

For Union and Freedom: African Americans in the Civil War

**An Online Professional Development Seminar
for North Carolina Teachers
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from the National Humanities Center

Close Reading

We will analyze:

Informational Texts

- Letters
- Testimony
- Reports

Persuasive Text

- Petition

Image

Close Reading

Three types of close reading questions:

- **Contextualizing**
- **General Analytical**
- **Text-specific**

Close Reading of Informational Texts

Contextualizing Questions:

- What kind of text are we dealing with?
- When was it written?
- Who wrote it?
- For what audience was it intended?
- For what purpose was it written?

Text-specific questions will appear throughout the seminar.

General Analytical Questions:

Where appropriate, cite specific language from the text.

- What inferences can we draw from the text?
- What is implied and not stated?
- What is omitted that we might expect to find in a document like this?
- What words are repeated? What is the effect of the repetition?
- Does the text make an argument? If so, what is the logic of the argument? The structure? How does the text's language advance the argument?

FROM THE FORUM Challenges, Issues, Questions

- What factors prompted the Union to employ African American troops in the War?
- What factors prompted the Confederacy to approve the use of African American troops?
- How decisive a role did African Americans play in the Union victory? In other words, were African American efforts on behalf of the North “a big deal”?
- To what extent did African Americans, free or enslaved, fight for the Confederacy?
- How did the Union army respond to the many escaped slaves who sought refuge within its lines?
- What specific impacts did African American participation have on the course and outcome of the War?

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDING

By undermining the Confederacy and aiding the Union, enslaved African Americans played vital roles in destroying slavery during the Civil War.

Leslie Rowland

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Land and Labor, 1865 (2008)

*Freedom's Soldiers: The Black Military
Experience in the Civil War* (1998)

*Families and Freedom: A Documentary
History of African-American Kinship in the
Civil War Era* (1997)

*Slaves No More: Three Essays on
Emancipation and the Civil War* (1992)

*Free at Last: A Documentary History of
Slavery, Freedom and the Civil War* (1992)



How African Americans Fought the Civil War

- They fled the South, denying the Confederacy valuable economic resources, including chiefly their labor.
- Because slaves knew their territory, they made excellent guides for Union troops in the South.
- For the same reason, they made excellent spies.
- They “stole” other slaves and encouraged still others to run away.
- They aided Union prisoners of war and Confederate deserters.
- They became soldiers and sailors and actively took up arms against the Confederacy.
- In doing all these things, they displayed courage, ingenuity, and loyalty, and in some cases experienced profound psychological transformations.
- Their service during the War changed Union policy and helped to sway Northern opinion to the idea that the War was about slavery after all.

Letter from John Boston to his wife in Maryland Upton Hill, Va., 12 January 1862

My Dear Wife it is with grate joy I take this time to let you know Whare I am i am now in Safety in the 14th Regiment of Brooklyn this Day i can Adress you thank god as a free man I had a little truble in giting away But as the lord led the Children of Isrel to the land of Canon So he led me to a land Whare fredom Will rain in spite Of earth and hell Dear you must make your Self content i am free from al the Slavers Lash. . . . I am With a very nice man and have All that hart Can Wish But My Dear I Cant express my grate desire that i Have to See you i trust the time Will Come When We Shal meet again And if We dont met on earth We Will Meet in heven Whare Jesas ranes

. . . .

i Want you to rite To me Soon as you Can Without Delay Direct your letter to the 14th Reigment New york State malitia Uptons Hill Virginea In Care of Mr Cranford Comary. . . . Kiss Daniel For me. . . . Give my love to Father and Mother

Analysis

- Did John Boston write this letter, or was it dictated to someone else?
- If he wrote it, what does the very fact that this letter was written at all tell us about John Boston?
- At what personal cost had John Boston chosen to seize freedom by taking refuge with a Union army regiment?
- What did John Boston mean when he wrote that he was “with” a very nice man in the 14th New York State Militia?
- How did decisions like that of John Boston's affect the course of the war and the transformation of Union war aims?

