

## SAVANNAH FREEDPEOPLE EXPRESS THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR FREEDOM

*In January 1865, after Union general William T. Sherman's army arrived in Savannah, Georgia, followed by thousands of newly emancipated people, the secretary of war Edwin Stanton joined Sherman at a meeting with representatives of Savannah's black community. The black community chose Garrison Frazier, a minister who was formerly enslaved, to represent their views before Sherman and Stanton. What follows is an excerpt from the transcript of this meeting, known as the Savannah Colloquy. Following the meeting, Sherman ordered 400,000 acres of land along the coasts of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida to be divided into 40-acre plots and given to freedpeople and their families.*

1. **State what your understanding is in regard to the acts of Congress, and President Lincoln's proclamation, touching the condition of the colored people in the rebel States.**

**Answer.** So far as I understand President Lincoln's proclamation to the rebellious States, it is, that if they would lay down their arms and submit to the laws of the United States before the 1st of January, 1863, all should be well; but if they did not, then all the slaves in the rebel States should be free, henceforth and forever: that is what I understood.

2. **State what you understand by slavery, and the freedom that was to be given by the President's Proclamation.**

**Answer.** Slavery is receiving by irresistible power the work of another man, and not by his consent. The freedom, as I understand it, promised by the proclamation, is taking us from under the yoke of bondage and placing us where we could reap the fruit of our own labor, and take care of ourselves, and assist the Government in maintaining our freedom.

3. **State in what manner you think you can take care of yourselves, and how can you best assist the Government in maintaining your freedom.**

**Answer.** The way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our labor—that is, by the labor of the women, and children, and old men—and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare . . . We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own.

4. **State in what manner you would rather live, whether scattered among the whites, or in colonies by yourselves.**

**Answer.** I would prefer to live by ourselves, for there is a prejudice against us in the South that will take years to get over; but I do not know that I can answer for my brethren.

[Mr. Lynch says he thinks they should not be separated, but live together. All the other persons present being questioned, one by one, answer that they agree with 'brother Frazier.']

5. **Do you think that there is intelligence enough among the slaves of the South to maintain themselves under the Government of the United States, and the equal protection of its laws, and maintain good and peaceable relations among yourselves and with your neighbors?**

**Answer.** I think there is sufficient intelligence among us to do so.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Sherman Meets the Colored Ministers in Savannah," O.R. Series I, Vol. XLVII/2 [S# 99], Union Correspondence, Orders, and Returns Relating to Operations in North Carolina (from February 1), South Carolina, Southern Georgia, and East Florida, from January 1, 1865, to March 23, 1865, #2.

## WHAT THE BLACK MAN WANTS

*During the Reconstruction era, Frederick Douglass demanded government action to secure land, voting rights, and civil equality for black Americans. The following passage is excerpted from a speech given by Douglass to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in April 1865.*

We may be asked, I say, why we want it [the right to vote]. I will tell you why we want it. We want it because it is our *right*, first of all. No class of men can, without insulting their own nature, be content with any deprivation of their rights. We want it again, as a means for educating our race. Men are so constituted that they derive their conviction of their own possibilities largely from the estimate formed of them by others. If nothing is expected of a people, that people will find it difficult to contradict that expectation. By depriving us of suffrage, you affirm our incapacity to form an intelligent judgment respecting public men and public measures; you declare before the world that we are unfit to exercise the elective franchise, and by this means lead us to undervalue ourselves, to put a low estimate upon ourselves, and to feel that we have no possibilities like other men . . .

What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply *justice*. [Applause.] The American people have always been anxious to know what they shall do with us . . . Everybody has asked the question, and they learned to ask it early of the abolitionists, "What shall we do with the Negro?" I have had but one answer from the beginning. Do nothing with us! . . . All I ask is, give him a chance to stand on his own legs! Let him alone! If you see him on his way to school, let him alone, don't disturb him! If you see him going to the dinner-table at a hotel, let him go! If you see him going to the ballot-box, let him alone, don't disturb him! . . .<sup>1</sup>

1 Frederick Douglass, "What the Black Man Wants" (speech before the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, April 1865), available at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=495> (accessed Apr. 25, 2013).

