

Reconstruction Voices

Examine why formerly enslaved leaders sought public office.

USII.2.e “describing the role and motivations of individuals who sought to gain from Reconstruction including, but not limited to formerly enslaved people elected to office during the years right after the Civil War; and”

NAME _____

DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK _____ Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each action formerly enslaved people took to gain power, and circle each goal or motivation for seeking office. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside the names of leaders who held office, so you can connect people, roles, and goals.

Claiming a Place in Government

- ① After the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments changed the nation’s laws. Many formerly enslaved men used their new freedom and voting rights to take part in government. They did not all seek office for the same reason. Some wanted fair laws, public schools, or protection from violence. Others hoped to represent neighbors whose voices had long been ignored. Serving in office gave these leaders a way to work for gains for themselves, their families, and their communities.
- ② Robert Smalls had been enslaved in South Carolina. During the war, he escaped to Union lines by sailing a Confederate ship to freedom. After the war, he became a businessman, helped start a school for Black children, and served in the South Carolina legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives. Smalls wanted Black citizens to have education, political power, and equal treatment under the law. His offices let him influence laws and speak for people in his district who had little power before the war.
- ③ Other leaders also entered public life. Hiram Revels, a minister from Mississippi, became the first Black man to serve in the U.S. Senate in 1870. Blanche K. Bruce, born enslaved in Virginia, later served as a U.S. senator from Mississippi. These men sought personal success, but their work also challenged the old idea that only white men could lead. By voting, debating, and holding office, formerly enslaved people claimed a share of power and worked to shape Reconstruction.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE _____ Use the passage

1 Name two goals that led formerly enslaved people to seek public office after the Civil War.

2 What offices did Robert Smalls hold, and how did those offices help him work toward his goals?

3 What old idea did the election of Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce challenge?

4 How could holding office help a formerly enslaved leader gain something for both the community and the leader's own family?

3 YOUR TURN _____ Your own words

Imagine you are a formerly enslaved man during Reconstruction who plans to run for a local office. Write 3 to 4 sentences that name the office, describe one community goal, explain how the office would help you reach that goal, and give one personal motivation.

PART 1 • READ AND MARK

Underline each action formerly enslaved people took to gain power, and circle each goal or motivation for seeking office. Number 1, 2, and 3 beside the names of leaders who held office, so you can connect people, roles, and goals. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 • ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Name two goals that led formerly enslaved people to seek public office after the Civil War.	Answers may include fair laws, public schools, protection from violence, representing ignored neighbors, education, political power, or equal treatment under the law.
2	What offices did Robert Smalls hold, and how did those offices help him work toward his goals?	He served in the South Carolina legislature and the U.S. House of Representatives. These offices let him influence laws and speak for people in his district.
3	What old idea did the election of Hiram Revels and Blanche K. Bruce challenge?	Their service challenged the idea that only white men could lead.
4	How could holding office help a formerly enslaved leader gain something for both the community and the leader's own family?	Office could help a leader work for laws, schools, safety, and political power for the community while also bringing personal success and helping the leader's family.

PART 3 • YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I plan to run for a seat on the town council. I want the council to support a public school so my children and other Black children can learn. As a council member, I could vote on local plans and speak for families whose needs were ignored. Winning the office would also give me a chance to build a secure future for my family.

Accept any passage-based goal or motivation in Parts 1 and 2. For the open response, accept historically reasonable offices and goals if the student clearly connects the office to both community gains and a personal motivation.