

Status and Service

Trace how legal status shaped Black Americans' Civil War contributions.

SS.68.AA.2.7 "Examine how the status of slaves, those who had escaped slavery and free blacks, affected their contributions to the Civil War effort."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB As you read, underline each phrase that names a group's legal status, circle each contribution, and draw a line from the status phrase to a contribution it shaped.

Many Paths to Union Support

- ① When the Civil War began, most Black Americans lived in slavery. Enslaved people had no legal freedom to choose where they lived or worked. Yet many shaped the war by escaping to Union lines. Union officers first called these freedom seekers "contraband," refusing to return them to Confederate enslavers. At camps and forts, men and women shared information about roads, Confederate troops, and local supplies. Some worked for the Union army as cooks, teamsters, builders, nurses, and laborers, while they sought safety for their families.
- ② Free Black people had a different legal position. Although racism and discriminatory laws restricted their rights, they were not owned and could form communities, raise money, publish arguments, and push the government to let Black men serve. At first, federal policy limited their enlistment. As the war continued, free Black volunteers joined United States Colored Troops, including famous units such as the 54th Massachusetts. Their service as soldiers challenged claims that Black Americans would not fight and strengthened the Union's military force.
- ③ After the Emancipation Proclamation took effect in 1863, many formerly enslaved men could enlist in the Union army. Their knowledge of Southern land and communities could help Union forces, and more than 180,000 Black men served in the United States Colored Troops during the war. Black soldiers often received lower pay and faced unequal treatment, while Confederate authorities threatened severe punishment for captured Black troops. Even so, their military service, labor, intelligence, and determination helped the Union fight and connected the destruction of slavery to Union victory.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 What limit on enslaved people’s freedom made escape to Union lines significant? Name two ways people who escaped contributed after reaching Union lines.

2 How did the legal status of free Black people allow them to support the war effort before or while Black enlistment was limited?

3 How did the Emancipation Proclamation change the contribution many formerly enslaved men could make to the Union?

4 What two unfair or dangerous conditions did Black soldiers face, and how did they contribute despite these conditions?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write a three-sentence claim explaining how legal status shaped Black Americans’ contributions to the Union. Include enslaved or formerly enslaved people and free Black people, at least two specific contributions, and one barrier they faced.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

As you read, underline each phrase that names a group's legal status, circle each contribution, and draw a line from the status phrase to a contribution it shaped. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What limit on enslaved people's freedom made escape to Union lines significant? Name two ways people who escaped contributed after reaching Union lines.	They could not legally choose where they lived or worked. After escape, they shared military information and worked for the Union army in jobs such as cooking, driving teams, building, nursing, or laboring.
2	How did the legal status of free Black people allow them to support the war effort before or while Black enlistment was limited?	Because they were not owned, they could form communities, raise money, publish arguments, and pressure the government to allow Black men to serve.
3	How did the Emancipation Proclamation change the contribution many formerly enslaved men could make to the Union?	It allowed many formerly enslaved men to enlist in the Union army. They could serve as soldiers and use their knowledge of Southern land and communities to help Union forces.
4	What two unfair or dangerous conditions did Black soldiers face, and how did they contribute despite these conditions?	They received lower pay and unequal treatment, and captured Black troops faced threats of severe punishment. Despite this, they served, provided labor and intelligence, and strengthened the Union war effort.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Legal status shaped which ways Black Americans could help the Union. Enslaved people risked escape because they lacked freedom, then provided intelligence and army labor, while free Black communities could raise money and demand that Black men be allowed to enlist. After emancipation opened military service more widely, Black soldiers strengthened Union forces despite unequal pay and the danger of capture.

Accept equivalent examples from the passage when students clearly connect legal status to a contribution. For the open response, look for an accurate comparison of groups, specific evidence, and a barrier or restriction.