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Final Project Written Statement

After the Civil War, the south was in shambles. It was a time of great turmoil, known today as “Reconstruction.” In this period, the southern economy took a nosedive, African American families were torn apart from the war, and racial tensions rose between African Americans and Whites. Amidst the crumbling and the chaos, however, newly-freed people of color were joining the workforce in ways that had been previously unavailable to them. Through the three former slave narratives, a picture of the Post-Civil-War narrative comes to light. By following these people through their journeys, we can better understand the effect of freedom on the economy, opportunity, and quality of life.

Bass Reeves’s story is important to our understanding of mobility for freed people of color due to its exemplary nature. Although his story is an exception and not a rule, Reeves shows what African Americans could accomplish if they were accepted into the workforce on equal terms. His contributions to the justice system and his devotion to his work are enduring and crucial to the post-Civil-War narratives of former slaves. Fredrick Douglas displays a prime example of how discrimination does not have to define one's life, as he overcame slavery to become one of the most powerful black men in history. Movement was a big part of Douglass's life, escaping slavery, moving to New York, then going to Washington D.C. and eventually working as a representative for Haiti. The potential for success was made by his movement, and he took full advantage of each opportunity he was given. The racism that plagues the United States posed a great challenge for Douglas, but he overcame this oppression, earning a position in the government, as well as meeting with multiple Presidents. Douglas set a precedent for success to those who worked hard enough, negating the importance of race, and relying on movement to provide him with opportunities. Booker T. Washington was an advocate for racial justice during the reconstruction era. He showed how important it is for individuals of both races to get along. He demonstrated how African Americans can be successful and have an impact in America.

As we observe the path of ex-slaves during the era of reconstruction and beyond, it is clear to see that though there was racial inequality, it was possible for African Americans to make a name for themselves. The stories of these men, three successful ex-slaves, show us how crucial the reconstruction time period was in aiding and helping the African-American population gain rights. Two of the men had relationships with the President of the United States, and one enforced the law of our nation. The African Americans certainly struggled in their efforts for equality, but few obtained unforeseen positive status in America. The constant theme of movement amplifies that there is a positive correlation between freedom and movement. These slaves, once free, moved to start a better life for themselves, achieving success on a level not capable to those who remained where they were. Movement is key to being able to increase possibilities. Taking advantage of this freedom to move will amplify your possibility for success. The three men we wrote about show how African Americans could break the stereotypes and negative stigma, by moving around the United States to achieve success, during a time of such negativity and scrutiny of their people.