

Document Based Question

How did different groups of Americans during the Reconstruction period use institutions to advance their visions of freedom and security?

(Documents marked with an asterisk also appear in *Freedom Was In Sight!*; in some cases the versions here are shortened and punctuation has been modified.)

Document 1

Letter from Sergeant George W. Hatton, First Regiment, United States Colored Troops*

George Hatton was born enslaved in Maryland and enlisted in the U.S. Army on June 8, 1863, shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation authorized the enlistment of Black troops. Hatton showed leadership promise and was made a sergeant immediately. He signed on for a 3-year term of service but was severely injured just one year after enlisting when he was shot in the leg during a battle. He wrote the letters below to the editor of a Black newspaper based in Philadelphia; the editor published the letters.

I feel that I am a man, fighting for a Government that recognizes me as such; but, behold, when I call my wandering mind to view facts, and the ground upon which I stand, I find that the leaders of the Government are still keeping us far behind the times. I appeal to the leaders of this great Republic to know the reason why they hesitate to give us our God-given rights. I do not expect to have all the enjoyments of home, but, undoubtedly, would not have any objection to being put on an equal footing with my brother white soldier.

We responded to the call of the Government at the time when her very metropolis was threatened with conflagration, willing to stand by her until the very last drop of blood be drained from our veins, on the promise of being treated as white soldiers, but, ah, I have been a soldier for more than a year, for the small sum of seven dollars per month. I want to know if the star spangled banner represents such unjust deeds.

Yours truly,
G. W. H.

"An Important Soldier's Letter," *Christian Recorder*, June 25, 1864

Document 2

Petition from Patients at L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia

As African American soldiers began serving in the Civil War, the government built a hospital in Alexandria, Virginia, to provide medical care for those who were wounded or sick. The hospital was called L'Ouverture Hospital, named after Toussaint L'Ouverture, an acclaimed military leader of the Haitian Revolution.

When Black soldiers died, the government buried them in a separate cemetery from white soldiers. Black patients at L'Ouverture signed the petition below to protest the segregation of cemeteries. Their protest helped prompt the Army to begin burying Black soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. The bodies of some soldiers who were buried in segregated "freedmen's" cemeteries were even disinterred and moved to Arlington.

December 27, 1864

We the undersigned Convalescents of Louverture Hospital & its Branches and soldiers of the U.S. Army, learning that some dissatisfaction exists in relation to the burial of colored soldiers and feeling deeply interested in a matter of so great importance to us, who are a part and parcel with the white soldiers in this great struggle against rebellion, do hereby express our views, and ask for consideration of the same....

We learn that the government has purchased ground to be used exclusively for Burial of soldiers of the United States Army, and that the government has also purchased ground to be used for the burial of contrabands, or freedmen, so called, that the former is under the control of Capt. Lee, A.Q.M. U.S.A. The latter under the control of Rev. A. Gladwin, Superintendent of Contrabands. We are not contrabands, but soldiers of the U.S. Army, we have cheerfully left the comforts of home and entered into the field of conflict, fighting side by side with the white soldiers, to crush out this God insulting, Hell deserving rebellion.

As American citizens, we have a right to fight for the protection of her flag, that right is granted, and we are now sharing equally the dangers and hardships in this mighty contest, and should shair [sic] the same privileges and rights of burial in every way with our fellow soldiers who only differ from us in color....We ask that our bodies may find a resting place in the ground designated for the burial of the brave defenders of our countries flag.

Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, General Correspondence and Reports Related to National and Post Cemeteries, National Archives, courtesy City of Alexandria website

Document 3

Letter from George W. Hatton to an agent of the Freedmen's Bureau

George W. Hatton was born enslaved in Prince George's County, Maryland. His father, William Hatton, had been free before the Civil War and worked as a blacksmith. William owned some land, and in 1866, he donated a portion of it to a new "school association" formed by Black families in the neighborhood. In the letter, Hatton informs a Freedmen's Bureau agent how the community is raising funds to establish a school and hire a teacher.

Oxen Run
Prince Georges County MD
September 8th 1866

Mr. Kimball,

In answer to the progress that we have made toward establishing a school for the benefit of the colored people in our vicinity.

I am happy to inform you that the land will be given to the School Association by Wm Henry Hatton and he will have it conveyed to the Trustees of the School and we will have the School House erected as soon as possible and the association pledge them selfs to pay the board and washing of the Teacher, and for the Lights and fuel necessary for the school.