Testimony by Samuel Elliot before the Southern Claims Commission McIntosh, Ga., 17 July 1873

My name is Samuel Elliott I was born in Liberty County a Slave. . . . I belonged to Maybank Jones. . . . I was with my master as a waiter—in the rebel service I was with him Eleven month. I came home with him. I told my son what was going on—he with 11 more ran off and joined the Army (the Yankee Army) on St Catherine Island. I dont remember the Year but it was soon after the battle at Williamsburgh Va, and before the 7 days battle near Chickahomony. . . . My Master had me taken up tied me and tried to make me tell “What made them ran off” I had to lie about it to keep from getting killed. . . . that stoped the slave owners from sending or taking slave into the Army as waiters or anything else. it stoped it in our neighborhood

Analysis

- What do you think Samuel Elliot told his son?
- How did the mobilization of slaves in the Confederate war effort affect the security of slavery?
- How did slaves take advantage of Confederate mobilization to undermine slavery?
- What does this letter tell us about Elliot’s knowledge of the War?
- How does this letter illustrate a point of vulnerability for the Confederacy?

**Letter from the headquarters of the Union Defenses North of the Potomac to a Regimental
Commander
Washington, D.C., 6 April 1862**

I am directed by Gen'l Doubleday to say in answer to your letter of the 2d inst. [of this month] that all negroes coming into the lines of any of the camps or Forts under his command, are to be treated as persons and not as chattels. . . . The question has been asked whether it would not be better to exclude negroes altogether from the lines. The General is of opinion that they bring much valuable information which cannot be obtained from any other source. They are acquainted with all the roads, paths fords and other natural features of the country and they make excellent guides They also Know and frequently, have exposed the haunts of secession spies and traitors and the existence of rebel organization. They will not therefore be excluded.

Analysis

Official federal policy dictated that the war was being fought solely to restore the Union and had nothing whatsoever to do with slavery. At the time of this letter, Union military forces were under instructions to exclude fugitive slaves from their lines. How were the actions of slaves eroding the exclusion policy and the goal of waging war without harming slavery?

**Report by Vincent Colyer to the Chairman of the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission, New York, 25
May 1863**

I give you a brief report of the freed blacks in the department of North Carolina during the time they were under my charge. I received my appointment a few days after the taking of Newbern. . . . My first order from Genl Burnside under this appointment, was to employ as many negro men as I could get up to the number of five thousand to offer them eight dollers a month. one ration of clothes. They were to work on **the building of forts**. . . .

In the four months that I had charge of them. the men built three first class earth work forts. . . . These three forts were our chief reliance for defence against the rebels. in case of an attack. have since been sucessfully used for that purpose by our forces under Major Genl Foster.

The negroes **loaded and discharged cargoes**. for about three hunderd vessels. **served regularly as crews** on about forty steamers. and **acted as permanent gangs of laborers** in all the Quatermasters. Commissary and Ordnance offices of the department.

Analysis

- Using the evidence in these passages, identify the ways in which slaves who escaped from the Confederacy aided the Union military effort. Why did they do so? And what risks did they take
- The events described in this testimony took place in the first half of 1862, before emancipation had become a Union war aim. How might these and similar actions by African Americans in other theaters of the war have influenced the development of Union policy toward slavery?

(3 slides)

Cont'd.

**Report by Vincent Colyer to the Chairman of
the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission
New York, 25 May 1863**

A number of the men were good **carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers &c.** and did effective work [. . .] **at bridge building, ship joining &c.** . . .

Upwards of fifty volunteers of the best & most courageous were kept constantly employed on the perilous, but most important duty of **spies, scouts and guides**. In the work they were invaluable and almost indispensable. They frequently went from thirty to three hundred miles within the enemy's lines; visiting his principle camps and most important posts and bringing us back important reliable information. They visited Kingston, Goldsboro, Trenton, Onslow, Swansboro, Tarboro of points on the Roanoke river; after these errands barely escaping with their lives. They were pursued on several occasions by blood hounds two or three of them were taken prisoners; one of these was shot; the fate of the others not known. The pay they received for this work was small but satisfactory. They seemed to think their lives were well spent, if necessary in giving rest, security, and success, to the Union troops, whom they regarded as their deliverers. They usually knelt in solemn prayer before they left, & on their return, from that hazardous duty. . . .

**Report by Vincent Colyer to the Chairman of
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New York, 25 May 1863**

The women and children supported themselves with but little aid from the government by washing, ironing, cooking, making pies, cakes &c. for the troops. The few women that were employed by the government in the hospitals received 4\$ a month, clothes and one ration. . . .