## LETTER FROM JOURDON ANDERSON: A FREEDMAN WRITES HIS FORMER MASTER

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865.

To my old Master, Colonel P. H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee.

Sir:

I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get \$25 a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy (the folks call her Mrs. Anderson), and the children, Milly, Jane, and Grundy, go to school and are learning well. The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At \$25 a month for me, and \$2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to \$11,680. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve and die, if it come to that, than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters. You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

From your old servant,

Jourdon Anderson

P.S.— Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from William E. Gienapp, ed., *The Civil War and Reconstruction: A Documentary Collection* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 380.

## SOUTH CAROLINA FREEDPEOPLE DEMAND EDUCATION

*In November 1865, a convention of freedmen met in Charleston, South Carolina, to demand new rights for African Americans. Foremost among their demands was education for their children. The convention issued the following resolution:*

*Whereas, "Knowledge is power," and an educated and intelligent people can neither be held in, nor reduced to slavery; Therefore [be it] Resolved, That we will insist upon the establishment of good schools for the thorough education of our children throughout the State; that, to this end, we will contribute freely and liberally of our means, and will earnestly and persistently urge forward every measure calculated to elevate us to the rank of a wise, enlightened and Christian people. Resolved, That we solemnly urge the parents and guardians of the young and rising generation, by the sad recollection of our *forced* ignorance and degradation in the past, and by the bright and inspiring hopes of the future, to see that schools are at once established in every neighborhood; and when so established, to see to it that every child of proper age, is kept in regular attendance upon the same.<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Colored People's Convention of the State of South Carolina, Held in Zion Church, Charleston, November 1865* (Charleston: South Carolina Leader Office, 1865), (accessed Sept. 18, 2014). [http://fax.libs.uga.edu/e185x93xg4xs7x1865/1f/State\\_Convention\\_of-the\\_Colored\\_People\\_of\\_South\\_Carolina\\_1865.pdf](http://fax.libs.uga.edu/e185x93xg4xs7x1865/1f/State_Convention_of-the_Colored_People_of_South_Carolina_1865.pdf).

## THE FREEDMEN'S BUREAU OUTLINES THE DUTIES OF FREEDPEOPLE

*Rufus Saxton, the assistant commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau, wrote the following letter to the freedpeople of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.*

HEADQUARTERS ASS'T COMMISSIONER BUREAU REFUGEES, FREEDMEN,  
AND ABANDONED LANDS, SOUTH CAROLINA, GEORGIA, AND FLORIDA,  
*Beaufort, S. C., August 16, 1865.*

*To the Freedmen of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida :*

. . . By the emancipation proclamation of President Lincoln, the laws of Congress, and the will of God, you have been declared "forever free." At the outset of your new career it is important that you should understand some of the duties and responsibilities of freemen. Your first duty is to go to work at whatever honest labor your hands can find to do, and provide food, clothing, and shelter for your families. Bear in mind that a man who will not work should not be allowed to eat. Labor is ennobling to the character, and, if rightly directed, brings to the laborer all the comforts and luxuries of life. The only argument left to those who would keep you in slavery is, that in freedom you will not work; that the lash is necessary to drive you to the cotton and rice fields; that these fair lands which you have cultivated so many years in slavery will now be left desolate. On the sea-islands of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, where your brethren have been free for three years, they have nobly shown how much better they can work in freedom. Over forty thousand are now engaged in cultivating the soil, their children are being educated, and they are self-sustaining, happy, and free. Some are working for wages, others are cultivating the land on shares, giving one-half to the owner.

