Freedom With Limits

How Black Codes restricted work and land choices after emancipation

8.C.13.2.D "Describe how the adoption of Black Codes by many southern state legislatures restricted employment and property rights of Freedmen."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two rules that restricted work choices, circle the rule that restricted land leases, and write W or P beside each effect you find.

Choices After Emancipation

1 In 1865, emancipation ended slavery, but freedom did not give newly freed people equal choices. Southern state lawmakers passed rules called Black Codes. Mississippi's laws show how these rules worked. Many freed people hoped to choose their employers, keep their wages, and build homes on land they could rent. Instead, lawmakers placed special limits on Black workers. These limits mattered in daily life: a person needed pay to support a family, and a family needed a place to live or work. Legal freedom and practical independence were not the same.

2 Mississippi required many labor contracts lasting more than a month to be written down. A worker who left such a contract early could lose wages already earned under it. Another law treated freed people without lawful employment or business as vagrants. A person convicted of vagrancy could be fined. If that person could not pay, officials could hire out the person's labor to cover the fine. These rules made it risky to quit an unfair job or spend time looking for better work. They gave employers leverage over workers who needed wages.

3 Property rules narrowed choices too. Mississippi allowed freed people to lease land or buildings in incorporated towns and cities, but not in the countryside. A family hoping to rent a rural plot for a home or a business could not make that plan under the law. The rule did not forbid every kind of property ownership, but it blocked an important way to use land. Together, the job and leasing rules limited independence: someone who could not easily leave a job also had fewer places to move and build a livelihood.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How could the labor contract rule affect a freed worker who left a job early?

2. How could the vagrancy law restrict a freed person's search for better work?

3. How did the land leasing rule limit where freed people could make a home or start a business?

4. Why could the work rules and the leasing rule together make it harder for a freed worker to leave an unfair job?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a freed family in 1865 Mississippi that wants to leave a farm job before its several-month contract ends and rent a rural building for a small shop. Write four sentences explaining how the work and land rules would affect the plan and how the rules together limit the family's choices.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom With Limits

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.2.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two rules that restricted work choices, circle the rule that restricted land leases, and write W or P beside each effect you find. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How could the labor contract rule affect a freed worker who left a job early?	**The worker could lose wages already earned under the contract.**
2	How could the vagrancy law restrict a freed person's search for better work?	**A person without lawful employment or business could be convicted and fined. If unable to pay, the person's labor could be hired out to cover the fine.**
3	How did the land leasing rule limit where freed people could make a home or start a business?	**They could lease land or buildings in incorporated towns and cities, but not in the countryside.**
4	Why could the work rules and the leasing rule together make it harder for a freed worker to leave an unfair job?	**Leaving could cost the worker earned wages or lead to a vagrancy charge, while the leasing rule limited places to move and build another livelihood.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My family wants to leave its farm job early and open a shop in a rented rural building. Leaving before our contract ends could cost us wages earned under it. Mississippi's land rule would stop us from leasing the rural building, although we could lease one in an incorporated town. Losing wages and being unable to rent our chosen space would make starting the shop much harder.

Accept answers that accurately distinguish the employment restrictions from the limit on rural leases. Students need not claim that the law banned all property ownership or all leases.