

Document Reader One: Politics

This selection of primary sources documents is designed to provide context for K-12 educators who are participating in the Quest for Freedom workshop examining the Long Civil Rights movement with a focus on landmarks in Thomasville and the Red Hill region of southern Georgia and northern Florida. With minor exceptions we have strived to provide verbatim transcripts with only minor editorial revisions--added texts are placed in square brackets. As historical documents they reflect many of the biases and prejudices of the period in which they were written. In using them in classroom care must be used as to place them in the proper context.

Striving to capture of the Black voice is often problematic. For instance, through much of Thomasville's history there existed no African American newspaper for the period before 1954. Fortunately, Black newspapers in other parts of Georgia and nationally sometimes carried news regarding Thomasville. We also often have to rely on letters, diaries, and newspapers accounts of white residents, nonetheless the documents in this reader underscore the resilience of the African American community from the end of the Civil War in 1865 to the U.S. Supreme Court issuing the Brown vs. Board of Education decision in 1954.

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The Quest for Freedom: The African American Community and the Aftermath of Slavery, 1865-1954.

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Document One

Circular of a Bureau Officer to the Colored People

BUREAU F, F. & A. L.,

OFFICE AGENT ALBANY DIV.,

Albany, Ga, June 10 '67

It is constantly reported to me tht you have been deceived as to the intention of the Government, and that reports calculated to unsettle labor and give rise to disorder and suffering have been industriously circulated amongst you. This has been done through ignorance, perhaps, but it is more likely that it has been done by persons who are disposed to do evil.

It is said that you have been told that lands are to be taken from the present holders and divided amongst you. This impression, wherever it exists, is wrong. By honest industry and frugality you will be enabled to purchase lands, but none will be given to you.

It is reported that you have military organizations and are drilling. Such unauthorized organizations are not only perniciously wrong, but they are in direct violation of existing orders, and must be disbanded at once. The story that arms are to be distributed to you from this or any other office is false and without foundation in truth. The Government will render you all necessary protection, but it will not protect you in wrong doing.

It is reported to me by people of your own color that some of you are not mindful of your obligations under your contracts. Your contract is to work for your employer six days in the week, in the manner customary on a plantation. During these six days your time is not your own, but your employer's, who pays you for it, and every hour of that time should be devoted to his service, and you must take turns in doing the work which is necessary to be done on Sunday.

Source: *Southern Enterprise*, June 21, 1867

Document Two

ADDRESS OF THE COLORED PEOPLE

We publish to-day an address signed by the leading colored men of Thomas County to the people of the 7th Senatorial District proposing to meet in convention in Thomasville on Saturday the 12th inst for the purpose of nominating candidates for the State Convention, upon whom all can harmonize, both white and colored.—They express the desire to be in harmony with the white people, claiming the same interests and feelings in the common good, and make this overture in good faith, as an earnest of their desire to live in peace and friendship with the white people.

We learn from the committee charged with the publication of this address that the colored people of Thomas County are in favor of concert of action between the whites and colored, and of nominating none but those who shall be found fully competent to discharge the important duties devolving upon them as delegates to the State Convention, whether they be white or black. They now ask the white people to unite with them in accomplishing this object, and we submit the address and its objects for the consideration of those who have the good of the country at heart. If the Southern Conservative people disire a controlling influence over the action of these

people, we submit whether this is not a favorable opportunity to unite them by stronger ties to the true interests of the country.

Source: *Southern Enterprise*, October 8, 1867, p. 2

Document Three

THE MASS MEETING ON SATURDAY

It will be remembered that there was a call, signed by a number of the leading colored citizens of Thomas county, for a mass meeting of the citizens of Thomas, Brooks and Colquitt counties to convene at Thomasville on the 12th inst.

It was the design of the movers, as stated in the call, to assemble the people of the counties composing our Senatorial District, and by their voice, to nominate candidates to the State Convention, soon impending upon whom all, or a controlling number, could agree, in order that there might be unanimity of feeling and action among all classes throughout the District.

Pursuant to that call a meeting was held, the proceedings of which may be found in column.