The Teacher will board with Mr James Shaw about one 16th of a mile from the school. He will have to pay 16 dollars per month board. I send you a copy of the names of the members of the Association and the amount they pledge themselves to give each month

Yours Respectfully
George W. Hatton

George W. Hatton to Mr. John Kimball Esq., Sept. 8, 1866, filed as "Oxen Run Papers," Unreg. Letters Rec'd, D.C. Sup't. of Education, Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, & Abandoned Lands, National Archives [photocopy obtained from the Freedmen & Southern Society Project, University of Maryland, control # A-10205]

Document 4

Freedmen's Bureau Report on Schools in Maryland

As a government agency, the Freedmen's Bureau offered regular reports on its activities. In a report dated Jan. 1, 1867, J.W. Alvord, a white man who was the agency's head of education, delivered an overview of the bureau's educational activities across the South. This excerpt offers some details about Black schools in Maryland, including a few interesting anecdotes about how Black Americans viewed opportunities for formal education.

The whole number of schools in the city of Baltimore and those counties of Maryland...is 95, under the care of an equal number of teachers...One of the latter, the school on Hanover street, was founded by the will of Nelson Wells, a colored man, in 1845, who bequeathed for this purpose, his entire estate, amounting to \$7,000...

The whole number of scholars receiving instruction in the above schools is 3,224 males and 2,495 females, making an aggregate of 5,719.

The above report...shows an increase of 48 schools and 2,555 scholars during the year ending in January, 1867.

The colored people of this State have settled down with the calm and firm resolution to make this work the one great and earnest effort of their life, thus demonstrating their manhood in the face of opposition, despite the prejudice and accumulated wrongs of many years...

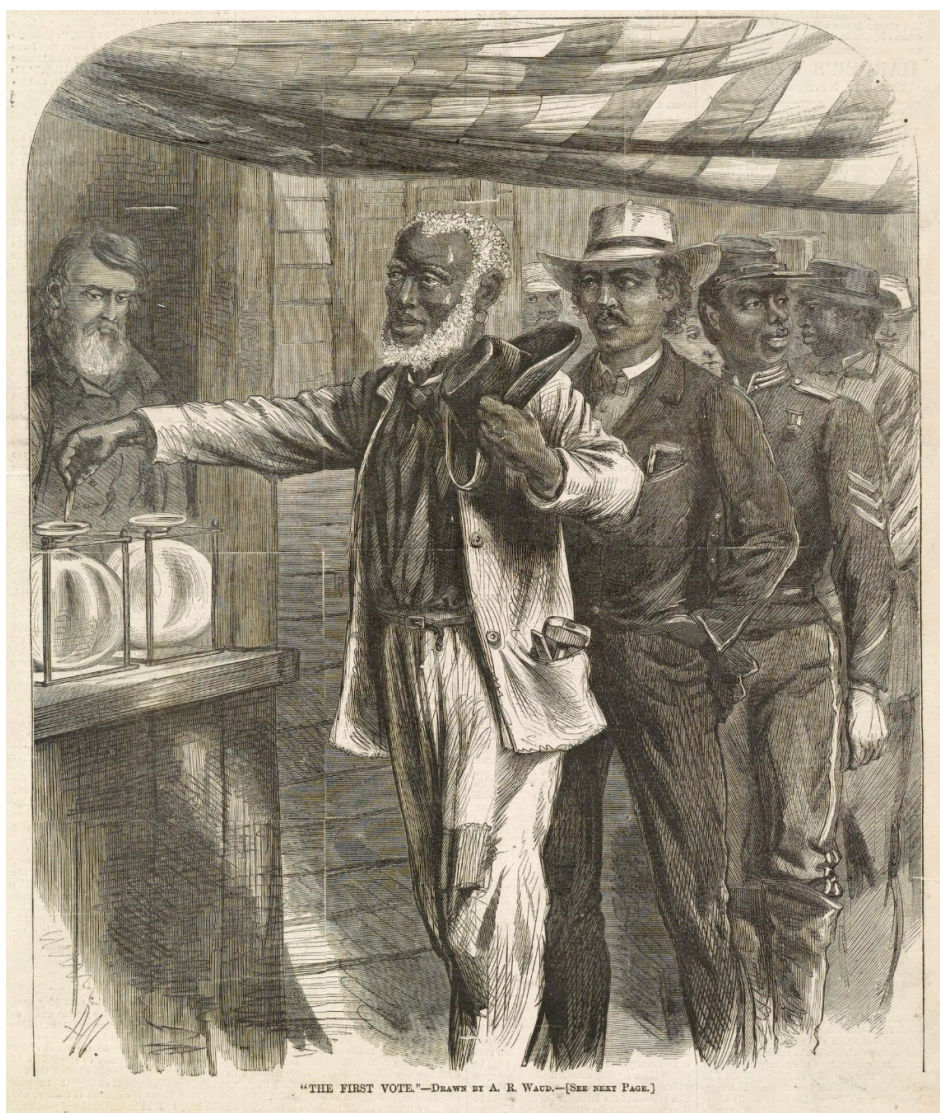
One aged woman, who has borne the storms and trials of life for more than eighty years, said to me, on entering our school on Montgomery street: "I am determined to make the effort to learn to read my Bible before I die, and if I fail I will die on the way."

