

Rise of the African American Press in Travis County



Subject and Grade Texas History, 7th
may be adapted for 4th

Author Jason Terry (2023)

Time duration Four or five 45-minute class periods

Objective Students will use primary source documents to explore how African American newspapers published in Travis County around the turn of the 20th Century aimed to improve the lives of African Americans living in Central Texas.

TEKS ***Social Studies, Grade 7***

(1A), identify the major eras in Texas history, describe their defining characteristics, and explain the purpose of dividing the past into eras, including Natural Texas and its People; Age of Contact; Spanish Colonial; Mexican National; Revolution and Republic; Early Statehood; Texas in the Civil War and Reconstruction; Cotton, Cattle, and Railroads; Age of Oil; Texas in the Great Depression and World War II; Civil Rights; and Contemporary Texas

(5C), explain the political, economic, and social effects of the Civil War and Reconstruction in Texas

(15A), explain rights of Texas citizens

(15B), explain civic responsibilities of Texas citizens and the importance of civic participation

(16A), identify different points of view of political parties and interest groups on important Texas issues, past and present

(16B), describe the importance of free speech and press in a democratic society

(20A), differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

(20B), analyze information by applying absolute and relative chronology through sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions

(20C), organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

(20D), identify bias and points of view from the historical context surrounding an event that influenced the participants

(20E), support a point of view on a social studies issue or event

(22B), use effective written communication skills, including proper citations and avoiding plagiarism

(22C), create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information

Materials

- Ransom and Sarah Williams Site Exhibit: www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom/
- Background Article
- Primary Source Newspaper Documents
- Essay Outline

Activities and procedures

Step 1: Introduce students to Ransom and Sarah Williams, two former slaves, who after the Civil War purchased a 45-acre farm in Travis County. The Williams family lived on the farm from 1871-1905. From 2007-2009, archeologists investigated the former Williams farmstead and collected thousands of artifacts. Historians examined historical archives searching for documents that would give clues as to what it was like for African Americans to live in Travis County from Reconstruction through the turn of the century. Important sources of information were newspapers published by and targeting African Americans.

Step 2: (Optional) Have students examine the main page of the Ransom and Sarah Williams exhibit at Texas Beyond History:
www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom/

Step 3: Have students read the Background Article and complete the questions. Discuss responses with the class. Explain to the class that students will be using examples primary source newspapers to answer the question, “How did newspapers published by black Texans around the turn of the 20th century strive to improve the lives of African Americans living in Travis County?” Students will

write a 5-paragraph essay using text evidence from the articles.

Step 4: In groups or individually, have students read each document and complete the questions. (Teachers may only assign certain documents to decrease the amount of time spent on the lesson.) Instruct students to choose the best three articles that will help them answer the main question, “How did newspapers published by black Texans around the turn of the 20th century strive to improve the lives of African Americans living in Travis County?”

Step 5: Have students complete the Outline to help them prepare for the essay.

Step 6: Students use primary source documents, questions and answers, and outlines to write a 5-paragraph essay that answers the question: “How did newspapers published by black Texans around the turn of the 20th century strive to improve the lives of African Americans living in Travis County?”

Closure: Have students read essays. Discuss what obstacles African Americans newspapers faced in Travis County around the turn of the century.

**Extension
Activities**

Have students use the information on the Ransom and Sarah Williams page to write a feature article about the couple that might have appeared in an African American newspaper from the time.

Include advertisements and editorials that are time-period appropriate.

Assessment Completed documents and essay.

Rise of the African American Press

Archeologists rely on numerous sources to help understand excavated artifacts and buildings and reconstruct the story of what happened at a site in the past. In their study of the Ransom and Sarah Williams farmstead, archeologists turned to historic newspapers printed by the black press to gain an in-depth view of black life in Travis County and Central Texas. In the news, we find contemporary accounts, editorials, and announcements reflecting the concerns and strivings of the black community at a critical juncture in Texas history. Against this backdrop, we have a greater understanding of the cultural and political environment in which Ransom and Sarah Williams raised their family, owned and operated a farm, and made the transition from slavery to citizenship.

For this study, five newspapers were selected from the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at The University of Texas at Austin. Only newspapers that fell within the occupation dates of the Ransom and Sarah Williams Farmstead (ca. 1871-1905) and were printed in Austin or the greater Travis County area were reviewed. The papers are: *Free Man's Press* (published only in 1868); *Gold Dollar* (published from 1876 to 1878 or 1880); *Sunday School Herald* (published only in 1892); *Herald: Baptist Convention Newspaper* (published from 1893 to 1917); and the *Austin Searchlight* (unknown publication dates; minimally 1896 and 1917). A total of 220 issues from the five newspapers were available in the archives, but only 135 issues were reviewed. Of these, most date from 1892 to 1895 and are probably quite representative of the black news journals of the 1890s.