We attended the meeting, and we regret to be compelled to say that the white people, in general did not respond to the call in a manner commensurate with the liberal and conservative spirit evinced in the words of the signers.

There were a goodly number of white men present, many of whom were among the best citizens of Thomas county; but after the proposal for cooperation had been made, in the spirit evinced by its language, it seems to us that it would have been more appropriate, to say the least, for it to have been regarded with a greater degree of general consideration than we are authorized to say it was.

We are aware that many have unexceptionable excuses for non-attendance, among which are chiefly press of business on their plantations and in their stores, both doubly important in the present financial condition of the country; but there were plenty of white men in town who had nothing else to do, to have gone to the meeting, although it *was* called by black men, and by their presence, if in no other way, have evince a disposition to listen to the overtures of the signers of the call, who are well known to be among the most truthful and generally reliable men of their race--- There can be only two reasons for this apathy---one a *mistrust* of the principal actors in the meeting, and the other a *fear* of the future contumely at the hands of the people.

In regard to the first we may say, that no one had any right to question the sincerity of the signers *before* the meeting; and now, since it has been held, those who were not present, and even those who were, can entertain no just suspicion of infidelity on the part of the body, because no effort whatever was made by those generally call conservative men to control or

influence one item of its proceedings. Yet what was the result of the meeting? A body composed principally of blacks, free and untrammelled, apparently, to speak and act as they pleased, expressed feelings of sympathy for and desire to cooperate with the whites, and nominated exclusively, white men as delegates to the State Convention.--- With these facts before us, then, let no *ex parte* judgment be pronounced by those who, who for one reason or other, did not attend. And let no man disparage the nominees, for from all the indications, it seemed plain to us that even the white men present, had they been so disposed, could have absolutely controlled the nomination.

It has been suggested as a singular coincidence that the delegates nomination were the preconcerted choice of the Loyal Leaguers. We are not prepared to say yes nor say yea or nay to this, as the Loyal League is a secret society of whose actings and doings we know nothing; but whether candidates nominated were the choice of the Leaguers or not, it must have been apparent to every observant man in the house that a *feather* might have turned the scale of nomination in any direction.

In regard to the other influence which kept many white men away from the meeting to wit: the fear of public opinion, we remark, that there was not the slightest ground for such a fear, for an attendance on such a primary meeting does not necessitate an endorsement nor an advocacy of the proposed State Convention. If the Convention is to be held, it is of the gravest importance that we should be represented there by good men; and that we all know that the best way to insure the election of a particular man, or set of men, is to nominate him or them regularly in a mass meeting call for that purpose. But even then, the after the nomination, even the prominent actors in the primary meeting may justly and reasonably vote *against* a State Convention, feeling safely assured that, in the event the question is carried against them, they have exerted their precautionary influence in favor of the man or men whom they would wish to represent them under the circumstances.

But, besides this, no one could have possibly been committed to any action of the meeting against his will. Every one had right to vote against any measure therein inaugurated and set in motion, or to withdraw from the meeting, or to remain a silent spectator of the proceedings.

This false modesty or want of moral courage, or whatever we may call it, should be cast aside, and we should exercise the manhood to act and speak what we feel and think. Then, and *not till then*, will the abominable system of spying suspicion, which exists between white man and the black man, be abolished, and men know more than each the others name when they meet.

It will also be remembered that the editor of the paper announced, in a late issue, a call for a Conservative Convention of the citizens of Thomas to be held on the same day (12th inst.), but we presume that the conservative men of the county either followed the editor's advice given in Friday's issue, by merging into the other, or disregarded the call altogether. At any rate there was only one Convention that we know of, and that called itself neither Radical nor Conservative as the word is generally understood, but professed simply to be a mass meeting looking to the reconstruction of the State. How much was accomplished in that direction we know not. The meeting as held, was evidently convened for some purpose, and it really appeared to us that the men composing the body labored, (to some extent in the dark, perhaps for want of cooperation,)

to discover the best course for the people of the District to pursue. Whether or not that course was discovered and marked out we are unable to say. We are neither a prophet nor a politician, (convertible terms now-a-days) and consequently we cannot foretell what is in store for us; b[u]t we may justly say this much, that if the sentiment prevails in the State Convention that was professed in the District or County Convention of Saturday, we have nothing to *fear* from it, if nothing to *hope*. There are no defined platform of principles laid down—an omission which we think was palpably wrong---but the general sentiments expressed were such as could not justly offend even the most democratic ear.

