

## **Teaching Guide:**

# **African American Freedom During Reconstruction**

### **Note for Teachers:**

This is the Teaching Guide for the African American Freedom During Reconstruction Case Study:

[museumofthenewsouth.org/schools/african-american-freedom-during-reconstruction/](http://museumofthenewsouth.org/schools/african-american-freedom-during-reconstruction/)

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## Background Information

Reconstruction is the time period from 1865 to 1877 that followed the American Civil War. Citizens of both the North and South were faced with the difficult task of rebuilding America. Physically, Americans could rebuild the ruins with a joint effort, but emotionally, they were in a state of turmoil that would last for years to come. With the swift passing of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments, the legal status of African Americans changed; for example, the 14th Amendment designated African Americans as citizens of the United States, providing them with all the rights due to citizens of a nation. The transition of African Americans formerly viewed as property, to now equal under the law of the land, created a storm of animosity and hatred from Southerners who simply wanted their life to return the way it was before the war.

While life for African Americans did transform in several ways, a contrast existed in being free citizens but also being viewed as inferior by many white people. The newly created Ku Klux Klan and other racial terror groups worked to intimidate and limit the freedoms of African Americans as much as possible. Through acts of racial terrorism, African Americans found themselves in a world similar to that of slavery. While not technically still enslaved, they were tied to the immense fear imposed upon them that negatively impacted their lives.

African Americans continued to be limited in political, economic, and social realms after slavery. The 15th Amendment granted American men the right to vote regardless of race, but Black men had their voting rights and ability to hold office attacked. Legal means such as poll taxes and literacy tests were imposed as well as the continual threat of extralegal intimidation and violence. Poll taxes were fees that had to be paid in order to vote, which disproportionately affected African Americans due to limitations on generating income from their labor or through land ownership during and after slavery. Literacy tests were often purposely confusing tests administered before voting that many people did not pass. White men who could not pay a poll tax or pass a literacy test were still allowed to vote through the use of grandfather clauses. As long as their male relatives were legal voters before the Civil War, they could vote.

Economically, many African Americans in the South were drawn to sharecropping or tenant farming due to scarce job opportunities. This system entailed landowners allowing farmers to use their land in exchange for a large portion of harvested crops or rental payments. Sharecropping offered some economic independence, but the system drastically benefited mostly white landowners at the expense of their tenants and created many of the same economic conditions that had existed under slavery. Most sharecroppers were confined to a cycle of debt and poverty that was very difficult to beat.

Black Codes contributed to the social restraints on African Americans by enforcing separate laws and codes of conduct by race and making Black citizens subservient to whites. Black men and boys in particular were more often subject to the horrors of convict leasing, in which prisoners' labor was sold to private enterprises with typically terrible working conditions.

The Reconstruction Era was ultimately one that began with great promise yet ended under the specter of white supremacy. African Americans were able to access rights and freedoms that had previously been denied to them, but this access was severely limited. Freedmen's Bureaus and the military took what little protection they offered when they began to leave the South at the end of Reconstruction. The radical promise of Reconstruction would have to wait because as the era faded, most African Americans would live in the Jim Crow world until the transformative years of the Civil Rights Movement.

### **Additional Information**

This case study asks students to delve deeper into questions surrounding freedom. In particular, students are asked to consider what it truly means to be free. As the background notes above, while African Americans were granted rights they had been previously denied through the Reconstruction Amendments, they were also limited in their political, social, and economic freedoms. When having students complete the case study, teachers should draw connections to the following topics that will likely have been covered prior: the Civil War, slavery, and the Emancipation Proclamation.

In addition to the general background included on the Reconstruction Era, teachers should note that most of the sources students will be analyzing are specific to North Carolina. For example, students will be asked to analyze Black Codes from North Carolina. Teachers can make connections between the greater United States and the state of North Carolina.

## Activity Instructions and Rubrics

### Discussion

- Teachers should pose the following question to students: What does it mean to be free?
  - Teachers should intentionally keep this question vague. Students may think of freedom in their own lives, they may think of historical conceptions of freedom, etc.
  - Teachers should allow students to think of their own answers to this question before discussing. Students could do this in the following ways:
    - Students could complete a quick-write on the question
    - Students could simply think about their answer
    - Students could answer the question as a warm-up at the beginning of class
- Once students have answered the question independently, they should discuss their answers in small groups of 3 to 4 people. They can use the included notes sheet to write down what their small group shares with each other or blank paper.
  - Once students have discussed their answers in small groups, groups should share with the whole class.
  - Teachers should review expectations for whole-class discussions with students.
  - Teachers should let students guide the direction of the discussion. There is not a specific answer to look for, but rather the purpose is to generate inquiry and interest in students through the use of the question and discussion.
  - Students can use the notes sheet to complete the whole-class discussion section or they can use blank paper.

**Modification:** Students can complete a silent discussion by posting their quick-writes on the wall and having other students give feedback and ask questions with post-it notes.

**Extension:** Students can write a follow-up reflection about their small group and whole class discussions and if and how it changed any of their initial opinions.