The Free Man's Press was reportedly the first black newspaper printed in Texas. It was founded by a group of blacks and whites in Austin who strived to encourage political awareness in black people. *The Gold Dollar* was founded by the Reverend Jacob Fontaine, a former slave who became a Baptist minister and successful entrepreneur. Fontaine's newspaper was said to be the first black newspaper published in Austin and the greater Travis County area. *The Sunday School Herald* and *The Herald* were published by Reverend L.L. Campbell, an esteemed Baptist minister who graduated from Bishop College in Marshall, Texas and the University of Chicago. Both papers were affiliated with the Baptist church and enjoyed the longest publication time out of all the newspapers in our sample. *The Austin Searchlight* was edited and published by W. P. Mabson, a former Reconstruction period legislator in the North Carolina House of Representatives. With only two issues of the newspaper stored in local archives, very little is known about it. Mabson's paper, however, supported the Republican political party and encouraged black racial uplift.

Source: <https://www.texasbeyondhistory.net/ransom/newspapers.html>

1. How did archeologists use newspapers as a primary source to learn more about the time period in which Ransom and Sarah Williams lived in Travis County?
2. Several of the papers were published by reverends. What might be the reason for this?
3. Some of the newspapers were only printed for short periods of time. What might be some reasons for this?

Name _____

Period _____

African American Newspapers in Travis County

Paragraph #1

Hook Sentence:

Background Information:

Thesis Sentence (with your three reasons included):

Paragraph #2

Reason 1: _____

Evidence from Document _____: _____

Elaboration: How does this document help answer the main question? Write 2-4 sentences to explain.

Paragraph #3

Reason 1:

Evidence from Document _____:

Elaboration: How does this document help answer the main question? Write 2-4 sentences to explain.

Paragraph #4

Reason 3: _____

Evidence from Document _____: _____

Elaboration: How does this document help answer the main question? Write 2-4 sentences to explain.

Paragraph #5

Conclusion:

Your Vote Can Check a Mob.

Did this fact ever enter your mind? No rock walls, no iron bars, no barricaded doors, no cowardly sheriff can check a savage mob. Yet these bands of cutthroats, these midnight assassins can be held at bay; they can be completely annihilated. Thro' the united and determined efforts of three mighty influences and forces this can be accomplished, viz: the public press, public sentiment and the Negro vote. Should the utterances of the newspapers, white and black, Republican and Democratic, chrystalize public sentiment against the mob and its hellish crimes, the monster could be throttled and driven from the land.

Note: An 1896 article in The Searchlight titled "Your Vote Can Check a Mob," was written in response to increasing incidences of racial violence against blacks. The unknown author is expressing the opinion that black voters can and should try to elect officials who would help curb mob violence. Image courtesy of Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

1. Who wrote this article? When was it written?
2. What is the message of this piece?
3. Why was this an important message for African Americans living at the time?
4. Who is the target audience? Who else might be a target audience?
5. If someone wrote this today, what might be the same? What might be different?
6. Is this a news story or opinion? Explain.
7. Does this article show clear bias? If so, towards what or whom? What evidence supports your conclusion?
8. How does this source help answer the question..."How did newspapers published by black Texans around the turn of the 20th century strive to improve the lives of African Americans living in Travis County?"

Friends, you shall know the truth and if what we say be not based upon facts, then call us fools.

44 M. Mitchell, Geo. T. Stapp,
Jas. W. Burnett.
Austin Furniture Co.
FURNITURE,
Carpets and Stoves

All goods sold on easy
payments. Houses fur-
nished from kitchen to
parlor.

The
Celebrated
Rotary
Shuttle
Standard
Sewing
Machine

On 3rd and Park
for all Machines. In-
structions supplied.

26 Congress Ave. Telephone No. 80
Austin, Texas.



**OWN
YOUR
HOME!**

Eight lots for sale on the
mail between 7th and 8th
streets near Yildes.

**TIME
TO
SUIT
PURCHASER.**

Small cash payments
only required.

G. A. BAHN

612 Congress Ave. Austin, Texas

Education is the Key by Which the Arcued Intellect May Enter all the Repositories of Treasure and Take for Itself Available Knowledge.

Vol. II.

Austin, Texas, Saturday, October 24, 1896.

No. 40.

Joseph D. Sayers.
The SEARCHLIGHT has this week

9th congressional district would hasten to cast his vote for Major Sayers.

ought to ask them to favor us when they get into their offices by getting

Hon. Albert B. Burleson.

