A Town of Their Own

Opportunity and its limits in Oklahoma's all-Black towns

OKH.C.3.3.D "Describe the establishment of all-Black towns and the extent to which they provided economic opportunities, political independence, and escape from discrimination."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details about how the towns began, circle one economic and one political opportunity, and put a 1 beside an economic limit and a 2 beside a limit on freedom from discrimination.

What Boley Made Possible

1. In 1903, families arriving in Indian Territory could step off a train near the new town of Boley and see land offered for homes and businesses. Boley grew beside a railroad, which helped settlers and goods move in and out. It was one of several all-Black towns established in the region that became Oklahoma in 1907. Black settlers included people moving from other states and people with roots in the territory, including descendants of formerly enslaved people in Native nations. They bought land, built institutions, and sought communities where Black residents, rather than white neighbors, could shape local life.

2. In Boley, Black residents opened stores, banks, and other businesses and worked as farmers and tradespeople. Customers could spend money with Black owners, and property ownership could help families build wealth. Yet access to land or a storefront required money. Farmers still depended on crop prices and buyers beyond town, while merchants needed supplies and customers from a wider economy. The town created real ways to earn a living and own property, but it could not promise prosperity to every resident.

3. Residents of all-Black towns could elect local officials, run schools, and make decisions about their own streets and businesses. In daily life, living among Black neighbors could reduce some encounters with racial hostility and exclusion. But a town could not set state law or control how its residents were treated when they traveled or sold goods elsewhere. After Oklahoma became a state in 1907, state laws imposed racial segregation. All-Black towns offered more local control and a measure of refuge, not freedom from discrimination throughout Oklahoma. Their achievements and limits existed at the same time.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Boley's location and its settlers help establish the town?

2. How much economic opportunity did Boley offer? Give one opportunity and one limit.

3. What political power could residents exercise, and where did that power end?

4. To what extent could an all-Black town offer an escape from discrimination?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a letter dated 1908 advising a relative whether to move to an all-Black town such as Boley. Explain how the town began, weigh economic opportunity, local political power, and protection from discrimination, and support your advice with passage details.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.C.3.3.D

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details about how the towns began, circle one economic and one political opportunity, and put a 1 beside an economic limit and a 2 beside a limit on freedom from discrimination. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Boley's location and its settlers help establish the town?	**The railroad helped settlers and goods reach Boley. Black settlers bought land and built homes, businesses, and other institutions.**
2	How much economic opportunity did Boley offer? Give one opportunity and one limit.	**Residents could own businesses or property, but buying land required money, and farmers depended on crop prices and outside buyers.**
3	What political power could residents exercise, and where did that power end?	**Residents could elect local officials and make local decisions, but they could not set Oklahoma's state laws.**
4	To what extent could an all-Black town offer an escape from discrimination?	**Living among Black neighbors could reduce some daily hostility, but residents still faced discrimination beyond town, including state segregation laws.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Dear Cousin, I think you should consider moving to Boley, but come with a plan for earning a living. Black settlers bought land and built the town beside a railroad that carries people and goods. You might find work or open a business, though land costs money and farmers depend on buyers outside town. Residents can elect local leaders and make decisions about their schools and streets. Living among Black neighbors may spare you some daily hostility. Still, Oklahoma's segregation laws reach beyond Boley, and the town cannot change them. Please weigh those limits before you move.

Accept other evidence-based judgments in the letter. A strong response distinguishes local opportunities and refuge from the economic and legal limits residents still faced.