J.W. Alvord, *Third Semi-Annual Report on Schools For Freedmen*, January 1, 1867

Document 5

Political Cartoon of “The First Vote”

Harper's Weekly was a New York-based weekly political magazine that published articles and political cartoons related to current events. The magazine supported the Republican Party and its Reconstruction policies. In 1868 it endorsed the presidential candidacy of Ulysses S. Grant, the former U.S. military commander who led the nation to victory in the Civil War. This drawing, by a white cartoonist named Alfred Waud, depicts four Black men standing in line to vote in fall 1867, after Congress's Reconstruction Acts required the former Confederate states to grant Black and white men equal access to the vote.



A.R. Waud, "The First Vote," *Harper's Weekly*, Nov. 16, 1867
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.37947/>

Document 6

Mary Ann Shadd Cary Argues for Women's Right to Vote

Mary Ann Shadd Cary was a Black woman who was born free in Delaware and, before the Civil War, became a teacher, writer, and newspaper editor. After the war she moved to Washington, D.C., where she was active in public affairs, taught school, and enrolled in law school at Howard University. Cary and other leading Black women in Washington allied with white women activists to push for women's right to vote. Cary may have been the only Black woman to join a group of white women who presented their arguments to the judiciary committee of the U.S. House of Representatives in 1872. This is an excerpt of a speech Cary drafted for that occasion. Earlier in the speech, Cary acknowledged arguments already made by white women; here, she sought to add her specific perspectives as a Black woman.

As a colored woman, a resident of this District, a tax-payer of the same; as one of a class equal in point of numbers to male colored voters herein; claiming affiliation with two and a half millions of the same sex, in the country at large, included in the provisions of recent constitutional amendments . . . my presence, at this time, and on an errand so important, may not I trust be without slight significance

From the introduction of African slavery to its extinction, a period of more than two hundred years, [black women] shared equally with fathers, brothers, denied the right to vote. This fact of their investiture with the privileges of free women of the same time and by the same amendments which disenthralled their kinsmen and conferred upon the latter the right of franchise, without so endowing themselves, is one of the anomalies of [the Fifteenth Amendment]. . . .

The colored women of this country . . . have neither been indifferent to their own just claims under the amendments, in common with colored men, nor to the demand for political recognition so justly made by the women suffragists of the country for women every where throughout the land.

Mary Ann Shadd Cary, "Speech to the Judiciary Committee Re the Right of Women"
Digital Howard @ Howard University, https://dh.howard.edu/mscary_speeches/2

Document 7

Objects associated with the Bladensburg Burying Association

After slavery, Black southerners often formed local organizations designed to help people in need. Black communities established burial societies to help pay costs associated with a person's death – including costs of the casket, funeral, and headstone. Community members could join a burial society by paying dues. Then, when they passed away, the society helped with the cost of the funeral. Burial societies were about much more than death, however. They were also clubs that had festive meetings, helped neighbors build bonds of trust, and provided people with opportunities to develop leadership skills. Men and women alike were involved in burial societies and other mutual aid organizations. The objects below were created by members of the Bladensburg Burying Association, which was founded in 1870.



Banner and Decorated Collar Courtesy of Anacostia Community Museum, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of the descendants of Adam and Emily Plummer

Document 8

Helen A. Cook Reports on the Activities of the Colored Woman's League*

Black women established a variety of clubs and organizations that aimed to help their communities. Black women's clubs provided food and clothing for people in need, established daycare centers and schools for young children, and provided help to the elderly. Elite Black women in Washington, D.C., founded the Colored Woman's League in 1892 to consolidate the work of many women's organizations under one umbrella. In this article, organizer Helen Cook reports on the League's activities.