See Perry for the office of collector of Travis county. Mr. Perry is a

Your Vote Can Check a Mob. See this fact and endorse our policy.

questions relative to this matter to every candidate that white Negro

Joseph D. Sayers.

THE SEARCHLIGHT has this week the announcement of Congressman Joseph D. Sayers for re-election. We desire to say to our many readers that in our efforts to speak of the merits of this citizen, statesman, and worthy national representative, we will only give a passing notice to his national record because it is too well known by all manner of people, both in his district, his state and the nation. However, no statesman before nor since the late war has done more to build up all the varied interests of the masses of living humanity than Hon. Joseph D. Sayers. As a protector and defender of our improvements and commercial interests in Texas, his equal cannot be found.

The white fellow citizen knows this to be an undisputed fact, and they, irrespective of party lash or party ties, will support him on the 3d of November at the ballot box. But what of the Negro? Has Hon. Joseph D. Sayers neglected the Negro's interests in congress? Has he any way attempted to do the Negro as a race any harm or retard his progress educationally or otherwise? Search the public records, read the varied honest and favorable comments from Republican papers of the north, and if your mind is free from prejudice you will exclaim, "Well done thou good and faithful servant, we will help our white fellow citizens in keeping you in congress." Yes, fellow Republicans, Hon. Joseph D. Sayers has given at least ten good places in Washington to our boys, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. Why did he do this? He has sold time and

Note: Because only a few issues from 1896 and 1907 have survived, little is known about *The Searchlight* or *The Austin Searchlight*. This paper was edited by William P. Mabson, a former Reconstruction-period legislator in the North Carolina House of Representatives who later relocated to Austin. In this issue from October 24, 1896, the headline banner notes that this was "An Illustrated Newspaper By the Negro." In this issue, the politically-astute editor gives a great deal of political and social advice to his readers. He calls for people to be politically active by voting and urging their representatives to support the creation of a "colored state university." The fight for equality in educational opportunities was a common theme in many of the newspapers.

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5. If someone wrote this today, what might be the same? What might be different?
6. Is this a news story or opinion? Explain.
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8. How does this source help answer the question..."How did newspapers published by black Texans around the turn of the 20th century strive to improve the lives of African Americans living in Travis County?"

<p>Dr. B. F. Barlow, COLORED DENTIST, 424 East 6th St., Austin, Texas in Jenning's Drug Store, up stairs. Office Hours: 8 to 10 a. m., 2 to 7 p. m. In Office at night. Special reductions to those living in neighboring towns.</p>	<p>The Bell Drug Store, BELL & MERRICK are the people for Fancy Toilet Articles, Combs, Brushes, Sponges, Perfumes and Cigars corner 6th and Austin.</p>
<p>Prescriptions Correctly and accurately compounded at any hour, day or night, by the popular druggists, Morley Bros.</p>	<p>Dr. J. H. Stevens, PHYSICIAN AND SURGEON, Office 424 East 6th Street. Office Hours: 8 to 10 a. m., 2 to 4 p. m. and to 8 p. m.</p>

Note: Local professional people advertised their services in Austin's black newspapers. Dr. B. F. Barlow advertised himself as "Colored Dentist" in The Searchlight. Courtesy of Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Enlarge to learn more and see more examples.

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THE GOLD DOLLAR, AUSTIN, TEXAS AUGUST 1876.

The gold dollar is the name of this little Paper. Its name taken from A gold dollar which was presented to me by my sister nelly miller on a visit to Mississippi in 1872 as we had been sepperrated by the evil of slavery for twenty years this gold dollr I have traded with sence that time and made sixty dollars of it with which I have bought this little Office and started this little Paper
Rev, Jacob Fontaine,

A letter of in quiry from Mr Estelra Jones for his Sister Judith Jones who came to Austin from Sanaugustine with Dr Ford. If found tel Rev Jacob Fontaine,

Aney one wishing to inquire for thir kinn send ten cents to the gold dollar

ANEY WISHING TO HIRE LABOUR, OR FIND WORK TO DO, SEND 10 CENTS TO THE GOLD DOLLAR

I will have on hand

ONE WEEK OLD
BLIND WHEN THEY
CAME OUT OF THE
SHELL J. FONTAINE.

TO THE SHBBATH
Schools

REMEMBER THY
CREATOR IN THE
DAYS OF THY YOUTH

In the Sabbath schools is the first public teaching for heaven's children you must attend your child's school regular and see for it is here that our race will be more fully Christianized and purified from sin.

Note: Notice in first issue of The Gold Dollar, August 1876, offering help in searching for lost relatives. In the antebellum era, many enslaved families were split up, with individuals sold to different masters and moved to other states. After emancipation, one role of black newspapers was to facilitate communication within the black community and provide a forum for lost relatives to find one another. Because the newspaper's editor, Jacob Fontaine, was separated from his family during slavery, he was keenly aware of the importance of helping others find their lost kin. Image courtesy of Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin.