They consider it a duty to work for the U.S. government & though they could in many cases have made more money at other conditions; there was a public opinion among them that tabooed any one that refuses to work for the Government. . . .

the men frequently led foraging parties, to places where supplies necessary for the department were obtained. In this way boat-loads of prime and oak wood for the hospitals. Government officers. a steam boat load of cotton bales for the protection of the gunboats and with forage for the same, number of horses and mules for the Quarter Master Department. Small sheep were obtained at no other cost than the small wages of the men. Without doubt property far exceeding in value all that was ever paid to the blacks, was thus obtained for the Government.

**Letter from a Confederate cavalry battalion to the headquarters of the Confederate Department of Mississippi and East Louisiana
Okolona, Miss., 8 January 1863**

You will oblige me by sending instructions in reference to the manner of disposing of negroes—runaways—caught by my scouts and not giving correct statement of the names of their owners and residence. . . . the number is increasing beyond convenience.

On yesterday a negro was caught armed and killed two dogs in the attempt to catch him and finally shot himself inflicting a severe wound, after which he stated that he was from Corinth; and that on the night of the 1st inst [of this month] the negroes (or most of them) were assembled at that place and officers attended making lectures and stating they were free. The negroes after receiving each a pistol (six shooter) were instructed to go to the vicinity of their respective homes and act as missionaries (or “in the recruiting service.”) I wish to know how to deal with them when caught.

[Response from department headquarters was to remand recaptured slaves to the civil authorities, adding: “When you take Negroes with arms evidently coming out from the enemy's camp, proceed at once to hold a drum head court martial and if found guilty hang them upon the spot.”]

Analysis

- What does this letter tell us about the control the Confederates exerted over this part of Mississippi?
- What was Confederate policy regarding fugitives slaves?
- When slaves who had successfully reached Union lines endeavored to return to their homes to liberate others, what risks did they face?
- Compare the Union policy regarding escaped slaves with that of the Confederacy.

Letter from the headquarters of the Union Defenses North of the Potomac to a Regimental Commander Washington, D.C., 6 April 1862

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**Testimony by Captain Charles B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands at
Fortress Monroe, Virginia, before the American Freedmen's Inquiry
Commission**

Fortress Monroe, Va., 9 May 1863

Question: How many of the people called contrabands, have come under your observation?

Answer: Some 10,000 have come under our control, to be fed in part, and clothed in part, but I cannot speak accurately in regard to the number. This is the rendezvous. They come here from all about, from Richmond and 200 miles off in North Carolina There was one gang that started from Richmond 23 strong and only 3 got through. . . .

Q: In your opinion, is there any communication between the refugees and the black men still in slavery?

A: Yes Sir, **we have had men here who have gone back 200 miles. . . .**

(3 slides)

**Testimony by Captain Charles B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission
Fortress Monroe, Va., 9 May 1863**

Q: In your opinion would a change in our policy which would cause them to be treated with fairness, their wages punctually paid and employment furnished them in the army, become known and would it have any effect upon others in slavery?

A: Yes—Thousands upon Thousands. I went to Suffolk a short time ago to enquire into the state of things there . . . and the colored people actually sent a deputation to me one morning before I was up to know if we put black men in irons and sent them off to Cuba to be sold or set them at work and put balls on their legs and whipped them, just as in slavery; because that was the story up there. . . . One woman came through 200 miles in Men's clothes. . . . I found hundreds who had left their wives and families behind. I asked them “Why did you come away and leave them there?” and I found they had heard these stories, and wanted to come and see how it was. **“I am going back again after my wife” some of them have said “When I have earned a little money”** What as far as that?” “Yes” and I have had them come to me to borrow money, or to get their pay, if they had earned a months wages, and to get passes. **“I am going for my family” they say.** “Are you not afraid to risk it?” **“No I know the Way” Colored men will help colored men and they will work along the bypaths and get through.** In that way I have known quite a number who have gone up from time to time in the neighborhood of Richmond and several have brought back their families; some I have never heard from. **As I was saying they do not feel afraid now. The white people have nearly all gone, the blood hounds are not there now to hunt them and they are not afraid, before they were afraid to stir.** There are hundreds of negroes at Williamsburgh with their families working for nothing. They would not get pay here and they had rather stay where they are. “We are not afraid of being carried back” a great many have told us and “if we are, we can get away again”

**Testimony by Captain Charles B. Wilder, superintendent of contrabands at Fortress Monroe, Virginia, before the American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission
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...

