



FOURTEEN

A THEATRICAL PERFORMANCE

VIDEO CLIP

<https://constitutioncenter.org/learn/hall-pass/14th-amendment-discussion-starter-the-black-codes>

Run Time: 4:26

FOURTEENTH AMENDMENT DISCUSSION STARTER: THE BLACK CODES

SUMMARY

In this clip from *FOURTEEN: A Theatrical Performance*, performers share sections of the Black Codes from the Reconstruction era and the response of African Americans to the rise of these laws. African Americans used petitions, like the one in the clip from the South Carolina Colored Convention. Once you have watched the video use the discussion questions below to explore the effect of Black Codes on newly freed African Americans and the work of state Colored Conventions to ensure rights for all.

BACKGROUND

During 1865 and early 1866, Southern state legislatures passed laws that, according to Frederick Douglass, merely replaced slavery with “some other name.” These Black Codes severely limited the economic rights and social mobility of African Americans. The laws maintained a racist social system by restricting their ability to speak freely, own property, travel, and conduct business. In 1865, black leaders organized conventions to push for equal rights and access to employment, land, and education—influencing constitutional politics and future movements.

Prominent Philadelphian Richard Allen, 1760-1831, organized the first national convention of black leaders in 1830 to discuss and improve the African-American condition. The colored conventions movement continued well after the Civil War. It provided a critical venue for debating national concerns and strategizing to protect the interests of black people.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1) Why would states pass these Black Codes?
What do the Black Codes have in common?
- 2) How do the laws mentioned in the clip compare to aspects of slavery?
- 3) What changes were Colored Conventions hoping to enact?
Were any of these changes implemented in the future?

PRIMARY SOURCES

Excerpts from the Black Codes of Louisiana, Mississippi, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, Virginia, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, and South Carolina. 1865-1866. Library of Congress, Washington, DC

“Proceedings of the Colored People’s Convention of the State of South Carolina, held in Zion Church, Charleston, November, 1865. Together with the declaration of rights and wrongs; an address to the people; a petition to the legislature, and a memorial to Congress.” Charleston: South Carolina Leader Office, 1865