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THE FREE MAN'S PRESS

Austin

Saturday, August 1, 1868

Vol. 1, No. 3

Get A Home.

The very first thing every colored man should do is to get a home. What we mean by a home is a piece of land, large or small. A place you can call your own.

These colored people who live in towns should buy themselves building lots, it makes no difference if the lots are only large enough to build a house upon. A good way is to club together and buy a piece of land and divide it up into lots. After the lot is bought put up a house, no matter how humble it is, it will save rent. It will be a home, and everything you do about it, every dollar you spend upon it will be for your own benefit.

It will be a home—a home for you and your children.

It will be a place where you can rest in peace without fear of being molested or being made afraid by a hungry landlord.

In the eye of the law it will be your castle, as sacred to you as the palace to a king. No man has a right to tear you from it, or to molest it. You have a right to defend it against every intruder.

These people who live in the country and who farm for a living out to buy themselves a piece of land. Ten acres, well taken care of will support a large family, but here in Texas where land is so cheap, it easy enough for any working man to secure himself at least fifty acres of good land, which will make a splendid farm.

It is unnecessary for us to tell you how to buy a farm, do it as you would buy a horse. You want a deed to it, but you can find out all about these things by asking a friend or neighbor who knows.

If a man and his wife and his children will give their little farm all their work and attention, it will make them in a few years prosperous and above want.

Thousands of colored men in Texas are now renting lands and houses, and paying enough in one year in the way of rent to buy themselves a home of their own, which would make them forever independent in the world.

The time is come when every colored man in the State must get a home.

A man who rents either a hose to live in or a field to plant, is not really a free man, he is depending on a landlord.

The last of "old master's" plantations will soon pass away, and every man will be thrown upon his own resources, that is, "every tub will have to stand on its own bottom." When the Bureau is superceded by a protecting civil government, then must every man who farms look out for a patch for himself. When that day comes, it will be a happy one for all concerned.

A home will make the colored man a free man. He will feel that he has an interest in the country; he will feel that he owns a part of it.

A home will be a glad place for the children to grow up in. It will promote virtue and build up strong family ties. A family who grow up on rented land never feel at home. But let a man have a home, no matter how poor it is, freedom will dwell about the lowliest hut; the sun of heaven will dance about the humblest door; the rains of heaven will fall solidly on the poor man's roof. And as the owner stands in his own door he looks out upon the world with a feeling of manly pride; he looks upon his children at play within the limits of his own home, he will rejoice in his heart, and no cross or surly land owner can stop the play of the children, or make the father feel uneasy lest the owner should be offended.

At evening he can watch the shadows creep over the world but no shadow steals over his heart as he

slips beneath his own roof, for fear that the morning sun will bring a cruel landowner, demanding his rent.

If sickness comes, and for a while the father and mother, or child causes the work to stop, or doctor's bills are made, still they have a home, a home which the law protects for them; it can not be sold for debt, and the mother and the children can never be turned out. The new constitution now being made by the Convention protects a homestead from sale provide it is not worth more than two thousand dollars. If it is worth over two thousand dollars, it can be sold but the two thousand dollars are still kept for the family.

The money put into a home is money in the safest place in the world.

God owns the world,—He intended the land should be tilled, and he intended that every man should have as much as he can cultivate. The greediness of men that make them want more than they really need. This is a free country and every man is at liberty to buy himself a piece of land and make him a home.

When the colored people begin to make home they will begin to be really free. Treasure this in your heart and get a home.

Note: *Owning a home is stressed as a way to freedom in this 1868 article in The Free Man's Press of Austin. It reads in part, "It will be a home—a home for you and your children. It will be a place where you can rest in peace without fear of being molested or being made afraid by a hungry landlord." Image courtesy of Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Newspapers Collection, Austin).*

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SATURDAY MORNING, AUGUST 1, 1868.

Set By Black Hands.

These types were set by black hands, and we ask if the words do not read just the same as if set by any other kind of hands. You would not know the difference, if we did not tell you. This proves that color has nothing to do with the work of life. Houses built by black hands shelter us from the sun and rain just the same as if built by white ones; victuals cooked by black hands taste just as good to a hungry man, as if cooked by white hands; and so throughout the whole chapter of life.

Note: This notice in the Free Man's Press, Aug. 1, 1868, speaks to the prejudice experienced by African Americans seeking work at the time. It makes the case that black typesetters—as well as black carpenters, cooks, and other craftsmen and laborers—could do their jobs equally as well as their white counterparts. Image courtesy of The Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin (Newspapers Collection-Austin).

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