I have questioned a great many of them and they do not feel much afraid; and there are a great many courageous fellows who have come from long distances in rebeldom. Some men who came here from North Carolina, knew all about the [Emancipation] Proclamation and they started on the belief in it; but they had heard these stories and they wanted to know how it was. Well, I gave them the evidence and I have no doubt their friends will hear of it.

Within the last two or three months the rebel guards have been doubled on the line and the officers and privates of the 99th New York between Norfolk and Suffolk have caught hundreds of fugitives and got pay for them.

Q: Do I understand you to say that a great many who have escaped have been sent back?

A: Yes Sir, The masters will come in to Suffolk in the day time and with the help of some of the 99th carry off their fugitives and by and by smuggle them across the lines and the soldier will get his \$20. or \$50.

Close Reading of Wilder's Testimony

Where appropriate, cite specific language from the text to support your answer.

- How does Wilder's use of anecdote and direct quotation affect his testimony?
- During the war, how did slaves know about Union military policies and practices?
- How did they communicate that information to African Americans who were still enslaved?
- What does this testimony suggest about both the opportunities and the dangers slaves had to take into account when they considered whether to stay where they were or try to escape to Union lines?
- How does Wilder's testimony document the cost of escaped slaves to the Confederacy?
- How does this text document a change in the psychology of the enslaved?

African Americans in the Civil War



The Effects of the Proclamation—Freed Negroes Coming into our Lines at Newbern, North Carolina
Harper's Weekly, Feb. 21, 1863

Discussion Questions

- What did emancipation cost the Confederacy?
- How does the oxen driver in the illustration echo the marching soldiers? What does the illustrator suggest through this parallel presentation?
- What is the significance of the oxen driver's whip?
- What is the effect of the illustration's funnel-like structure?

**Report by Union General Edward A. Wild (commander of a brigade of U.S. Colored Troops) regarding an expedition by former slaves to liberate others
Newport-News, Va., 1 September 1864**

I have the honor to report that some Government employees (colored) came up here from Fort Monroe and Hampton Hospitals, having been allowed a short leave of absence for the purpose of getting their families if possible. I told them I had no boats, but would help them with men. They reappeared the next day with sailboats. I sent with them a Captain and 15 men (dismounted Cavalry). The families were in and about Smithfield. I gave them strict instructions to abstain from plundering—to injure no one if possible—to get the women and children merely, and come away as promptly as possible. They were to land in the night. They followed these directions closely: but became delayed by the numbers of women and children anxious to follow, whom they packed in extra boats, picked up there, and towed along. They also had to contend against a head tide, and wind calm. So that their progress down Smithfield Creek in the early morn was exceedingly slow. The inhabitants evidently gathered in from some concerted plan of alarm or signals. For, 3 miles below, the party were intercepted by a force of irregular appearance, numbering about 100—having horses and dogs with them;—armed variously with shot guns, rifles, &c, and posted behind old breastworks with some hurried additions. They attacked the leading boats, killed a man and woman, and wounded another woman therein. The contrabands then rowed over to the opposite bank and scattered over the marshes. How many more have been slaughtered we know not.

Analysis

Use the evidence in this document to consider the efforts of escaped slaves to liberate others, as well as the resistance Confederates could mount against such efforts as late as the final year of the war. What does this document about the slaves' ability to revolt, even in the late stage of the War?

**Report by Colonel James S. Brisbin on black troops
at the battle of Saltville, Virginia
Lexington, Ky., 20 October 1864**

I have the honor to forward herewith a report of the operations of a detachment of the 5th U.S. Colored Cavalry during the late operations in Western Virginia against the Salt Works. . . .

On the march the Colored Soldiers as well as their white Officers were made the subject of much ridicule and many insulting remarks by the White Troops and in some instances petty outrages such as the pulling off the Caps of Colored Soldiers, stealing their horses etc was practiced by the White Soldiers. **These insults as well as the jeers and taunts that they would not fight were borne by the Colored Soldiers patiently or punished with dignity by their Officers but in no instance did I hear Colored soldiers make any reply to insulting language used toward [them] by the White Troops.**

(3 slides)

Analysis

- According to this report, how did the military service of African American men affect the attitudes of white soldiers?
- What does this report indicate about Confederate policy with respect to the Union's black troops? How did African American soldiers respond?

