Freedom, With Limits

How revolutionary ideals changed slavery's legal status

SS24.US1.4 "Assess how the American Revolution and its rhetoric affected the status of slavery in the newly formed United States. 4a Describe the growth of an anti-slavery movement in northern states through the founding of the first abolitionist..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline claims about freedom, circle limits on freedom, and number four different kinds of action against slavery. Use your marks to track both change and its limits.

A Revolution's Uneven Reach

(1) In 1776, the Declaration of Independence announced that "all men are created equal." Enslaved people and their allies pressed Americans to face the gap between that claim and slavery. In 1775, Philadelphia reformers founded the Society for the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage, later known as the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Its members helped people held illegally in slavery seek freedom and petitioned lawmakers for change. Black petitioners also demanded liberty, drawing on the Revolution's language of natural rights. These efforts did not free everyone, but they helped turn revolutionary rhetoric into organized pressure against slavery in northern states.

(2) Northern states did not follow a single path. Pennsylvania's 1780 gradual emancipation law did not free people already enslaved. Children born to enslaved mothers after the law took effect had to serve until age 28, so freedom came slowly. In Massachusetts, Elizabeth Freeman sued for her freedom in 1781, invoking the state constitution's statement that all men are born free and equal. She won. In the 1783 Quock Walker cases, judges likewise treated slavery as incompatible with that constitution, helping end slavery in the state. Laws, lawsuits, and individual action challenged slavery, but their results varied sharply from place to place.

(3) Congress also shaped where slavery could expand. The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, the land north of the Ohio River that would later form several new states, including Ohio and Indiana. Its ban mattered because those future states would enter the Union without legal slavery, limiting slavery's spread in that region. Yet the ordinance did not abolish slavery in states where it already existed, and it did not ban slavery in all western lands. The new nation thus put revolutionary ideals into some laws while allowing slavery to continue elsewhere, especially in southern states.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Revolution's language of rights support organized action against slavery in Philadelphia?

2. How did Pennsylvania's law and the Massachusetts court cases change slavery in different ways?

3. Why did the Northwest Ordinance matter for states that would form north of the Ohio River?

4. Why did these changes fall short of ending slavery throughout the new United States?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A museum needs a five-sentence label assessing the claim, "The Revolution ended slavery in the new United States." Write a qualified verdict that explains how revolutionary ideas fueled change, includes two different northern paths and the Northwest Ordinance, and identifies one limit.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom, With Limits

GRADE 10 · SS24.US1.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline claims about freedom, circle limits on freedom, and number four different kinds of action against slavery. Use your marks to track both change and its limits. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Revolution's language of rights support organized action against slavery in Philadelphia?	**It gave petitioners a way to argue for liberty, while society members helped people held illegally in slavery seek freedom and petitioned lawmakers.**
2	How did Pennsylvania's law and the Massachusetts court cases change slavery in different ways?	**Pennsylvania's law set a slow path to freedom for children born to enslaved mothers after it took effect, but did not free people already enslaved. Massachusetts court cases treated slavery as incompatible with the state constitution, helping end it there.**
3	Why did the Northwest Ordinance matter for states that would form north of the Ohio River?	**It banned slavery in the Northwest Territory, so future states formed there would enter the Union without legal slavery.**
4	Why did these changes fall short of ending slavery throughout the new United States?	**Northern changes varied and could take years to free people. The Northwest Ordinance did not abolish slavery in existing states or ban it in all western lands.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Revolution did not end slavery in the new United States, but its language of equality helped people challenge it. In Pennsylvania, an abolition society pressed for change, and a gradual emancipation law offered freedom to children born after it took effect only after years of service. In Massachusetts, lawsuits brought by Elizabeth Freeman and Quock Walker helped make slavery incompatible with the state constitution. The Northwest Ordinance barred slavery in the Northwest Territory, shaping the status of future states there. Slavery remained legal in other states, so these victories were substantial but incomplete.

Accept other passage-supported northern examples if the response distinguishes their effects. Look for an assessment that recognizes both antislavery change and the continued existence of slavery.