

## Significance of the 1868 Louisiana Constitution

### Learning Objectives

- Gain awareness of the progressive changes introduced by the 1868 Louisiana State Constitution under Federal Reconstruction.
- Consider how new laws and legislation during Reconstruction impacted Black Americans, many of whom were formerly enslaved.
- Practice interpreting textual and visual primary sources through close looking, reflecting, and questioning.

### Introduction

The Federal Reconstruction Acts of 1867 required the former Confederate states to create new constitutions before they could be readmitted to the Union. The new constitutions had to be created by representatives elected by *all* male citizens over the age of 21, regardless of race. For the first time, Black men in Louisiana could vote and run for office in an election for state legislators. The Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1868 included 49 Black men and 49 white men.

The resulting 1868 Louisiana Constitution granted rights that were previously denied to Black residents. It was a significant document that introduced major changes to social, economic, and political life in Louisiana.

In this activity, you will analyze a print featuring portraits of the Black members of the Louisiana Constitutional Convention of 1868 and excerpts from the state constitution. You will interpret words, images, and design choices on this primary source document.

### Instructions

1. Look at the full print and note your initial reactions and interpretations.
2. Following the prompts, look closely at different sections of the print and answer the questions.

### Primary Source

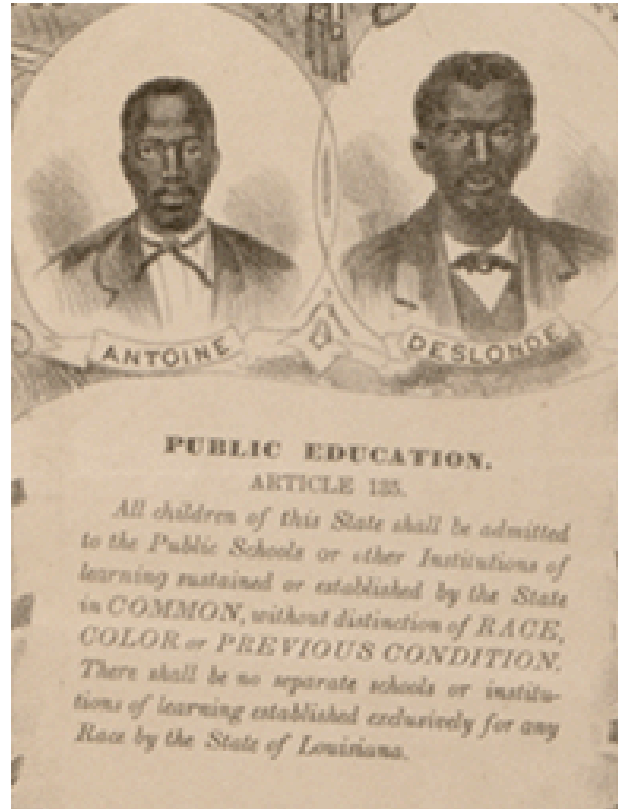
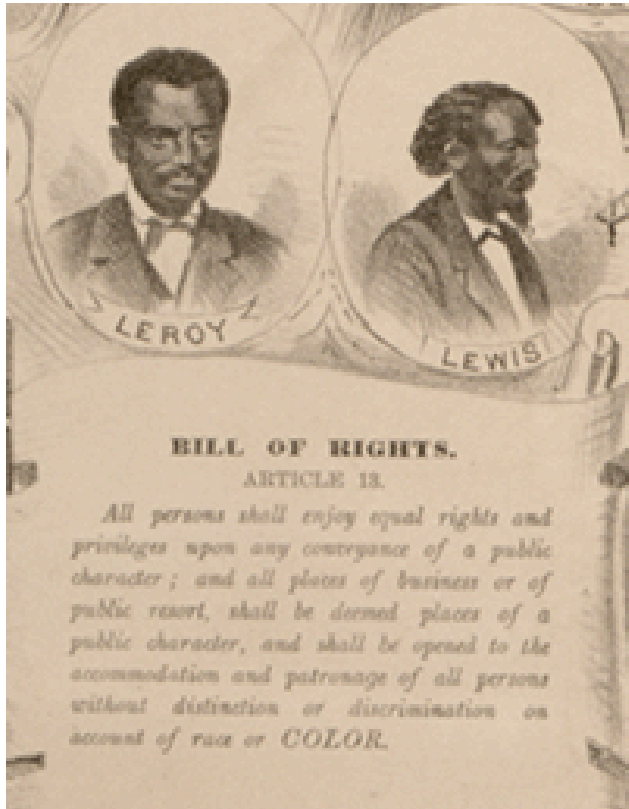
Extract from the reconstructed Constitution of the state of Louisiana, with portraits of the distinguished members of the Convention & Assembly, A.D. 1868

- <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g05947>
- **Repository:** Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C.
- **TIP:** Use the link above to display the image on a projector so the whole class can look together.



A. Look at this image.

- What do you notice first?
- What do you notice about the design or layout?
- What images stick out to you?
- What words stick out to you?



- B. Take a closer look at the sections above showing portraits and excerpts of the constitution.
- How are the people portrayed? What are they wearing? What illustration and design choices did the artist make?
  - What words are in all capital letters in the excerpts from the constitution? Why do you think those words are emphasized?
  - Why do you think these two particular excerpts from the constitution were selected for this print? What might be the significance of these articles?



- C. Look at these close-up images and symbols from the document.
- What images can you identify?
  - Do you see any images that you cannot identify? Describe those images.
  - What do these images mean to you? What do they make you think about?

D. Reflect and question:

- After looking closely at this document, what do you think the printmaker was trying to communicate to people who saw this print in 1868?
  
- What do you think was the printmaker's attitude toward the 1868 Louisiana Constitution? Did they feel positively or negatively about the constitution and the members of the convention? What clues make you think that way?
  
- Who do you think was the intended audience for this print? What clues make you think that?
  
- Where do you think this print would have been displayed in 1868?
  
- Is this print similar or different to any of the ways we share information currently?
  
- What further questions do you have about this print? What does it make you wonder?