Cont'd.

**Report by Colonel James S. Brisbin on black troops
at the battle of Saltville, Virginia
Lexington, Ky., 20 October 1864**

On the 2d of October the forces reached the vicinity of the Salt Works and finding the enemy in force preparations were made for battle. . . . The Rebels opened upon them a terrific fire but the line pressed steadily forward up the steep side of the mountain until they found themselves within fifty yards of the Enemy. . . . **the Negroes rushed upon the works with a yell and after a desperate struggle carried the entire line killing and wounding a large number of the enemy and capturing some prisoners** There were four hundred black soldiers engaged in the battle. one hundred having been left behind sick and with broken down horses on the march, and one hundred having been left in the Valley to hold horses. Out of the four hundred engaged, one hundred and fourteen men and four officers fell killed or wounded. Of this fight I can only say that men could not have behaved more bravely. **I have seen white troops fight in twenty-seven battles and I never saw any fight better.** At dusk the Colored Troops were withdrawn from the enemies works, which they had held for over two hours, with scarcely a round of ammunition in their Cartridge Boxes.

On the return of the forces those who had scoffed at the Colored Troops on the march out were silent.

**Report by Colonel James S. Brisbin on black troops
at the battle of Saltville, Virginia
Lexington, Ky., 20 October 1864**

Nearly all the wounded were brought off though we had not an Ambulance in the command. The negro soldiers preferred present suffering to being murdered at the hands of a cruel enemy. I saw one man riding with his arm off another shot through the lungs and another shot through both hips.

Such of the Colored Soldiers as fell into the hands of the Enemy during the battle were brutally murdered. The Negroes did not retaliate but treated the Rebel wounded with great kindness, carrying them water in their canteens and doing all they could to alleviate the sufferings of those whom the fortunes of war had placed in their hands.

Analysis

- According to this report, how did the military service of African American men affect the attitudes of white soldiers?
- What does this report indicate about Confederate policy with respect to the Union's black troops? How did African American soldiers respond?

**Affidavit of Patsey Leach
Camp Nelson, Ky., 25 March 1865**

I am a widow and belonged to Warren Wiley of Woodford County Ky. My husband Julius Leach was a member of Co. D. 5th U.S. C. Cavalry and was killed at the Salt Works Va. about six months ago. When he enlisted sometime in the fall of 1864 he belonged to Sarah Martin Scott County Ky. He had only been about a month in the service when he was killed. . . . About three weeks after my husband enlisted a Company of Colored Soldiers passed our house and I was there in the garden and looked at them as they passed. My master had been watching me and when the soldiers had gone I went into the kitchen. My master followed me and Knocked me to the floor senseless saying as he did so, “You have been looking at them darned Nigger Soldiers” When I recovered my senses he beat me with a cowhide When my husband was Killed my master whipped me severely saying my husband had gone into the army to fight against white folks and he my master would let me know that I was foolish to let my husband go he would “take it out of my back,” he would “Kill me by picemeal” and he hoped “that the last one of the nigger soldiers would be Killed” He whipped me twice after that using similar expressions. . . .

Analysis

- How did slaveowners respond to the enlistment of black men in the Union army?
- How did the enlistment of enslaved men affect their families?
- What does this passage suggest about the slaves’ ability to revolt?
- Consider the special role that black enlistment played in Union slave states like Kentucky.

Petition of “colored citizens of Nashville” to a unionist convention in Tennessee Nashville, Tenn., 9 January 1865

1. We the undersigned petitioners, American citizens of African descent, natives and residents of Tennessee, and devoted friends of the great National cause, do most respectfully ask a patient hearing of your honorable body in regard to matters deeply affecting the future condition of our unfortunate and long suffering race.
2. First of all, however, we would say that words are too weak to tell how profoundly grateful we are to the Federal Government for the good work of freedom which it is gradually carrying forward; and for the Emancipation Proclamation. . . . After two hundred years of bondage and suffering a returning sense of justice has awakened the great body of the American people to make amends for the unprovoked wrongs committed against us for over two hundred years.
3. Your petitioners would ask you **to complete the work begun by the nation at large**, and abolish the last vestige of slavery by the express words of your organic law. . . .
4. **We hold that freedom is the natural right of all men**, which they themselves have no more right to give or barter away, than they have to sell their honor, their wives, or their children. . . .

