**Stanford University - Reading Like A Historian: Reconstruction**

**Document A: The Reconstruction Amendments**

The 13th, 14th and 15th amendments to the United States Constitution are sometimes called the “Reconstruction Amendments.” They were passed in order to abolish slavery and to establish the rights of former slaves.

**13th Amendment: 1865** Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

**14th Amendment: 1868** Section 1. All persons born or naturalized in the United States . . . are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

**15th Amendment: 1870** Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

 **Vocabulary**

 **jurisdiction**: legal control **naturalized**: made citizens **abridge**: limit  **immunities**: rights

**Document B: Black Codes**

In the years following the Civil War, many Southern states and cities passed Black Codes. These laws laid out what freed blacks were and were not allowed to do. The document below, passed July 3, 1865, is a Black Code from Opelousas, Louisiana.

**SECTION 1**. No black shall be allowed to come within the limits of the town of Opelousas without special permission from his employers.

**SECTION 3**. No black shall be permitted to rent or keep a house within the limits of the town under any circumstances.

**SECTION 4**. No black shall reside within the limits of the town of Opelousas who is not in the regular service of some white person or former owner.

**SECTION 5**. No public meetings of blacks shall be allowed within the limits of the town of Opelousas under any circumstances without the permission of the mayor or president of the board of police. This, however, does not prevent the freedmen from attending the usual church services.

**SECTION 7**. No freedman who is not in the military service shall be allowed to carry firearms, or any kind of weapons, within the limits of the town of Opelousas without the special permission of his employer, in writing, and approved by the mayor or president of the board of police.

**Source**: Black Code from Opelousas, Louisiana, July 3, 1865.

**Document C: Henry Adams Statement**

In September 1865 I asked the boss to let me go to the city of Shreveport. He said, "All right, when will you come back?" I told him "next week." He said, "You had better carry a pass." I said, "I will see whether I am free by going without a pass."

I met four white men about six miles south of town. One of them asked me who I belonged to. I told him no one. So him and two others struck me with a stick and told me they were going to kill me and every other black who told them that they did not belong to anyone. They left me and I then went on to Shreveport. I saw over twelve colored men and women, beat, shot and hung between there and Shreveport.

Sunday I went back home. The boss was not at home. I asked the madam [the boss’s wife], "where was the boss?" She said, "You should say 'master'. You all are not free . . . and you shall call every white lady 'missus' and every white man 'master.'" During the same week the madam took a stick and beat one of the young colored girls, who was about fifteen years of age. The boss came the next day and whipped the same girl nearly to death. . . . After the whipping a large number of young colored people decided to leave that place for Shreveport. [On our way], out came about forty armed white men and shot at us and took my horse. They said they were going to kill every colored person they found leaving their masters.

**Source**: Former slave Henry Adams made this statement before the U.S. Senate in 1880 about the early days of his freedom after the Civil War.

**Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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1. What was the purpose of the Reconstruction Amendments?

2. What rights did the Amendment’s guarantee?

3. List three things that freed men and women were not allowed to do according Document B.

4. Why would white Southerners pass laws that controlled the movement of African Americans? What would happen if African Americans left the South in huge numbers?

5. According to Adam’s account in Document C, what tactics are used by white southerners to control or discrimination against newly freed African Americans?

6. Do you trust Adam’s account in Document C? Why or why not?

7. Knowing what you do from the Adam’s account, if you were a newly freed slave during the same period would you stay with your former owner or risk going out on your own? Please explain your choice.

8. Based on the documents provided and your previous knowledge of the period, do you believe African Americans were free during Reconstruction? Explain your reasoning.

9. Based on these documents, was Reconstruction a success or failure? Explain your reasoning.