### Make an Argument

- Have students reread the Student Background section and have them annotate and summarize it. Make sure they have also analyzed and answered questions for the five case study sources. An optional graphic organizer is included for source analysis.
- Using the Background Information, analysis of the sources, and their notes from the class discussion, students will answer the following question: Were African Americans

free during Reconstruction? They will answer this question by completing one of the following tasks:

- An argumentative paragraph
  - Clear argument that answers the essential question
  - 7-10 sentences
  - Include evidence from at least 3 primary sources analyzed
- A recorded video
  - Clear argument that answers the essential question
  - 3-5 minutes
  - Include evidence from at least 3 primary sources analyzed
- A slideshow presentation
  - Clear argument that answers the essential question
  - 8-10 slides
  - Include evidence from at least 3 primary sources analyzed

**Modification:** Students can complete a shorter paragraph, video or slideshow.

**Extension:** Students can share their completed argument with the class to receive feedback and answer other students' questions.

### **One Pager**

- Have students research either the Civil Rights Act of 1964 OR the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and create a one pager to summarize their research.
- If you are not familiar with one pagers, they are easily searchable online.
- The one pager should include visual and text elements and be in color.
- At a minimum it should include the following information:
  - Background information leading up to passage of the law
  - How the law was passed
  - Major parts of the law and what it did/does
  - How it affected North Carolina
  - How the law has changed, if at all, today

**Modification:** Students can complete fewer of the required elements of the one-pager and/or use fewer text elements.

**Extension:** Students can complete one-pagers on both of the topics and write a summary paragraph comparing the two pieces of legislation.

## **African American Freedom During Reconstruction: Discussion**

Quick-Write: What does it mean to be free?

Small-Group Discussion: What did your small group share?

Whole-Class Discussion: What did your classmates share?

### African American Freedom During Reconstruction: Source Analysis

**Instructions:** Using the case study sources, complete the graphic organizer below.

Document	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3
Black Codes in NC			
Sharecropper's Contract			
Freedmen's Convention Address			

<b>Document</b>	<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Question 3</b>
Article about Chicken Stephens			
Political Card			



## **African American Freedom During Reconstruction: Make an Argument**

**Instructions:** Construct an argument that answers the Compelling Question: **Were African Americans free during Reconstruction?**

To answer this question, use the following resources:

- Notes from class discussion
- Reconstruction Background Information annotated and summarized
- Answers to case study source questions and/or your Source Analysis sheet

To construct your argument, use one of the following options:

- Write a 7-10 sentence argumentative paragraph that answers the Compelling Question. Your paragraph should have a clear argument and include primary source evidence from at least 3 of the primary sources analyzed in the case study.
- Record a 3-5 minute video that answers the Compelling Question. Your recorded video should have a clear argument and include primary source evidence from at least 3 of the primary sources analyzed in the case study.
- Create a slideshow with 8-10 slides that answers the Compelling Question. Your slideshow should have a clear argument and include primary source evidence from at least 3 of the primary sources analyzed in the case study.

**This box should be used for the argumentative paragraph option. If you choose to record a video or create a slideshow, please note that in this box.**

### African American Freedom During Reconstruction: Make an Argument Rubric

	<b>0 Points (Does Not Meet Standards)</b>	<b>1 Point (Needs Improvement to Meet Standards)</b>	<b>2 Points (Meets Standards)</b>	<b>3 Points (Exceeds Standards)</b>
<b>Argument</b>	No evidence of student including an argument	Student response includes an argument but it is unclear or difficult to understand	Student response includes an argument	Student response includes an argument AND the argument is communicated at the beginning of the student response
<b>Use of Evidence/ Support</b>	No evidence of student using reasons or evidence to support their answer	Student response has reasons that support the argument, but does not include specific evidence from primary sources used in the case study	Student response has 1-2 pieces of specific evidence from primary sources used in the case study AND the evidence supports the main idea/argument	Student response has at least 3 pieces of specific evidence from primary sources used in the case study AND the evidence supports the main idea/argument
<b>Writing/ Composition Requirement</b>	No evidence of a student response	Student response exists but only has 1-2 sentences, 1-3 slides or is 30 seconds recorded	Student response is close to 5 sentences, 6-8 slides or 2 minutes recorded	Student response is at least 7 sentences, 8 slides or is at least 3 minutes long

## **Student Objectives**

1. Students will analyze a variety of Reconstruction Era primary sources connecting to African American freedoms.
2. Students will be able to explain how the freedoms of African Americans were restricted socially, economically, and politically during Reconstruction.
3. Students will be able to construct an argument about whether or not African Americans were free during the Reconstruction Era.

## **Relevant NC 8th Grade Social Studies Standards**

**8.H.1.3** Explain how slavery, segregation, voter suppression, reconcentration, and other discriminatory practices have been used to suppress and exploit certain groups within North Carolina and the nation over time.

**8.I.1.7** Construct arguments consisting of multiple claims with evidence from sources and attention to disciplinary detail.

**8.C&G.2.1** Summarize the strategies and societal reforms used to address discrimination and oppression in North Carolina and the nation.