Analysis

- What understandings of democracy and citizenship are presented in this petition?
- How did black military service advance the claims of African Americans to full citizenship?

(3 slides)

5. In the contest between the nation and slavery, our unfortunate people have sided, by instinct, with the former. We have little fortune to devote to the national cause, for a hard fate has hitherto forced us to live in poverty, but we do devote to its success, our hopes, our toils, our whole heart, our sacred honor, and our lives. We will work, pray, live, and, if need be, die for the Union, as cheerfully as ever a white patriot died for his country. The color of our skin does not lessen in the least degree, our love either for God or for the land of our birth.

....

6. Near 200,000 of our brethren are to-day performing military duty in the ranks of the Union army. Thousands of them have already died in battle, or perished by a cruel martyrdom for the sake of the Union, and we are ready and willing to sacrifice more. But what higher order of citizen is there than the soldier? or who has a greater trust confided to his hands? If we are called on to do military duty against the rebel armies in the field, why should we be denied the privilege of voting against rebel citizens at the ballot-box? The latter is as necessary to save the Government as the former.

Analysis

- What understandings of democracy and citizenship are presented in this petition?
- How did black military service advance the claims of African Americans to full citizenship?

(3 slides)

7. Let no man oppose this doctrine because it is opposed to his old prejudices. The nation is fighting for its life, and cannot afford to be controlled by prejudice. Had prejudice prevailed instead of principle, not a single colored soldier would have been in the Union army to-day. But principle and justice triumphed, and now near 200,000 colored patriots stand under the folds of the national flag, and brave their breasts to the bullets of the rebels. As we are in the battlefield, so we swear before heaven, by all that is dear to men, to be at the ballot-box faithful and true to the Union.

8. The possibility that the negro suffrage proposition may shock popular prejudice at first sight, is not a conclusive argument against its wisdom and policy. No proposition ever met with more furious or general opposition than the one to enlist colored soldiers in the United States army. The opponents of the measure exclaimed on all hands that the negro was a coward; that he would not fight; that one white man, with a whip in his hand could put to flight a regiment of them; that the experiment would end in the utter rout and ruin of the Federal army. Yet the colored man has fought so well, on almost every occasion, that the rebel government is prevented, only by its fears and distrust of being able to force him to fight for slavery as well as he fights against it, from putting half a million of negroes into its ranks.

9. The Government has asked the colored man to fight for its preservation and gladly has he done it. It can afford to trust him with a vote as safely as it trusted him with a bayonet.

Close Reading of Colored Citizens of Nashville Petition

Where appropriate, cite specific language from the text to support your answers.

- What are the petitioners asking for?
- What argument do they make?
- Why do they call themselves “citizens”?
- Considering the context, what does this petition suggest about the colored citizens of Nashville?
- How do the petitioners present themselves in the opening paragraph? Why did they do so?
- How do they present themselves throughout the petition?
- What is the tone of the opening paragraph? What words establish the tone?
- What is the purpose of the second paragraph?
- What documents do the petitioners echo in making their case? Why?
- How do the petitioners anticipate opposition in paragraphs 7 and 8? How do they address it?
- Identify key words repeated in the petition. What role do they play in the argument?

Testimony by Alonzo Jackson before the Southern Claims Commission Georgetown, S.C., 17 March 1873

My name is Alonzo Jackson— I was born a slave, in the state of Virginia—and am 64 years of age—. . . . I have lived all the time at Georgetown since 1823—and from that time was a slave until made free by the war when the US. Forces came to Georgetown in February 1865—

. . . .