The agents of the Freedmen's Bureau will aid you in making contracts to work for fair wages for your former masters or others who may desire to hire you, or will locate you on small farms of forty acres, which you can hire at an easy rent, with an opportunity to purchase at low rates any time within three years. These are splendid opportunities. Freedmen, let not a day pass ere you find some work for your hands to do, and do it with all your might. Plough and plant, dig and hoe, cut and gather in the harvest. Let it be seen that where in slavery there was raised a blade of corn or a pound of cotton, in freedom there will be *two*. Be peaceful and honest. Falsehood and theft should not be found in freedom; they are the vices of slavery. Keep in good faith all your contracts and agreements, remembering always that you are a slave no longer. While guarding carefully your own rights, be as careful not to violate your neighbor's. "Do unto others as you would they should do unto you."

In cases where you feel that you have been wronged, it is neither wise nor expedient to take redress into your own hands, but leave the matter to be settled by three impartial friends of both parties. In cases of difficulty between white men and yourselves, you should appeal to one of the agents of this bureau in your vicinity, who may appoint one referee, the other party one, and you should appoint a third, and the decision of the majority should be considered final. By this easy mode of settling difficulties much trouble may be avoided.

In slavery you only thought of to-day. Having nothing to hope for beyond the present, you did not think of the future, but, like the ox and horse, thought only of the food and work for the day. In freedom you must have an eye to the future, and have a plan and object in life. Decide now what

you are to do next year—where you are to plant in the spring, and how much—and in the autumn and winter prepare your land and manure for the early spring planting. After being sure that you have planted sufficient corn and potatoes for food, then put in all the cotton and rice you can, for these are the crops which will pay the best. Bear in mind that cotton is a regal plant, and the more carefully it is cultivated the greater will be the crop. Let the world see ere long the fields of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida white with this important staple cultivated by free labor.

In slavery the domestic relations of man and wife were generally disregarded. Virtue, purity, and honor among men and women were not required or expected. All this must change now that you are free. The domestic altar must be held sacred, and with jealous care must you guard the purity of a wife, a sister, or a daughter; and the betrayer of their honor should be punished and held up to universal condemnation. You are advised to study, in church and out of it, the rules of the marriage relation issued from these headquarters. Colored men and women, prove by your future lives that you can be virtuous and pure.

No people can be truly great or free without education. Upon the education of your children depends in a great degree the measure of your success as a people. Send your children to school whenever you can. Deny yourselves even the necessaries of life to keep your boys and girls at school, and never allow them to be absent a day or an hour while it is in session.

Your liberty is a great blessing which has been vouchsafed to you, and you should be patient and hopeful. The nation, through this bureau, has taken your cause in hand, and will endeavor to do you ample justice. If you do not obtain all your rights this year, be content with part; and if you act rightly, all will come in good time. Try to show by your good conduct that you are worthy of all; and whatever may happen, let no uneasy spirit stir you up to any act of rebellion against the government. Strive to live down by your true and loyal conduct the wicked lie and weak invention of your enemies, that in any event you would rebel against that government and people which have sacrificed so many precious lives and so much treasure in your cause. Could you rise even against those who oppress you, or against a government which has given you a right to yourselves, your wives and children, and taken from you the overseer, the slave trader, the auction block, and broken the driver's whip forever? I have no fears on this point, and trust you to show those who have how groundless they are, and that you are willing to leave your cause in the hands of the government. Ever cherish in your hearts the prayerful spirit, the trusting, childlike faith in God's good providence, which has sustained so many of you in your darkest hour.

The assistant commissioners and agents of this bureau will publish this circular to the freedmen throughout these States, and ministers of the Gospel are requested to have it read in all the churches where the freedmen are assembled.

R. SAXTON,  
*Brevet Major General, Assistant Commissioner.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United States Congress Joint Committee on Reconstruction, *Report of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction, at the First Session, Thirty-ninth Congress*, vol. 3 (US Government Printing Office, 1866), available at [http://books.google.com/books?id=edg0AQAAAMAJ&source=gb\\_s\\_navlinks\\_s](http://books.google.com/books?id=edg0AQAAAMAJ&source=gb_s_navlinks_s).

