Ballots to Congress

How constitutional changes opened doors to public office

8.C.13.2.B "Assess the impact of the Civil War Amendments in securing political rights for African Americans, resulting in their election to state and national government positions."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each amendment and the change it made, circle the two elected officials and their offices, and put a star beside one obstacle to equal political power.

New Voices in Government

1 Before the Civil War ended, enslaved African Americans could not vote or run for office. The Thirteenth Amendment, ratified in 1865, ended slavery throughout the United States, except as punishment for a crime. Ending slavery did not, by itself, give formerly enslaved people a ballot. The Fourteenth Amendment, ratified in 1868, recognized citizenship for people born in the United States and under its authority, as well as naturalized people. It also required states to provide equal protection of the laws. These changes laid a legal foundation for African Americans to take part in government.

2 Federal Reconstruction laws opened voting to Black men in former Confederate states before 1870. The Fifteenth Amendment, ratified in 1870, then barred governments from denying voting rights because of race, color, or previous enslavement; it did not protect women's voting rights. New voters could help choose leaders. In 1868, voters elected Francis Cardozo South Carolina's secretary of state, a statewide post. In 1870, Mississippi's legislature chose Hiram Revels for the U.S. Senate. At that time, state legislatures, not voters directly, chose U.S. senators.

3 These elections showed that legal changes could open state and national government to African Americans. Cardozo helped manage South Carolina's government, while Revels represented Mississippi in Congress. Yet a legal right was not the same as safe, equal access to politics. White supremacist groups used threats and violence to keep Black citizens from voting or serving in office. Later, southern states imposed barriers such as literacy tests and poll taxes. The amendments created lasting constitutional protections, but those protections had to be defended and enforced.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Why was ending slavery alone not enough to give formerly enslaved people a political voice?

2. How did the Fifteenth Amendment strengthen a voting change that had already begun in former Confederate states?

3. How do Cardozo's and Revels's elections show that African Americans gained access to different levels of government?

4. What evidence challenges the claim that the amendments immediately secured equal political power?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label titled “New Voices in Government.” Make a claim about the amendments' impact, use Cardozo and Revels as evidence, and explain one limit on that impact.

ANSWER KEY

Ballots to Congress

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.2.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each amendment and the change it made, circle the two elected officials and their offices, and put a star beside one obstacle to equal political power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Why was ending slavery alone not enough to give formerly enslaved people a political voice?	**The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery but did not give people the vote. Citizenship protections and voting rights helped open a path to political participation.**
2	How did the Fifteenth Amendment strengthen a voting change that had already begun in former Confederate states?	**Federal Reconstruction laws had opened voting to Black men there. The Fifteenth Amendment barred governments from denying voting rights because of race, color, or previous enslavement.**
3	How do Cardozo's and Revels's elections show that African Americans gained access to different levels of government?	**Cardozo won a South Carolina state office, while Revels gained a seat in the U.S. Senate, part of the national government.**
4	What evidence challenges the claim that the amendments immediately secured equal political power?	**Threats and violence kept some Black citizens from voting or serving, and later literacy tests and poll taxes created further barriers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The Civil War Amendments helped open government to African Americans by ending slavery, recognizing citizenship, and protecting voting rights against racial restrictions. Francis Cardozo's election as South Carolina's secretary of state showed a new path to state office. Hiram Revels's selection for the U.S. Senate showed that African Americans could also serve in national government. Threats and violence still kept many Black citizens from using their political rights safely.

Accept answers that connect legal changes to voting or officeholding while distinguishing those gains from equal access in practice. Students should not claim that the Fifteenth Amendment caused Cardozo's 1868 election.