The object of the Woman's League . . . is "the education and improvement of colored women and the promotion of their interest." It was conceived that this improvement must proceed on two general lines; the training of the mind and of the hand Classes, which meet in the parlors of the Y.M.C.A., have been formed in German grammar and reading, in German conversation, in English Literature, and in Hygiene. . . . A series of three lectures, for the benefit of the girls of the High and Normal Schools and of the Eighth grade schools, were offered. . . . Another endeavor in the line of mental training is the promised payment of half the salary (\$10 per month) of a lady who is to be employed as Kindergartener [kindergarten teacher] The Industrial Association formed in 1884 [is] now engaged in a sewing school consisting of 88 pupils and 19 teachers. The directress is a lady whose knowledge and experience enable her to pursue the best methods of instruction."

Helen A. Cook, "Washington Letter," *Woman's Era*, March 1894

Document 9

Image of White Rioters Setting Fire to a School for Black Children in Memphis

During Reconstruction, white Southerners regularly attacked Black institutions, especially schools and churches. They targeted schools because schools symbolized Black freedom, promoted Black literacy, and represented Black citizenship. Black communities frequently held political meetings in schools, so assaults on schools were also acts of political violence. In May 1866, white Memphians organized to attack a Black neighborhood, setting fire to schools and other properties and assaulting women and men. No one was ever convicted of the crimes committed during several days of rioting. The illustration below depicts the arson of a Black school in Memphis, Tennessee.



A. R. Waud, "Scenes in Memphis, Tennessee, during the Riot—Burning a Freedmen's School-House," *Harper's Weekly*, May 26, 1866
<https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/94507780/>

Document 10

President Andrew Johnson Rejects Black Men's Enfranchisement in the District of Columbia*

In January 1867, the Republican majority in Congress passed a statute granting Black men the right to vote in the District of Columbia on the same terms as white men. The white citizens of Washington and Georgetown, in turn, conducted their own polls showing that the vast majority of white residents opposed Black men's right to vote. In a message explaining his veto of the bill passed by Congress, President Andrew Johnson argued that the nation's promises of self-government did not apply to Black citizens and that Congress should respect the wishes of white residents of the capital. Congress immediately passed the law over Johnson's veto, and Black men soon began voting in local elections.

[W]e may well pause to inquire whether, after so brief a probation, they are as a class capable of an intelligent exercise of the right of suffrage and qualified to discharge the duties of official position. The people who are daily witnesses of their mode of living, and who have become familiar with their habits of thought, have expressed the conviction that they are not yet competent to serve as electors, and thus become eligible for office in the local governments under which they live

It is within [African Americans'] power in one year to come into the District in such numbers as to have the supreme control of the white race, and to govern them by their own officers [Allowing Black men to vote] would engender a feeling of opposition and hatred between the two races, which, becoming deep rooted and ineradicable, would prevent them from living together in a state of mutual friendliness . . . Following the clear and well-ascertained popular will, we should assiduously endeavor to promote kindly relations between them, and...prepare for the gradual and harmonious introduction of this new element into the political power of the country...