About 8 months before Georgetown was occupied by Union soldiers—while I was in the freighting business on my flat boat on “Mingo creek” (up “Black river”) about 30 or 40 miles from Georgetown by water, 3 white men came near the boat which was at the bank of the river—. . . . As soon as the 3 white men saw we were colored men they came to the boat and said “we are Yankee soldiers, and have escaped from the rebel “stockade” at Florence, we are your friends can't you do something for us we are nearly perished” As soon as I saw them, before they spoke, I knew they were Yankee soldiers—by their clothing. They were all private soldiers—so they told me— **I invited them to come on the boat and told them I would hurry and cook food for them, which I did and gave it to them in my boat—** As soon as they entered the boat I shoved off from land and anchored in the creek about 60. ft from shore— I was loading cord wood in my boat when the soldiers came and had completed my load within about 4. cords— I did not wait to take it all—fearing that, some one else might come and catch the Yankees—. . . . They were very weak—and had no weapons— They had no shoes on— It was then winter weather, and cold— The 3 Yankees did not suggest anything for me to do for them except to feed them—and wanted to get to the gun boats—

Testimony by Alonzo Jackson before the Southern Claims Commission Georgetown, S.C., 17 March 1873

They did not know where the gun boats were— I did—and I told them I would take them where they could get to the gun boats unmolested. . . . I hid the 3 soldiers in my flat boat and started at once down the river towards Georgetown as soon as the tide allowed— In about 3 days time we came to “North Island” (about 12 miles from Georgetown) which I then knew was in possession of the Union forces— I did not pass Georgetown by day light for fear of being stopped by the rebels who had “pickets” all along the shore to stop all boats from going below— In the night I floated with the ebb tide (without being seen) to “North Island”— I got there in the night and landed the 3 soldiers in my small boat— I showed them the direction to cross the Island so as to get to the gun boats— About 2 Months after this occurrence—I brought 2 other Yankee soldiers (one a corporal) to “North Island” from the same place in “Mingo creek” The circumstances were nearly the same except that when I saw the soldiers I called to them saying there was “no danger”—for they were running away in a swamp— They came nearer and asked me if I was a friend to them that, they were Yankee soldiers who had escaped from rebel prison— I replied that “I was as good a friend as ever they had in their lives”! Then they came on my boat where I fed and delivered them (as before described) on “North Island” In February 1865 while I was at “Mingo creek” as before I found 4 other Yankee soldiers there who also said they had escaped from Florence— I fed and took them towards “North Island” but told them it might not be necessary as the Yankees were then probably at Georgetown— When we came near Georgetown I found out that this was true—and landed the 4 soldiers there— I know I would have been killed if the rebels had found out that I had Yankees on my boat—

Testimony by Alonzo Jackson before the Southern Claims Commission Georgetown, S.C., 17 March 1873

....

I sympathized with the Union cause— “I knew what I needed most and looked that way certain”! I wanted to be free—and wanted my race to be free— I knew this could not be if the rebels had a government of their own— I talked with a few white men at Georgetown and with such colored men as I could trust, in favor of the Union all the time during the war, but I knew my life would be taken if it was known how I really felt about the war— I was all the time anxious for the success of the Yankees— I never did or said anything to help the rebels and never wished for the success of any rebel soldiers— I did what I could for the Yankees and wanted to do more! I was always ready and willing to do what I could even at the risk of my own life— I could every time have avoided bringing the Yankee soldiers to “North Island” and could have caused their arrest if I had wished to do so, on my way to “North Island”—

Close Reading of Alonzo Jackson's Testimony

Where appropriate, cite specific language from the text to support your answer.

- What is the purpose of Jackson's testimony?
- How might that purpose shape his testimony?
- How might a judge on the commission corroborate the general reliability, if not the details, of Jackson's testimony?
- How could slaves held deep in Confederate territory assist the Union cause and undermine that of the Confederacy?

**Report by two Union prisoners of war who had escaped
Hilton Head, S.C., 7 December 1864**

On the 5th October, the officers confined in Roper Hospital Charleston S.C. received orders to prepare for a removal, we, together with Lieut Millward A.D.C to Genl Scammon, having provided ourselves with rebel uniforms (while in route to the dept, walked deliberately out of the ranks. Knowing no one in the city we relied upon the negroes & the same day, we related to one Thos Brown (Col'd Barber) who we were, & asked assistance— Said Brown, who seemed proud of speaking of his being a Black Republican—placed us in charge of his son who the same night procured for us a hiding place among some friends of his (colored) where we remained at least one month. We, a short time after our escape, heard of one Mr. Riels (German) who was hiding away the other officers— This gentleman provided us with money & used all endeavors to get us away.