It is to be regretted that there was not a larger attendance of white citizens, to have heard with their own ears and seen with their own eyes the liberal sentiments evinced by the words of the speakers and the actions of the audience.

The candidates nominated were Rev. Milton C. Smith and Dr. William C. Carson, of Thomas, and Hon. John L. Cutler, of Brooks. The views of these gentlemen upon the momentous questions before the country are none of them generally known, and the very names of Messrs. Carson and Cutler are strange to most people in our country. Mr. Smith is well known and we certainly know of no reasonable objection to him, unless it may be his limited knowledge of the affairs and principles of Government. We think we know him, however, to be a good sensible man, and although not as well adapted to the position for which he has been nominated as some who are debarred by legal disabilities, yet we have no doubt he will prove himself true and steadfast should the people in their might call the eagerly hoped for, much dreaded, and indifferently cared for Convention together.

We have been credibly informed that Dr. Carson is a Marylander, two or three years, perhaps resident in Thomas county, and who was pronounced by an informant “a good man, whom he” himself a goodman, “could endorse.”

We are informed that Mr. Cutler is a very intelligent old gentleman, no ex-member of Congress, and well known in Brooks as an honest, reliable man.

But we can learn nothing of these gentlemen’s views, and therefore we think it is necessary that they should address the people at a stated time or times and make known their political opinions and intentions, in order that we may know for whom we are voting and what we are to expect should the proposed Convention be called together.

Source: *Southern Enterprise*, October 15, 1867, p. 2

Document Four

WHO FURNISHES THE GUNS?

We are informed that many colored men in this section have lately been armed with new *army guns*, and it is patent to all that those who are not already armed, are arming themselves as rapidly as possible. Many of them have sold their produce to buy guns in the stores and gun shops, while others are mysteriously furnished with *army guns*. These facts, taken in connection with numerous threats and hints thrown out by individuals all over the country, indicate that the

threatened insurrection is not a hoax, but has real meaning among the negroes, and that it extends all over the South. There are many, we believe, who are not engaged in it; but the more ignorant among them, who have been led on by evil men, are in earnest, and, if steps are not taken to nip it in the bud, serious trouble may be apprehended in all sections where the black predominates over the white. The authorities should look into this matter and by early application to Military Head Quarters, provide against the danger.

Source: *Southern Enterprise*, November 22, 1867, p. 2

Document Five

Annual Parade of Vigilant Fire Company, No. 2, May 27th

The Company will meet at its Engine house at 9 1 – 2 o'clock, a.m., and march to t[h]e Colored School House where the Engine will be, having been carried there for the purpose of being decorated with flowers by the ladies, after which the march will be as follows: From the school-house down Broad street and halt in front of Dreyer & Isaac's, where an inspection will be made by the Chiefs of Fire Department; thence to Fletcher street; up Fletcher street to Remington avenue: down Remington avenue to Hansell street; down Hansell street to Smith avenue thence to Col. J. L. Seward's old residence, w[h]ere dinner will be served.

Committee of Arrangement—Crawford Smith, chairman, Thomas Wright, Mike Thomas, E. J. Mitchell. This committee will arrange things in good style.

Committee of Invitation---W.H. Henderson, chairman, Thos. Wright, E. J. Mitchell. They extend a general invitation to all present.

Committee on Finance---A. Randolph, chairman, Samuel Dixon, Thos. Baker.

A Ball will be given by the member of the Company at the City Hall, commencing at 7 1-2 o'clock p.m.

The Company returns its thanks to the Mayor and Council, who tendered them the use of the City Hall for the Ball, and extend them a cordial invi- to all to be present at the inspection.

