	How did Union League chapters help turn the right to vote into action at the polls?	**Members explained voting rules, urged eligible men to register and vote, and could arrange group travel to polling places.**
3	How could schools support political participation without making reading a requirement for voting?	**Schools helped some voters read political notices and laws, giving them more information to use when making political choices.**
4	How does Robert Smalls's election show the result Black communities sought through their organizing? Name two actions from the passage that supported that goal.	**Smalls won a seat in the state House, placing a Black representative in government. Communities supported that goal by bringing neighbors to meetings and helping eligible men register and reach the polls.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Meet at our church on Tuesday to hear candidates explain their plans for local families. Our Union League chapter will pair first-time voters with neighbors who know where to register and how to reach the polls. Women who cannot vote can spread word of the meeting and help families plan travel together. By going to the polls despite threats and casting their ballots, eligible men can help elect a Black representative who speaks for our town.

Accept other passage-supported links between organizing and elections. The announcement should include a plausible plan, not a claim that schools or literacy were required to vote.