

Rights, Votes, Barriers

Evaluate how Reconstruction amendments changed civic participation.

SS.8.CG.2.6 "Evaluate how amendments to the U.S. Constitution expanded opportunities for civic participation through Reconstruction."

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline details that show an amendment expanded civic participation, and circle details that show a barrier or limit, so you can weigh both kinds of evidence.

Reconstruction and Civic Participation

- ① After the Civil War, the nation faced a major question: who would belong to the political community? During Reconstruction, Congress and the states added the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Together, these amendments changed the legal position of formerly enslaved people. They did not create equal treatment everywhere, but they gave citizens new constitutional grounds to claim freedom, citizenship, legal protection, and a voice in elections. These changes expanded civic participation because taking part in public life depends on rights protected by law.
- ② The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery, ending a system that denied enslaved people control over their labor and lives. The Fourteenth Amendment made people born or naturalized in the United States citizens and required states to provide equal protection of the laws. This gave formerly enslaved people a constitutional basis to challenge unfair state actions. The Fifteenth Amendment barred governments from denying a citizen the right to vote because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Voting could help citizens influence leaders and laws in their communities and nation.
- ③ These gains were significant, yet constitutional words did not automatically guarantee safe or fair participation. Black men voted, held public office, and helped shape governments during Reconstruction. At the same time, white supremacist violence, intimidation, and weak enforcement threatened Black voters and officeholders. After Reconstruction ended, Southern states used devices such as poll taxes and literacy tests to block many Black citizens from voting. Women still could not vote nationwide under these amendments. Evaluating Reconstruction means recognizing both the expanded rights and the barriers that limited their use.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 How did the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments expand opportunities in different ways?

2 What civic opportunity did the Fifteenth Amendment protect, and how could that opportunity affect government?

3 What evidence in the passage shows that the amendments expanded participation but did not guarantee it? Give one expansion and one limit.

4 Based on the passage, were the Reconstruction amendments important for civic participation even though barriers remained? Explain your evaluation with two details.

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Write four or five sentences evaluating which Reconstruction amendment most expanded civic participation. Name the amendment, explain its impact, use one detail from the passage, and explain one barrier that could still limit participation.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline details that show an amendment expanded civic participation, and circle details that show a barrier or limit, so you can weigh both kinds of evidence. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments expand opportunities in different ways?	The Thirteenth Amendment abolished slavery. The Fourteenth Amendment made people born or naturalized in the United States citizens and required equal protection of the laws.
2	What civic opportunity did the Fifteenth Amendment protect, and how could that opportunity affect government?	It protected a citizen's right to vote from denial because of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Voting could help citizens influence leaders and laws.
3	What evidence in the passage shows that the amendments expanded participation but did not guarantee it? Give one expansion and one limit.	Answers should name an expansion, such as Black men voting or holding office, and a limit, such as violence, intimidation, weak enforcement, poll taxes, literacy tests, or women not voting nationwide.
4	Based on the passage, were the Reconstruction amendments important for civic participation even though barriers remained? Explain your evaluation with two details.	Yes. The amendments abolished slavery, established citizenship and equal protection, and protected voting from racial discrimination. However, violence, intimidation, weak enforcement, and later voting restrictions limited these gains.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Fifteenth Amendment most directly expanded civic participation because it protected voting rights from racial discrimination. It gave Black male citizens a constitutional claim to participate in elections and influence laws. This change helped Black men vote and hold public office during Reconstruction. However, violence and intimidation, along with later poll taxes and literacy tests, limited how fully many Black citizens could use this right.

Accept a supported evaluation of any of the three amendments. A strong response explains a specific expanded opportunity and accurately identifies a barrier that limited participation.