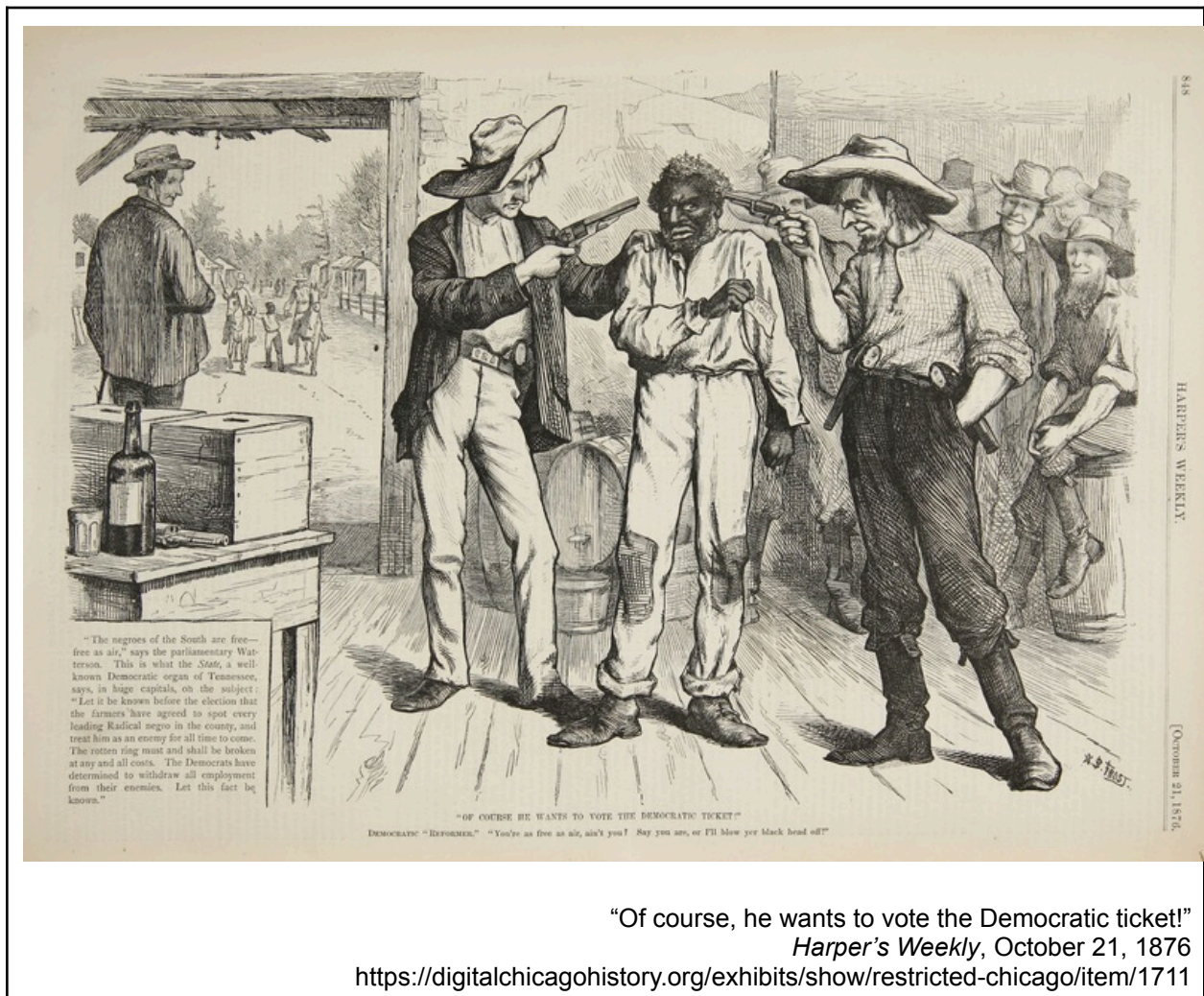
After full deliberation upon [the bill enfranchising African American men], I can not bring myself to approve it...There is a limit, wisely observed hitherto, which makes the ballot a privilege and a trust, and which requires of some classes a time suitable for probation and preparation. To give it indiscriminately to a new class, wholly unprepared by previous habits and opportunities to perform the trust which it demands, is to degrade it, and finally to destroy its power, for it may be safely assumed that no political truth is better established than that such indiscriminate and all-embracing extension of popular suffrage must end at last in its destruction.

President Andrew Johnson, "Veto Message," January 5, 1867
<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/veto-message-438>

Document 11

Image of White Men Using Guns to Intimidate a Black Man at a Polling Place

Black men gained the right to vote in the former Confederacy in 1867. Most African Americans supported the Republican Party, as party leaders had pushed for emancipation and federal measures that protected Black Americans' rights. White southerners, aligned with the Democratic Party, used a variety of strategies to exclude Black men and their white Republican allies from the institutions of government. Where white southerners already held political power, they did things like use gerrymandering to reduce Republican power and deny polling places to Black neighborhoods. They used fraud, stuffing ballot boxes to make it appear that Democrats had won. They also turned to violence – they intimidated, threatened, and even assaulted and murdered Black men and white Republicans who tried to run for office or to vote. The image below depicts an example of white Southerners' tactics for pushing Black Southerners out of politics and denying them access to political institutions.



