Freedom and Power

How Reconstruction laws changed rights and opportunity

8.C.13.2 "Analyze the impact of state and federal legislation following the Civil War. Explain the impact of the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments on the status of formerly enslaved persons..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline federal actions and circle state restrictions in the passage. Number two results for formerly enslaved people so you can compare new rights with obstacles.

Rights on Paper and in Practice

1 In 1865, freedom did not automatically bring land, wages, or a voice in government. The Thirteenth Amendment ended slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime. The Fourteenth Amendment established national citizenship for people born or naturalized in the United States and required states to provide equal protection of the laws. The Fifteenth Amendment barred denying male citizens the vote on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Together, these changes gave the federal government stronger grounds to challenge state laws that denied basic rights.

2 In the South, many state legislatures passed Black Codes that narrowed freedom in daily life. Some required freed people to sign labor contracts or face arrest under vagrancy laws; others limited their ability to own or rent land. These rules pushed workers toward unfair jobs even though slavery had ended. Congress created the Freedmen's Bureau to help freed people find work, settle labor disputes, and establish schools. Its schools expanded access to reading and writing. In some places, bureau workers also helped freed men register to vote.

3 Federal changes opened doors, but state actions and violence could still block them. During Reconstruction, Black men voted and won seats in southern state legislatures and in Congress. Hiram Revels of Mississippi became the first Black U.S. senator in 1870. These victories showed that constitutional rights could change who held power, not just what laws said. Yet threats at polling places and unfair local rules kept many eligible voters from using their rights. The amendments supplied legal protections, but making those protections real often required federal action against resistance in the states.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments change what states could legally do to formerly enslaved people?

2. How did the Fifteenth Amendment help change who held government positions during Reconstruction?

3. How did Black Codes and the Freedmen's Bureau affect freed people's economic opportunities in opposite ways?

4. Why did legal voting rights not always lead to political participation? Include one way the Freedmen's Bureau helped.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A state proposes forcing freed workers to labor without pay and refusing votes from Black male citizens who were once enslaved. Write four or five sentences advising a state lawmaker. Use two amendments and one Freedmen's Bureau effort, and explain why federal protection might still be needed.

ANSWER KEY

Freedom and Power

GRADE 8 · 8.C.13.2

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline federal actions and circle state restrictions in the passage. Number two results for formerly enslaved people so you can compare new rights with obstacles. 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 change what states could legally do to formerly enslaved people?	**The Thirteenth ended slavery and involuntary servitude, except as punishment for a crime. The Fourteenth established citizenship and required states to provide equal protection of the laws.**
2	How did the Fifteenth Amendment help change who held government positions during Reconstruction?	**It barred denying male citizens the vote on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. Black men voted and won seats in state legislatures and Congress.**
3	How did Black Codes and the Freedmen's Bureau affect freed people's economic opportunities in opposite ways?	**Black Codes restricted labor and access to land, pushing freed people toward unfair jobs. The bureau helped them find work and settle labor disputes.**
4	Why did legal voting rights not always lead to political participation? Include one way the Freedmen's Bureau helped.	**Threats at polling places and unfair local rules kept eligible voters from voting. In some places, bureau workers helped freed men register.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would tell the lawmaker to reject the proposal. Forcing freed workers to labor without pay violates the Thirteenth Amendment's ban on involuntary servitude. Denying Black male citizens the vote because they were once enslaved violates the Fifteenth Amendment. The Freedmen's Bureau could help workers find paid jobs. Federal protection might still be needed if state officials refuse to respect these rights.

Accept answers that connect a specific federal protection or bureau effort to its effect on freed people. Students should distinguish rights established by law from the barriers that limited their use.