VIGILANT FIRE CO.---This sterling arm of our fire department will have a grand Parade dinner & c., on the 27th.

They will have their refreshments served up on the Braswell place near the Corporate limits.

At night they will have a ball at the City Hall. As they are trying to raise some funds with which to buy new caps, and belts, we hope they will realize a handsome sum.

The Vigilants have worked faithfully in the past, and we doubt not will do so in the future; and they should receive a liberal encouragement at the hands of all.

Source: *Thomasville Times*, May 24, 1873, p. 3

Document Six

The Color-Line In Georgia

There are certain great American principles imbedded in the constitution of the United States, enshrined in the hearts of the American people, which it would be well to remind these gentlemen of, who insist that the Republican party is to be officered and ruled *ad infinitum* by white men. A reading of the constitution by the light of the Declaration of Independence, will inform them that all men, regardless of color, have an equal chance, before the law, to occupy any position they can get; that there is not a single line in the statutes of the United States that entitles a white man more than a colored man to become a delegate to Chicago or chairman of the State Central committee. The code of American citizenship designates no particular race for the leadership of American freemen---here all men are equal. Popularity and capacity set one man above another.

In the early days of Republicanism, when men like John P. Hale and Joshua R. Giddings were leaders in our great National party, the Republicans were knighted "Black Republicans." A Paris paper, speaking of Mr. Banks, who was then running for the speakership of the lower house of Congress, referred, without any reproach whatever, to this distinguished Massachusetts white man, as the "Negro Congressman." If, in those infant days of the recognition of the colored man, some of the noblest heroes of the Nation could dare to fight their battles under the cognomen of "Black" or "Negro" Republicans, it is certainly out of place for those professing Republicanism, to grow sulky in the noonday of this era of progress, liberty, and like another Achilles, sit down, remote from the battle, in sight of their party struggling for the rights of mankind.

Acknowledging that this is no time to make charges against the white men who have been or acting with us, nevertheless, with guarded language the assertion can be truthfully made, that the colored man has not had the chance to gain as much political knowledge in the South, under the leadership of the past, as should have been gained. The men who lead, lead simply for personal aggrandizement, for office or honor. They have never made any arrangements by which colored men have had their local citizenship more fully recognized. Yet, for these things alone, we do not say that sceptre should be snatched from Judah. But recognizing the fact that 'Judah is a lion's whelp,' we are also mindful of the prophecy that the time would come when the law-giver should depart from between his feet; a time when the insignia of power was shared by others.

Is it ungrateful to insist that that day come in Georgia? The children of the field, of the plow and the hoe are rising. Their heads have rubbed against the college walls of the Atlanta University, and of other institutions of learning---not sufficiently to open their eyes.

Now gentlemen, it is painful for us to speak thus plainly to you; but it has been forced upon us. The *Journal of Progress* is no advocate of the color question. It has studiously avoided pressing this issue. Its editor flatly refused to have anything to say or do with the resolution when it was first introduced at Thomasville. While the justice of the spirit of the resolution was recognized; the propriety of its introduction was denied.

But away with personal bickerings and race prejudices! Away with dissensions and wrangling! Let each man nerve himself for the fray. There is a foeman strong and uncompromising to fight. United we stand, but divided we fall.

Source: *Herald of Kansas* (Topeka), May 28, 1880, page 1.

Document Seven

The Vigilant's Parade

Thursday was the annual parade and picnic day of our crack colored fire company, the Vigilants. Up to the arrival of the Chattahoochee train they expected the Bainbridge company to participate and their non-arrival somewhat disarranged the day's programme. Meeting at their engine house on Madison street, early yesterday morning, they marched down Broad street, and after some drill manouvers the company was inspected by city officials, Mayor pro-time Merrill, Col. A. P. Wright, Mr. S. L. Hayes and Chairman of Street Committee E. B. Whiddon.

Speeches were called for and responded to by Mayor pro-tem Merrill and Col Wright, who in a few appropriate remarks said that they had found the fixtures of the company and members in good form, and after thanking them for their efficiency in the past, and the faith in them for the future, wished them all a pleasant day and evening.