....

We stayed in Charleston two months, relying all that time on the negroes for safety—who we found remarkably intelligent, thoroughly comprehending their own Status in the Rebellion. The Germans also rendered us every assistance. Indeed without them we could not have escaped.

Analysis

What does this report suggest about secret networks of African Americans and white unionists who operated against the Confederacy?

What light, if any, does this report throw on Alonzo Jackson's testimony?

**Testimony by Nancy Johnson before the Southern Claims Commission
Savannah, Ga., 22 March 1873**

I was born in Ga. I was a slave and became free when the army came here. My master was David Baggs. I live in Canoochie Creek The claimant is my husband. He was a good Union man during the war. He liked to have lost his life by standing up for the Union party. He was threatened heavy. There was a Yankee prisoner that got away & came to our house at night; we kept him hid in my house a whole day. He sat in my room. White people didn't visit our house then. My husband slipped him over to a man named Joel Hodges & he conveyed him off so that he got home.

....

The white people came hunting this man that we kept over night; my old master sent one of his own grandsons & he said if he found it that they must put my husband to death, & I had to tell a story to save life. My old master would have had him killed He was bitter. . . . I told him that I had seen nothing of him. I did this to save my husbands life. Some of the rebel soldiers deserted & came to our house & we fed them. They were opposed to the war & didn't own slaves & said they would die rather than fight. Those who were poor white people, who didn't own slaves were some of them Union people. I befriended them because they were on our side. I don't know that he ever did any thing more for the Union; we were way back in the country, but his heart was right & so was mine. I was served mighty mean before the Yankees came here. I was nearly frostbitten: my old Missus made me weave to make clothes for the soldiers till 12 o'clock at night & I was so tired & my own clothes I had to spin over night. She never gave me so much as a bonnet. I had to work hard for the rebels until the very last day when they took us. The old man came to me then & said if you won't go away & will work for us we will work for you; I told him if the other colored people were going to be free that I wanted to be.

Analysis

- What does Nancy Johnson's testimony reveal about the burdens the war placed on slaves?
- How does Johnson's testimony relate to that of Alonzo Jackson?
- In addition to aiding the Union cause by assisting escaped prisoners of war, how could slaves held deep within Confederate territory undermine the Confederacy?

**Two letters from Private Spotswood Rice—one to his daughters Cora and Mary, and the other to Kitty Diggs, the owner of Mary
St. Louis, Mo., 3 September 1864**

My Children I take my pen in hand to rite you A few lines to let you know that I have not forgot you and that I want to see you as bad as ever. . . . Dont be uneasy my children I expect to have you. If Diggs dont give you up this Government will and I feel confident that I will get you Your Miss Kaitty said that I tried to steal you But I'll let her know that god never intended for man to steal his own flesh and blood. . . . I once [thought] that I had some respect for them but now my respects is worn out and have no sympathy for Slaveholders. And as for her cristianantty I expect the Devil has Such in hell. . . . Oh! My Dear children how I do want to see you

**Two letters from Private Spotswood Rice—one to his daughters Cora and Mary, and the other to Kitty Diggs, the owner of Mary
St. Louis, Mo., 3 September 1864**

I received a leteter from Cariline telling me that you say I tried to steal to plunder my child away from you now I want you to understand that mary is my Child and she is a God given rite of my own and you may hold on to hear as long as you can but I want you to remembor this one thing that the longor you keep my Child from me the longor you will have to burn in hell and the qwicer youll get their for we are now makeing up a bout one thousand blacke troops to Come up tharough and wont to come through Glasgow and when we come wo be to Copperhood rabbels and to the Slaveholding rebbels for we dont expect to leave them there root neor branch but we thinke how ever that we that have Children in the hands of you devels we will trie your [vertues?] the day that we enter Glasgow. . . . now you call my children your pro[per]ty not so with me my Children is my own and I expect to get them and when I get ready to come after mary I will have bout a powrer and autherity to bring hear away and to exacute vengencens on them that holds my Child you will then know how to talke to me I will assure that and you will know how to talk rite too. . . . I have no fears about geting mary out of your hands this whole Government gives chear to me and you cannot help your self

Analysis

What do Private Rice's letters reveal about the transformations, both personal and public, that emancipation and black military service had brought about?

Final slide.

Thank You