Doors to Freedom

Weighing the Freedmen's Bureau's achievements and limits

8.C.13.2.C "Evaluate the efforts of the Freedmen's Bureau to assist freed persons with economic, educational, and political opportunities."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one way the Freedmen's Bureau helped freed people in each paragraph. Circle one limit on its work in each paragraph, then use your marks to judge how effective its efforts were.

Help After Emancipation

1. When slavery ended in 1865, many formerly enslaved people needed wages, land, and protection from former enslavers. Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau to help them make the move to freedom. Bureau agents explained labor contracts and sometimes challenged employers who refused to pay. The Bureau also gave out food during emergencies. Yet agents were few, and many local officials sided with landowners. Most land that freed families hoped to farm was returned to its former owners, so contracts often left workers dependent on the same plantations where they had been enslaved.

2. Education offered another path toward independence. Freed people crowded into classrooms, sometimes after long workdays, because reading could help them study contracts, write letters, and take part in public life. The Bureau helped pay for school buildings and teacher salaries, often working with Black communities and Northern aid groups. Some freed people donated land or built schoolhouses, showing that the Bureau did not act alone. Still, families often had to pay for supplies or school space themselves. Poverty and attacks on schools made regular attendance difficult, especially in rural areas.

3. Political freedom also needed support. Bureau agents could tell freed people about new laws and bring complaints of violence or unfair treatment to federal authorities. In some places, agents helped protect Black men who tried to vote after Reconstruction laws expanded voting rights. But agents could not be everywhere, and threats from white groups kept some voters away from the polls. Congress ended most Bureau work in 1872. The Bureau opened doors to jobs, schooling, and civic life, but its short life and local resistance kept those openings from reaching everyone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Bureau help freed people earn a living, and what kept that help from making many workers independent?

2. How effective was the Bureau's school support? Use one achievement and one obstacle from the passage.

3. Why was the Bureau's help with political rights limited, even where its agents took action?

4. Which effort, economic, educational, or political, seems most likely to have helped freed people gain independence? Defend your judgment with two details from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise Congress on the Bureau's budget in 1868. In 5 to 7 sentences, recommend expanding one kind of help, use passage evidence from two areas of its work, and explain one trade-off your choice would create.

ANSWER KEY

Doors to Freedom

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one way the Freedmen's Bureau helped freed people in each paragraph. Circle one limit on its work in each paragraph, then use your marks to judge how effective its efforts were. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the Bureau help freed people earn a living, and what kept that help from making many workers independent?	**Agents explained labor contracts and sometimes challenged unpaid wages. Few agents, officials who sided with landowners, and the return of land to former owners left many workers dependent on plantations.**
2	How effective was the Bureau's school support? Use one achievement and one obstacle from the passage.	**The Bureau helped pay for buildings and teacher salaries, but poverty and attacks on schools made attendance difficult.**
3	Why was the Bureau's help with political rights limited, even where its agents took action?	**Agents could explain laws, report mistreatment, and sometimes protect Black men trying to vote. They could not be everywhere, and threats kept some voters from the polls.**
4	Which effort, economic, educational, or political, seems most likely to have helped freed people gain independence? Defend your judgment with two details from the passage.	**Answers may vary. For example, education could help people gain independence because reading helped them study contracts and take part in public life, while the Bureau helped pay for school buildings and teacher salaries.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would ask Congress to expand the Bureau's school support in 1868. Reading could help freed people study contracts and take part in public life. The Bureau helped pay for buildings and teacher salaries, but families still struggled to cover supplies. More funding could help schools where poverty made attendance difficult. This choice would leave less money for labor contract help, even though some employers refused to pay workers. I would keep some agents investigating unpaid wages.

Accept different judgments when students support them with accurate passage evidence. For Part 3, look for evidence from two areas of the Bureau's work and a trade-off connected to the recommendation.