The speakers were enthusiastically cheered. The company then marched to the merry tune of fife and drum to Paradise Park where, with their friends, they passed a pleasant day.

The Vigilants, with their red shirts and black pants, made a splendid appearance as the company filed down Broad street. The company has made a fine record in the past and it will be as active in future in protecting the property of our people from the ravages of the great destroyer.

Source: *The Thomasville Times*, June 8, 1889, p. 3

Document Eight

THE TRIBUNE congratulates our esteemed citizen Hon. Mark A. Hanna of Thomasville, Georgia, on the great vindication he received by the defeat of Mayor McKisson for re-election in Cleveland, Ohio. Mr. McKisson it will be remembered was one of the leading Republicans who attempted to defeat the wishes of the people of Ohio who had expressed to have Mr. Hanna represent them in the upper house of the United States Congress. Mr. Hanna is senator for Ohio and is honorary senator from Georgia. The Republicans of Georgia regard him in the same light as do the people of Ohio.

Source: *The Savannah Tribune*, April 8, 1898, page 2.

Document Nine

Strange that not even on the stump, nor in interviews, does Hanna denounce disfranchisement. Perhaps the fact that for many years he has had a home in Cleveland, Ohio and another in THOMASVILLE, GEORGIA has something to do with it. Think it over.

Cleveland Gazette, October 24, 1903, page 2.

Document Ten

ORDINANCE No. IX.

Section I. The cemeteries belonging to the city shall be under the control of the Mayor and Aldermen, and of such committee as a may be appointed by the Mayor to superintend the same, and shall be cared for and kept in order by the City Sexton, under the direction of such committee. Laurel Hill cemetery shall be used only for the burial of white persons, and shall be the only place in the corporate limits of said city where it shall be lawful to bury deceased white persons; Provided, that if any deceased person was related within the third degree by blood, or the second degree by marriage, to the owner or owners of the enclosed lot the "Old Cemetery," the body may be buried in said lot, but not elsewhere in said cemetery.

Sec. II. Laurel Hill Cemetery shall be kept always in thorough repair and cleared of weeds and rubbish.

Sec. III. The prices of burial lots in Laurel Hill Cemetery shall be fixed such as are in the Cemetery record.

The lots to be selected by the purchaser; Provided that paupers dying within the corporate limits of the city shall be buried free of charge in that portion of said cemetery laid off for that purpose; and Provided further, that no more than \$5 shall be allowed for the burial of any pauper.

Sec. IV. The New Cemetery for the burial of deceased colored persons, known as Magnolia Cemetery, shall be used for the burial of colored persons only, and shall be the only place in said town where it shall be lawful to bury deceased colored persons; Provided, that if the deceased was related within the third degree by blood or the second degree by marriage, to the owner or owners of an enclosed lot in the cemetery, bounded by Broad, Jerger, Madison and Walcott streets, the body of such person may be buried in such lot but not elsewhere in said cemetery.

Sec. V. The prices of burial lots in Magnolia Cemetery shall be:

First Class.....	\$15.00
Second Class.....	10.00
Third Class.....	5.00

The lots to be selected by the purchaser; Provided, that colored paupers dying within the corporate limits of the city shall be buried free of charge in their portion of said cemetery laid off for that purpose.

Sec. VI. Any persons or persons who shall efface or otherwise injure or improperly interfere with any monument, vault, gravestone, headboard, footboard, or grave enclosure, or any tree, shrub, flower, flower vase, or wreaths, growing or placed within the grave, enclosures or the general enclosure of any of the cemeteries, or who shall break down or otherwise injure any of the gates, fences, or other improvements of the same shall be liable, on conviction, to be punished as prescribed in Section I of the General Penal Code.

Source: *Charter, Ordinances and Rules of Council of the City of Thomasville, Georgia*. Thomasville, Ga., Press Publishing Company, 1909.

Document Eleven

SHARKS ACTIVE.

Unscrupulous Men Fleece Thomas County Negroes by Talking Slave Pension Bill.

The Times-Enterprise has been informed that a number of unscrupulous negroes are reaping a rich harvest from the more ignorant members of their race in this vicinity.

They are using Senator Hanna's proposed bill to pension ex-slaves as a bait to lure coin from the pockets of the unwary. Their method of procedure is to represent themselves as Senator Hanna's agents. They then collect any sum from 25 cents to \$2 from the ex slaves or their descendants and guarantee a fat pension in return. Of course their guarantee is worthless.

W. B. Wilson, an old colored man well known in Thomasville, wrote Senator Hanna in regard to the matter and received a reply from A. E. Fisher, the Senator's private secretary. The secretary states in the letter that Senator Hanna had learned that the Senate committee had made an unfavorable report on a similar measure introduced in 1900. He also said that it was "not at all probable that favorable action could be secured on such a measure in the future."

Mr. Fisher says: Senator Hanna has authorized no one to collect money to aid in securing the passage of this measure, and any effort being made along that line with the representation that is done with his sanction are fraudulent"

Of course this is ancient history to many people, but it will be news to the negroes who have been contributing. They should keep their money in their pockets.

Source: *Thomasville Times-Enterprise*, August 15, 1903, p. 3

Document Twelve

EX-SLAVE PENSION FRAUD

Given Another Airing During Trial of Negro Held on Charge of Cheating and Swindling

At Thomasville, Ga., Tuesday, S. P. Mitchell, the negro who is charged with swindling ex-slaves by promising them pensions under the proposed Hanna bill, was tried before Justice Marshall and bound over to the superior court under a \$100 bond.

The sensational feature of the trial was the speech of Judge S. A. Rodenbury, who represented Mitchell. He charged that the republican party was behind this prosecution and that in order to stop Mitchell, some of the leaders had communicated with leading negroes of Thomas county, and they had induced Mayor Culpepper to swear out the warrants. While he was innocent of any design, it was stated, the fact revealed that an unseen hand was behind the movement; the republicans were alarmed because this movement was so far-reaching. They saw that the democrats were ready to push the pension bill, and fearing the loss of power among the negroes they had decided to throttle Mitchell, the promoter of the scheme.

Mitchell is supreme president of the National Industrial Council, which he claims has a membership of 600,000, extending all over the country. The convention of the southern district of Georgia of this council was in session at Thomasville, and Mitchell came down from Washington to attend it.

He preached his doctrine and gathered in his shekels in the meantime. At the request of H. H. Thweatt, the principal of the negro public schools of Thomasville, and several other prominent local negroes, Mayor Culpepper swore out the warrant against Mitchell for cheating and swindling.

Mitchell declared his arrest was just what he had long wished for; that it would enable him to show his hand. He employed able counsel, and when the trial was called Tuesday morning the court house was filled with a large crowd of interested negroes.

It was claimed that Mitchell represented himself as an agent of Senator Hanna's, and guaranteed a pension if enough were paid him.

Thweatt had taken the trouble to write Senator Hanna on the question and had recently received the following answer from his private secretary:

Cleveland, Ohio, August 26, 1903.
"Senator Hanna directs me to acknowledge the receipt of your fa[v]or of the 24th inst., and to say in reply that he introduced the so-called ex-slave pension bill by request; that it was not considered by the senate committee on pensions, and died the last session of congress. Consequently there is no such measure pending now, and I wish to say also that the senator has

authorized no one to act as his agent in an effort to further the passage of this measure, and ny representations of that kind are absolutely without foundation.

“ELMER DOVER,
“Private Secretary.”

W. B. Wilson, another negro who is prominent in the prosecution had a letter from Registrar of the Treasury Lyons in which Lyons said:

“The bill was introduced by Senator Hanna by request and with me notice to the world that he introduced it simply as a courtesy to the people besought him to do so, and has no possible interest in its fate. Indeed, he has stated publicly that he was not concerned about it. Such bills are frequently introduced, and this particular bill has been introduced by request of various senators for the last eight or ten years. I am sorry to hear that any of our people are being fleeced by sharpers under the head of ex-slave pension matters.”

Source: *Savannah Tribune*, September 5, 1903, p. 1.

June 23, 2023