“Of course, he wants to vote the Democratic ticket!”
Harper's Weekly, October 21, 1876

<https://digitalchicagohistory.org/exhibits/show/restricted-chicago/item/1711>

Document 12

A Black Newspaper Promotes Black Tourism at Harpers Ferry*

In this article, the *Washington Bee*, a Black newspaper founded in Washington, D.C., in the early 1880s, encouraged African Americans to visit Harpers Ferry as tourists. The article emphasized the place's many associations with "liberty," in part by invoking white radical abolitionist John Brown, who famously attempted to start an uprising of enslaved people there in October 1859. The article encouraged visitors to stay at Lincoln Hall, where a Black proprietor would welcome them.

The historic interest which surrounds this spot has been and is yet attracting many tourists from far and near, to gaze where a heroic soul made a stand for liberty, not for himself primarily, but for his "brother in black." The spirit of freedom has always dwelt among the mountains, and, when old John Brown looked upon the mountains . . . he here resolved to do and dare and die, if need be, that his fellow man might come forth from the charnel house of bondage.

Thus this fiery soul by his death has lifted [this place] from the merely provincial into the universal thought of mankind. His fort still stands, a shrine for lovers of liberty. But whether the outward structure remains or moulders back to dust, the great principle for which he died survives in strength, beauty and triumph, and verily we at this day can say "his soul is marching on." The visitor to Harper's Ferry is doubly paid, for he not only feels the thrilling impulses which come from a contemplation of the movement of the first martyr of a true and not a spurious American freedom, but the natural beauty of the place appeals strongly to the most refined and exalted part of his being. . . .

For those who seek rest, pure and simple . . . Lincoln Hall offers rare inducements. The kind and obliging host puts every one at ease For the money (\$4 dollars a week) good board is furnished. The quick easy access to Washington City renders it twice a blessing to those whose time and purse will not allow them to go far or to anymore fashionable places. This resort ought to be crowded from the opening to the close. As Mt. Vernon [George Washington's Estate] is the Mecca of the whites so Harper's Ferry should be the Mecca of the colored American citizen.

"Harper's Ferry," *Washington Bee*, June 16, 1888

Document 13

Frederick Douglass Speaks at the Opening of Manassas Industrial School*

Frederick Douglass delivered this speech at the opening ceremony for the Manassas Industrial School for Colored Youth. The school's founder, Jennie Dean, was a Black woman from northern Virginia who worked hard to fund and build support to establish a school that would serve Black students who wanted their education to go beyond elementary school. When he gave the speech in 1894, Douglass was a respected elder, the most widely known Black man in the United States. In his address, Douglass reflected on the sweeping changes he had witnessed since growing up enslaved in Maryland. He told his audience, mainly composed of young people, that he was well aware that white Americans were organizing to roll back many of the democratic promises of Reconstruction. It was a difficult, delicate time. But he concluded his speech by urging people to remain hopeful and keep fighting those who tried to hold them back.

Since the great and terrible battle [of First Bull Run] with which its name is associated and which has now passed into history as the birth of many battles, no event has occurred here, so important in its character and influence, and so every way significant, as the event which we have this day met to inaugurate and celebrate. . . . We are to witness here, a display of the best elements of advanced civilization and good citizenship. It is to be a place where the children of a once enslaved people may realize the blessings of liberty and education, and learn how to make for themselves and for all others, the best of both worlds. . . .

Were a period put today to my career, I could hardly wish for a time or place or an occasion better suited for a desired ending, than here and now. The founding of this and similar schools on the soil of Virginia,— a State formerly the breeder, buyer, and seller of slaves; a State so averse, in the past, to the education of colored people as to make it a crime to teach a negro to read,— is one of the best fruits of the agitation of a half a century, and a firm foundation of hope for the future. . . .

Education . . . means emancipation. It means light and liberty. It means the uplifting of the soul of man into the glorious light of truth, the light by which men can only be made free. To deny education to any people is one of the greatest crimes against human nature

You young people have a right to ask me what the future has in store for you and the people with whom you are classed You want to know whether the hour is one of hope or despair I think the situation is serious—but it is not hopeless The existence of this Industrial School at Manassas, is a triumphant rebuke to the cry of despair now heard in some quarters

In conclusion, my dear young friends, be not discouraged. Accept the inspiration of hope. Imitate the example of the brave mariner who, amid clouds and darkness, amid hail, rain and storm bolts, battles his way against all that the sea opposes to his progress, and you will reach the goal of your noble ambition in safety.

“The New Manassas: Hon. Fred. Douglass’ Masterly Oration on Virginia’s Celebrated Battle Field,” Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress