Freedom Just Around the Corner

BLACK AMERICA FROM CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS

DANIEL PIAZZA

Smithsonian National Postal Museum
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SMITHSONIAN NATIONAL POSTAL MUSEUM
WASHINGTON, D.C.
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Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry at Washington, D.C.’s Fort Lincoln c. 1862–1865

COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
You cannot make soldiers of slaves, or slaves of soldiers. The day you make a soldier of them is the beginning of the end...then our whole theory of slavery is wrong.

CONFEDERATE MAJOR GENERAL HOWELL COBB, 1865
Foreword

It is hard for me to believe that nearly a year and a half has passed since we opened the William H. Gross Stamp Gallery.

The results of the Gross Stamp Gallery have been unbelievable. Our attendance was up forty percent. Eighty-five percent of our visitors said they would return for another visit. Most importantly, more than one-quarter of our visitors leave here inspired to take up stamp collecting as a hobby.

The gallery continues to generate tremendous coverage. It has been featured in the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Washington Post. Television crews from C-SPAN, CBS Sunday Morning, and Fox 5 DC have broadcast from here. Each new exhibit we open, including our forthcoming display of the famed British Guiana Penny Magenta, is another opportunity to promote philately.

Before I came to the Smithsonian Institution I had a career with the U.S. Postal Service that lasted nearly forty years. USPS is proud of its history as one of the country’s largest employers of African Americans. That story is told in Freedom Just Around the Corner and the exhibits on the museum’s lower level. I hope that you will enjoy them.

ALLEN R. KANE
DIRECTOR
The National Postal Museum’s first exhibition devoted entirely to African American history, *Freedom* marks 150 years since the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery throughout the United States.

It highlights letters carried by enslaved Americans, mail sent by and to leaders of the civil rights movement, and original artwork for numerous stamps issued by the United States Postal Service. Nearly one hundred items from National Postal Museum’s collection are on display, augmented by outstanding pieces on loan from other institutions and private collections.
News was usually gotten from the colored man who was sent to the post-office for the mail. In our case the post-office was about three miles from the plantation and the mail came once or twice a week.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON, *UP FROM SLAVERY*, 1901
Slave-Carried Mail

Before the introduction of home mail delivery, slaves often carried letters to and from the post office. Slave-carried mail is usually identified by a notation—called an endorsement—that also served as a travel pass. These mail messengers could be an important source of news if they overheard discussions during their travels.
Susan was probably unaware that the letter she carried to the Eastville, Virginia post office contained arrangements for her to be sold to a slave dealer in Richmond.

I send to you my negro girl Susan aged 16 all rite and a first rate girl big limbs and muscles please sell her and remit...

A slave named Moses carried this letter and a trunk to Annapolis, Maryland where Teackle was a member of the state legislature.
The addressee, Rice Carter Ballard, was a slave dealer who owned plantations in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi.
Mrs. Maria Gooch stampless cover  
DECEMBER 22, 1856  LOAN FROM SCOTT R. TREPEL

A cart and three slaves—Turner, Lindsay, and Julia—brought this letter with them to Airfield Plantation near Richmond, Virginia. It was not uncommon for slaves to be given travel passes at Christmastime to visit friends and relatives on other plantations.

“Davy Lamar (colored)” stampless letter  
UNDATED  LOAN FROM DAVID MIELKE

Slaves occasionally received mail, as evidenced by the endorsement on this letter: “Mr. Wells will please read the enclosed note to Davy.”
American slavery was big business. On the eve of the Civil War, four million slaves produced cash crops—cotton, tobacco, and rice—that were exported at high prices. In addition to the crops they raised, slaves themselves were commodities to be bought, sold, bred, and borrowed against. A variety of service industries supported the slave economy including dealers, insurance companies, and shippers. The federal government also derived revenue from taxes on the sale of slaves and the export of slave-grown products.

The Business of Slavery

Slave dealer’s shop on Whitehall (now Peachtree) Street, Atlanta 1864

COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
Richmond, Virginia was the center of the domestic slave trade on the eve of the Civil War. Despite the large volume of mail that must have been sent by slave dealers, just a few examples survive today.
Dear Sir,

Richmond Oct. 12, 1860

Our market is fair at this time several here who wish to buy some good negroes. Several have been waiting for you and expect you in as soon as you get our letter. But as you have not arrived we conclude you did not get our letter come immediately.

Very respectfully,

[Signature]
This indenture made the 3 day of March 1863 between Mary Jones of the first part and David Clark of the second part both of the County of Henderson and State of Kentucky

Whereas the said Clark has agreed to pay to L. H. Jones the sum of six hundred dollars as evidence by a promissory note of this date payable with interest at six months from date signed by the said L. H. Jones and Mary Jones of the first part

The said sum of money to be paid to said Jones on the delivery of this deed and

Said the party of the first part in consideration of said loan and as an inducement thereof has agreed to give the said Jones security herein set forth.

Now in consideration of the premises, the party of the first part has sold and hereby conveys in mortgage to the party of the second part her negro man named George, of copper color and aged about forty five years...

The condition of this conveyance is that if the said L. H. Jones and Mary Jones shall ever and truly pay off and discharge said debt, it shall be void and cease to remain in full force and virtue.

In testimony whereof the party of the first part has presented at her hand and affixed her seal, the day and year above written.

L. H. Jones
Mary Jones

Freedom Just Around the Corner
Kentucky slaveowner Margaret Jones secured a loan of $600 by mortgaging her “negro man, named George, of copper color and aged about forty five years.” Under the terms, George would be deeded back to Jones if the loan was paid off in six months.

A total of six cents tax was due on $305 paid for a “negro boy Charles” at a court-ordered auction in Bourbon County, Kentucky.
The Charleston, South Carolina post office was raided by a pro-slavery mob in July 1835. “U.S.M.” on the mail bag at lower left stands for U.S. Mail, and the mob is burning bundles of abolitionist newspapers—with the help of the city postmaster.
The political ideals of the American Revolution—liberty, equality, and freedom—inspired some Americans to rethink the morality of slavery. By 1804, reformers had succeeded in abolishing slavery in the northern states and turned all their efforts to attacking slavery in the south and opposing its spread in the west. Postage rates decreased from the 1830s through the 1850s, allowing abolitionists to distribute literature cheaply via the post office. Many southerners regarded these mail campaigns as an attack, aided and abetted by the federal government.
Boston abolitionists met in 1842 and called on Congress to end slavery in Washington, D.C. This report of the meeting was mailed free to a member of Congress with an affixed seal that reads: “Are you a FREEMAN... Do as you would be done by. Proclaim liberty to the captives.” Slavery remained legal in the District until 1862.
Great Meeting in Faneuil Hall, for the abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia.

A large and overwhelming Meeting of the citizens of Boston and vicinity was held in the old Cradle of Liberty, on Friday evening, Jan. 20, 1832, favorably to the immediate abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia. The Meeting was called to order by FRANCIS JACKSON, and, on motion of Edward Quincy, WILLIAM LIPER HUNTINGTON was unanimously called to the Chair.

On motion, Faled, That there be chosen six Vice Presidents, to be nominated by the Chair. The following persons were then chosen, viz:

FRANCIS JACKSON, }
ISAAC SEXTON, } New England.
GEORGE B. RUSH, } }
Hon. J. P. MARSH, } } }
J. P. ROGERS, of New Hampshire, } }
JAMES CANNES, of New York.

The following persons were then appointed Secretaries, viz:

WILLIAM BISSEY, } }
CHARLES GUTENS, } }
EDWARD W. WALLACE, } New York.

The Chairman said he would long hope to present to the Meeting, for their consideration, the following Resolutions, which expressed the feelings of his heart, and the spirit of which he thought should animate the bosom of every friend of Liberty:

1. Resolved, That treason to the District of Columbia is neither a part nor under the control of any one State, but belongs to the people of the United States, and to make the executive profession of Congress in Ottawa, whatever else may be, so far as the relations of slavery in that District, Congress and the people of the United States are bound to keep it out and at any moment they can constitutionally do it.

2. Resolved, That, in the world war of the God of nations, and by every command of justice, humanity, and religion, we must view Congress immediately to break the doors and to make the treaty defective, which that body has made, and to let the oppressed go free, in the advanced District, and to give no countenance or protection to slavery in any part of the republic.

3. Resolved, That the object of Congress to receive the petitions of the people, is evident, to this great national integrity and voice, in an act of high-handed corruption, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people, and if presented in such language, most successfully lead to the most deplorable consequences.

4. Resolved, That the object of Congress, in the present state of the country, in a light of high-handed corruption, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people; and, if presented in such language, most successfully lead to the most deplorable consequences.

5. Resolved, That the object of Congress, in the present state of the country, in a light of high-handed corruption, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people; and, if presented in such language, most successfully lead to the most deplorable consequences.

6. Resolved, That the object of Congress, in the present state of the country, in a light of high-handed corruption, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people; and, if presented in such language, most successfully lead to the most deplorable consequences.

7. Resolved, That the object of Congress, in the present state of the country, in a light of high-handed corruption, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people; and, if presented in such language, most successfully lead to the most deplorable consequences.
The Free Soil Party was a third party in the presidential election of 1848, when Martin Van Buren was their candidate. Their sole platform was preventing the spread of slavery into the new territories acquired during the Mexican-American War. The first U.S. postage stamp, issued in 1847, was used to send their political circular through the mail.
[CONFIDENTIAL CIRCULAR.]

Boston, September 10, 1840.

A. B. CALDWELL.

DEAR SIR,

Will you be so kind as to send the names of your School Committee to the proper State Committee, in the event of your receiving this letter through which we have been authorized to communicate to you the following Circulars of the same.

The Free Soil party of Massachusetts is now fairly solid upon the grounds of the following Circulars.

We have no apposed party—THOMAS J. DIAZ—was nominated by no others in the State for the highest offices, and their qualifications for public service. We have been also the support of Van Buren and Adams.

VAN BUREN AND ADAMS.

Next spring, a party founded upon a better basis than the Buffalo Platform, need be a party founded with candidates more deserving of public confidence, and more true to the platform which they represent. It is impossible to bring out our whole strength without systematic and combined effort.

The following plan is generally recommended to be adopted by every town.

The State Committee believe that the adoption of this plan in every town, if faithfully carried out, will secure the State vote for Free soil, at the coming elections. We hope that towns will voluntarily assume the responsibility of subduing defeat by measures.

PLAN OF ORGANIZATION.

1. Each Committee consisting of two men, not less than and not more than, or that they may consult and act together, and can easily reach every town, by letter, or personal visits.

2. In addition, the Chairman of each Town Committee may be a member of the County Committee.

3. The Committee, by the Chairman or Secretary, will be in correspondence with the State Committee, communicating at once the names of its officers, to be entered on the State Committee's books, and enabling useful information, at all times.

4. The County Committee will forward to the State Committee the names of the Chairmen of Town Committees, and the names of every townsman, seeking the neighborhood of such Post Office, to whom circulars, either, for, or against, may be sent, when necessary.

5. Every correspondent should always be a person who is in the greatest degree of public necessity, and be willing to be in the hands of the Committee, and sent to the friends of his neighborhood, for the purpose of forwarding the necessary circulars, to be sent to the friends of the Committee.

6. The County Committee should see that every town is organized, and that the State vote for Free soil, at least once a year, by letter, or personal visits, to be held every town, at least once a year, by letter, or personal visits, to the friends of the Committee, and sent to the friends of the State Committee, for the purpose of forwarding the necessary circulars, to be sent to the friends of the Committee.

7. The Town Committee will take the lead in the political action of the town, and in the decision of the State, County, or District Committees, and the nomination of representatives. They will also, if necessary, get up banners, neighborhood meetings, lyceum lectures, circulars, and letters.
Less than a year after its publication in the United States, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* sold more than one million copies in Great Britain. Although modern critics point out the book’s use of racially stereotyped characters, in its day it was regarded as a powerful piece of anti-slavery propaganda. Scenes from the novel decorate the reverse of this British anti-slavery cover published by James Valentine of Dundee, Scotland.

» *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* 
illustrated anti-slavery 
cover  MARCH 28, 1853

» *Early London edition of* 
*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*  1852

LOAN FROM SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION LIBRARIES, DIBNER LIBRARY OF THE HISTORY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
The scenes, clockwise from top flap: Uncle Tom is sold away from Aunt Chloe and his children because of his owner’s bankruptcy. The overseers Sambo and Quimbo flog Uncle Tom. Simon Legree whips Uncle Tom. Uncle Tom reads his Bible atop cotton bales on a Mississippi River steamboat. Pursued by slave catchers, Eliza escapes north with her five year old son Harry. Emmeline is sold away from her grieving mother, Susan.
The U.S. and Great Britain prohibited the importation of slaves in 1807. Both nations established Africa Squadrons—naval detachments to intercept slave trading ships off the West African coast. Slaves found on the captured vessels were freed, usually in Liberia. Mail to and from ships of the Africa Squadron is quite scarce.

**Cover from USS Portsmouth off Cape Verde**  
JANUARY 7, 1849  
LOAN FROM PATRICK MASELIS

![USS Portsmouth]( COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION)
cover to USS Mohican off Angola December 20, 1860

Loan from Patrick Maselis

Mohican’s only capture was the slave ship Erie, carrying almost 900 Africans. The thirty-three cents postage on this letter paid five cents domestic U.S. postage, the sixteen cents transatlantic ship rate, and twelve cents (equal to six pence) British Empire postage.
Liberia

While abolitionists wanted an immediate and unconditional end to slavery, the American Colonization Society (ACS) supported gradual emancipation combined with resettling freed slaves in Africa. This appealed to slave owners who feared rebellions; white farmers and laborers who worried that free black labor would depress wages; religious leaders who wanted to missionize Africa; and those who believed freed slaves would never be treated fairly in America. The ACS founded the West African colony of Liberia in 1822 and resettled more than 13,000 freed American slaves there.
Signed by their designer, the noted illustrator Arthur Szyk, these stamps romanticize the arrival of the first African Americans at Liberia in 1821. Most of the 164 emigrants on board the ship Nautilus (visible in the background) were from North Carolina and were under eighteen years old. Within a year, 25% died from malaria.
Reverend Charles A. Stillman, a minister in Alabama, reports in his letter that local colonizationists have purchased a slave family’s freedom for $2500 in order to send them to Liberia as missionaries.

They are all fond of the name of Harrison—that of their first owners in Virginia, for whom... they cherish a tender regard. For this reason they desire to retain that name. Our missionary therefore will henceforth be known as Ellis Harrison...
The writer, James M. Priest, was born a slave in Kentucky. Freed by his owner to become a missionary in Liberia, he later served as the fledgling country’s vice president and a justice of its supreme court. His letter entered the U.S. aboard a ship that landed at Baltimore.
Soldiers in winter camp  c. 1864
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
Civil War

The debate over slavery turned violent during the 1850s. Pro- and anti-slavery settlers in the Kansas Territory fought a year-long running battle known as “Bleeding Kansas.” An abortive attempt at a slave rebellion in Virginia, followed closely by Abraham Lincoln’s election as president in 1860, made the Civil War inevitable. Although roughly 10% of Union forces were African American, they served in segregated units led by white officers.
**Captain John Brown cover**  NOVEMBER 29, 1859

John Brown was a veteran of Bleeding Kansas who organized an 1859 attack on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry in hopes of inciting a Virginia slave rebellion. His capture, trial, and execution became a cause célèbre that brought pro- and anti-slavery arguments to a fever pitch. During his final month in jail at Charlestown, Virginia, Brown was allowed to send and receive mail.

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**“Beardless” Lincoln campaign cover**  c. 1861

*Slavery Sectional, Freedom National*—an abolitionist slogan coined by U.S. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts—here endorses Abraham Lincoln’s 1860 presidential candidacy. The sentiment proved prophetic; Lincoln’s election without the support of a single southern state led to the secession of the Confederate States of America and the Civil War.
Early in the Civil War, Union General Benjamin Butler decreed that escaped slaves who reached his station at Fort Monroe would be considered “contraband” and not returned to their owners. Although the idea of black troops is caricatured by these envelopes, nearly 200,000 black men served in the Union forces.

“Come back here you black rascal” illustrated cover c. 1861 LOAN FROM SCOTT R. TREPEL

Runaway slaves volunteering for Union army illustrated cover c. 1861
Seventeen-year-old Maryland slave William H. Jones enlisted in the 19th Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops on December 18, 1863. His owner later filed emancipation papers, possibly to apply for federal compensation. Wounded during the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, Jones was discharged and returned to Maryland.

Recruiting depots paid new recruits an enlistment bounty, mustered them into Union service, and assigned them to a regiment. Most black troops served as manual laborers or on guard duty, including guarding Confederate prisoners of war. The Department of the Gulf was headquartered in occupied New Orleans.
DEED OF MANUMISSON AND RELEASE OF SERVICE.

Whereas my slave, [name], has enlisted in the service of the United States; now, in consideration thereof, I, [name], of [place], State of [place], do hereby, in consideration of said enlistment, manumiss, set free, and release the above-named [name] from all service due me, his freedom to commence from the [date], the date of his enlistment as aforesaid in the [regiment] of [army], in the service of the United States.

Witness:

[signature]

[signature]

Howard County,
State of Maryland, 1864.

Before me appeared this day [name] and acknowledged the above Deed of Manumission and Release of Service to be his free act and deed.

[signature]
The 121st consisted almost entirely of black troops raised in Kentucky, where one of the regiment’s white officers mailed this letter shortly before a skirmish with Confederate soldiers.

Nothing suits me better than to have command of Darkey Troops...

It is a fact that colored Troops learn faster than white Troops.
41
BLACK AMERICA FROM CIVIL WAR TO CIVIL RIGHTS
41

New York, December 15, 1863

Capt. T. J. Crawford
Commodore J. M. T. Bruno

Dear Captain,

I am sure you will find this letter to be a welcome change from the busy life of business in New York. At the time I wrote it, I was in the mailroom, waiting for the mail to arrive.

I wanted to thank you for the kindness you showed to my family when you were in the mailroom. I was very impressed by the way you handled our mail and how you always made sure that it was delivered on time.

I was also very impressed by your efficiency and how you always made sure that the mail was sorted and delivered on time. I know how much effort you put into your work and how much you care about your job.

I wanted to let you know that I appreciate all you do and how much I value your service.

Thank you for your hard work and dedication.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
William Harvey Carney, born a slave in Virginia in 1840, volunteered for the celebrated, all-black 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Shot twice while rescuing the American flag during an attack on Battery Wagner near Charleston, South Carolina, he later received the Medal of Honor. After the war, he worked as a letter carrier in the New Bedford, Massachusetts post office for more than thirty years.

William H. Carney on his postal route c. 1880
COURTESY CARL J. CRUZ
**Confederate “turned” cover**  c. 1862

As the Civil War dragged on, southerners “turned” unused documents and even leftover wallpaper inside out to fashion homemade envelopes. This cover, mailed in Georgia with Confederate postage, was made from a tax assessment form that lists “Slaves–Male” as property to be taxed.

[Image of the Confederate “turned” cover]

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**Confederate “Office Enrollment of Slaves” cover**  c. 1864  Loan from Scott R. Trepel

Robert E. Lee ordered conscription of slaves in 1864 to bolster his faltering Confederate army. General Howell Cobb, well-known for his opposition to enlisting slaves, was placed in charge of doing just that in Georgia. This letter to Cobb was hand-carried by a Confederate officer rather than mailed presumably because it contained $936, a small fortune in the war’s waning days.

[Image of the Confederate “Office Enrollment of Slaves” cover]
Mississippi sharecropper’s cabin
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
Reconstruction

Reconstruction refers to the process of reorganizing the southern states and readmitting them to the Union. It generally began once U.S. forces occupied a Confederate territory, and involved freeing local slaves and extending political rights to them. The rise of the Ku Klux Klan foreshadowed the difficulties that African Americans would face once the last federal forces withdrew from the south in 1877, leaving blacks vulnerable to segregationist “Jim Crow” laws.
First Federal Issue revenue stamp on slave girl photograph  c. 1864

The National Freedmen’s Relief Association sold a series of slave photographs to raise money for educational projects in occupied New Orleans. They favored images of obviously mixed-race children, which appealed to a white audience. Photographs were taxed according to their retail value, and a government revenue stamp is found on the reverse.

Baltimore Association cover  c. 1865

Addressee Rebecca Primus was an African American teacher from Connecticut brought south by the “Baltimore Association for the Moral and Education Improvement of the Colored People” to open a school for freed blacks in eastern Maryland.
Private charity could only partially meet former slaves’ needs, which ranged from food and clothing to employment and education. Congress created the Freedmen’s Bureau in 1865 with Major General Oliver O. Howard as its commissioner. A Medal of Honor recipient, he later served as president of Howard University. His signature indicated that no postage was due.
CONTRACT FOR LABOR

State of Alabama,

COUNTY OF Pulaski,

Between

James H. Dozier,

and the undersigned colored laborers, WITNESS,

James H. Dozier,

obligate myself to give to the undersigned colored laborers,

of the cotton; (1/2) of the corn; (1/2) of the fodder; and

of all other produce raised on my plantation; and to furnish the said laborers with

two dollars per week, until the first day of January, 1863.

For and in consideration of the above, We, the undersigned colored laborers, obligate ourselves to labor
faithfully for

James H. Dozier,

each day, from sunrise until sunset Sunday excepted, until the first day of January, 1863, working agreeably to, and obeying all reasonable orders given by the employer or his agents. We also obligate ourselves to pay

John H. Dozier

sixty-six and one-half cents per day, for all

James H. Dozier

time lost by illness, and to obey all and be governed by the general rules and regulations of the plantation.

 Signed at Montgomery, the 1st day of March, 1863.

John H. Dozier

Witness:

James H. Dozier

Freedom Just Around the Corner
Southern landowners no longer owned slaves, and most freedmen owned no land. This dilemma resulted in the sharecropping system, in which free blacks (and many poor whites) farmed someone else’s land in return for one-quarter to two-thirds of the crop, depending on how much the landowner was obligated to provide for them.
Long before famous African Americans were celebrated on postage stamps, poor black sharecroppers appeared on a series of revenue stamps issued to collect the tax on one of their major crops—tobacco. Similar images appeared on banknotes and checks of the period.

- **1/2 lb., 3 lb., and 5 lb. tobacco taxpaid stamps** 1868
- **1/2 lb. tobacco taxpaid revenue die essay** 1868
Former slaves hoping to enjoy new-found freedom were soon confronted by whites trying to maintain their supremacy. The KKK began as a society of Confederate veterans that used terrorism to intimidate freedmen. Its most recognizable symbol—the pointed hood and mask—did not become common until the 1920s, however.
Most U.S. postmasters were not issued standard devices for canceling stamps until the 1890s. Prior to that, they were purchased from vendors or homemade. A number of hand-carved KKK-themed cancels were used by the post office at Union Mills, Pennsylvania in 1870. They serve as a reminder that the Klan had adherents in the north as well as the south.

“The skull and crossbones” KKK postal cancel, Union Mills, Pennsylvania c. 1870

LOAN FROM STAMPVESTORS LLC COMPLIMENTS OF COLUMBIAN STAMP COMPANY

The skull and crossbones was one of the earliest symbols adopted by the Klan.

Watertown, New York Ku Klux Klan

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“Kleagle Mask” KKK postal cancel, Union Mills, Pennsylvania c. 1870

This cancel depicts an early style of homemade KKK mask. Modern stamp collectors refer to it as a kleagle mask after the title given to Klan recruiters, but that word was unknown in the 1870s.

Mississippi Ku-Klux, Harper’s Weekly

JANUARY 27, 1872
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
“First ‘Jim-Crow’ P.O. in U.S.”

Dallas Express  JULY 19, 1919
Segregation

With the U.S. Army no longer suppressing the Klan and enforcing the political rights of freedmen, southern states introduced racial segregation and passed laws that made it difficult for black men to vote. Lynchings peaked between 1890 and 1910, and anti-lynching legislation became a perennial concern of new civil rights organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Throughout this period, the post office and the military were the nation’s largest employers, and they reflected the racial tensions of the larger society.
Postal Segregation

- Segregated Rural Free Delivery saddlebag
  c. 1896

Palmyra, Virginia became a Rural Free Delivery post office on October 22, 1896, one of the first in the nation to deliver mail to farm families. This mailbag with separate compartments for “white” and “colored” mail was not required by federal policy but was procured by the carrier to satisfy either his own preferences or those of his customers.
President William McKinley appointed hundreds of African American postmasters, including Frazer B. Baker of Lake City, South Carolina. Local whites burned the post office to force Baker to resign; when he did not, they burned his house and shot his family as they escaped. Because Baker was a U.S. government employee, his murder led to a federal trial. None of the accused was convicted, but the incident brought national attention to the lynching problem.
Blackdom, New Mexico post office cash book  c. 1913
Faced with segregation and discrimination in the east, many African Americans chose to establish their own towns in the west. Some, like Blackdom, grew large enough to support post offices that offered money orders and postal savings accounts, functioning as *de facto* banks. Cash books from these post offices contain the community’s economic history.

![Blackdom, New Mexico post office](c. 1913)

*COURTESY KNME-TV / CHANNEL 5*
Federal employment was desegregated during Reconstruction. In 1913, however, President Woodrow Wilson resegregated the government. An early flash point was the Railway Mail Service (RMS), where close quarters and hazardous working conditions exacerbated racial tensions. Black RMS clerks formed the National Association of Postal Employees and published a journal, *The Postal Alliance*, to address their concerns.
Widespread discrimination and the prevalence of Jim Crow laws in the south made it difficult for African Americans to travel freely. Harlem, New York letter carrier Victor H. Green and his wife Alma published the *Green Book* from 1936 to 1966 to guide black travelers to hotels, restaurants, and other establishments that would serve them. Much of his information was supplied by fellow postal workers around the country.
Military Segregation

Let the black man get upon his person the brass letters U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder, and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on earth or under the earth which can deny that he has earned the right of citizenship in the United States.

FREDERICK DOUGLASS, SHOULD THE NEGRO ENLIST IN THE UNION ARMY?, 1863
The idea of an entirely African American squadron in the Army Air Corps seemed far-fetched at a time when there were only a handful of black pilots in the entire country. However, Tuskegee Institute had operated a federally-funded training program for black pilots since 1939, so when just such a squadron was authorized by the War Department it was based there. Lieutenant Colonel Noel F. Parrish, the unit’s third white commander, was directly responsible for ensuring the Tuskegee Airmen’s many successes.

**Tuskegee aviation cadet Herbert O. Reid**

**Cover**  APRIL 14, 1942

**Noel F. Parrish “somewhere in Alabama”**

**Cover**  JULY 11, 1943
“Chief” Anderson was a self-taught Pennsylvania pilot who served as an instructor at the Tuskegee Army Air Field. His nickname stemmed from his title—Chief Civilian Flight Instructor. His students included two future African American four-star generals: Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. and Daniel “Chappie” James, Sr.
One of the first all-black Marine units, the 3rd Ammunition Company’s meritorious performance in the 1944 Battle of Saipan earned them a Presidential Unit Citation and won praise from senior white commanders, softening opposition to African Americans in the military.

African American soldiers in the field continued to receive, read, and correspond with black publications such as the NAACP’s *The Crisis* magazine. The sender of this letter, Private First Class Sam Wallace, Jr. of Kansas, was killed in action in the final months of the war.
Longtime NAACP Executive Secretary Walter F. White served as a war correspondent for several publications, including the *New York Post*. He reported on the contributions of black military personnel and the discrimination they faced in the service. His book *A Rising Wind* figured in President Harry S. Truman’s 1948 decision to desegregate the military.
The 6888th was the first all-black battalion in the Women’s Army Corps, and the only such unit deployed overseas in World War II. Its 855 members were sent to England and France in 1945 to clear a backlog of undelivered mail addressed to U.S. soldiers serving in Europe.
One of the first African American officers in the Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps during World War II, Roundtree was known as a tireless recruiter. This uniform is an early style, worn before the WAACs converted to full military status and dropped “auxiliary” from their name on July 1, 1943.
The U.S. military’s V-Mail (short for Victory Mail) system involved photographing letters to military personnel, then sending the microfilmed negatives to be developed and delivered in the field. The top letter in this V-Mail microfilm strip is a letter from a Howard University student to her husband in the navy.
Few things can help an individual more than to place responsibility on him.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
The first generation of civil rights leaders were born in slavery or were the children of slaves. They emphasized education and self-reliance as the path to equality, founding local and national organizations to help fellow black Americans become educated, build businesses, and establish social networks. The institutions they created trained and nurtured later generations of activist leaders.
Mary McLeod Bethune to Walter White cover

OCTOBER 17, 1928

A notation on this envelope indicates that it contained a letter from Mary McLeod Bethune concerning the deadly 1928 Okeechobee Hurricane, in which 75% of those killed were poor black farmers in the lowlands surrounding Lake Okeechobee. Bethune founded Bethune-Cookman College at Daytona Beach, Florida in 1904.
The Tuskegee Institute, which Booker T. Washington founded and where George Washington Carver taught for nearly a half-century, offered a practical education to future teachers, farmers, and industrial workers.

**Tuskegee Institute cover to Nigeria**  
February 19, 1913

**10¢ Booker T. Washington**  
1940

**3¢ George Washington Carver block of four**  
1948
The Chicago Defender both encouraged and chronicled the “Great Migration” of African Americans to northern urban centers between 1910 and 1970. Despite its title, most of its readers were outside Chicago; black travelers frequently smuggled copies into the south, where many news agents refused to carry it.
Novelist, playwright, and poet Paul Laurence Dunbar was one of the first black writers to be accepted by the white literary establishment. He published pieces in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and *Saturday Evening Post* as well as writing *Dahomey*, the first African American Broadway musical.

› **10¢ Paul Laurence Dunbar imperforate pair** 1975

LOAN FROM JOHN M. HOTCHNER

**Paul Laurence Dunbar cover** JUNE 11, 1895

LOAN FROM JOHN M. HOTCHNER

**The Call black newspaper cover** FEBRUARY 17, 1944

In addition to national news items, Kansas City’s *The Call* focused on printing social information that the city’s white-owned newspapers declined to print, such as marriages, obituaries, and graduation announcements. NAACP Executive Director Roy Wilkins began his career as a reporter for *The Call*. 
Organizations

› National Negro Business League cover
   JULY 24, 1914

   Organized in 1900 by Booker T. Washington, the National Negro Business League encouraged its members to cater to black consumers and advertise in black magazines and newspapers.

Charles Hamilton Houston founded the NAACP’s legal department in 1935. For the next fifteen years he challenged segregation through the courts and mentored his successor, the future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

› 42¢ Charles Hamilton Houston and Walter White 2009

› Thurgood Marshall to Charles Hamilton Houston cover SEPTEMBER 23, 1935
The “Scottsboro Boys” were nine black teenagers from Alabama falsely convicted of raping two white teenage girls in 1931. The convictions were overturned by the Supreme Court and sent back to Alabama for retrial. The NAACP cooperated with the Scottsboro Defense Committee to raise money to pay for the Scottsboro Boys’ defense, but five of them were reconvicted. All were eventually paroled or pardoned.
The Struggle Against Lynching
Born a slave in Mississippi during the Civil War, Ida B. Wells became a journalist and lecturer who brought worldwide attention to race issues in the United States. She undertook the first systematic, statistical study that exposed the lynching problem.

Ruby Hurley opened the NAACP’s first permanent office in Alabama in 1951. She investigated the murders of several African Americans, including fifteen-year-old Emmet Till, before turning her attention to the desegregation of public universities.

42¢ Ella Baker and Ruby Hurley
2009

Home Missions Council to Ruby Hurley cover SEPTEMBER 18, 1951
The Rise of Direct Action

During the 1950s, legal and political challenges to segregation were replaced by non-violent “direct action” tactics such as boycotts, sit-ins, and marches. This was due in part to the influence of World War II veterans, who had fought for freedom abroad and were no longer willing to accept less at home. The largest and most famous of these demonstrations was the August 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, the setting for Martin Luther King’s *I Have a Dream* speech.

“Full Freedom by 1963”

*cover*  JANUARY 7, 1957

The slogan on this NAACP envelope refers to the organization’s stated goal of equality for African Americans by the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. The centennial was also the occasion of the March on Washington.
Chicago NAACP Race Restrictive Covenants cover
JUNE 6, 1945

As America suburbanized from the 1920s to the 1960s, black Americans were excluded from buying homes in many communities. The NAACP addressed this trend at the end of World War II, when returning black veterans were entitled to low cost G.I. Bill mortgages but found it difficult to buy property.
White House cover
to A. Philip Randolph
DECEMBER 3, 1962

Labor leader A. Philip Randolph first proposed a mass protest in Washington, D.C. during 1941. Although it never materialized, he participated in planning for the August 1963 March on Washington. This envelope dates from a period when the Kennedy administration was discouraging the march’s organizers from going through with it.
Martin Luther King’s *I Have a Dream* speech was commemorated in the Postal Service’s Celebrate the Century stamp series issued at the end of the twentieth century. A trace of brightness on the horizon represents hope, while King wears the March’s official badge.
“Mrs. Medgar Evers” cover
JUNE 14, 1963

The March on Washington occurred between two infamous civil rights crimes. NAACP leader Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson, Mississippi two months before the March; less than a month afterward, four young girls died in a bombing at Birmingham, Alabama’s 16th Street Baptist Church. This cover contained a letter of condolence to Myrlie Evers-Williams, who later became chairman of the NAACP.

42¢ Medgar Evers and Fannie Lou Hamer 2009
Political Pins  c. 1960s–1970s
LOAN FROM TUSKEGEE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES

The images and slogans on these lapel pins symbolize the “Black Power” movement that gained popularity in the years after the March on Washington. It went beyond the equality called for by the mainstream civil rights movement, instead emphasizing a sense of racial pride.
The Black Heritage stamps reflect the progress, richness, and diversity of African American achievements.

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE
Black Heritage Stamp Series

U.S. postage stamps were in use for nearly a century before Booker T. Washington became the first African American to appear on one. A handful of additional black history-related designs appeared between 1940 and 1978, when the U.S. Postal Service introduced the Black Heritage series. Today the Black Heritage issues are the longest-running U.S. stamp series.
25¢ Frederick Douglass approved stamp art by Walter DuBois Richards  
c. 1967

The Douglass stamp marked the first time an African American was included in a “regular” stamp series; that is, one meant for everyday postal use. The dramatic portrait was based on a photograph approved by Douglass’s descendants.

5¢ Emancipation Proclamation concept stamp  
art by Georg Olden  c. 1963

This bold, allegorical commemorative for the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation was the first U.S. postage stamp designed by an African American.
The U.S. bicentennial was the occasion for this stamp, part of a series that honored little-known figures of the American Revolution. Salem Poor was a slave who purchased his freedom and later participated in the battles at Bunker Hill, Valley Forge, and White Plains.
Illustrator Jerry Pinkney’s designs for the first Black Heritage stamps set the tone for the series and were emulated by later illustrators Thomas Blackshear II and Higgins Bond. They feature a central portrait surrounded by symbolic vignettes of the subject’s primary accomplishments.

13¢ Harriet Tubman die proof  c. 1978

15¢ Martin Luther King, Jr. approved stamp art by Jerry Pinkney  c. 1979
Controversies

The Black Heritage series has occasionally drawn criticism, especially when it has depicted individuals who espoused controversial political ideologies.

29¢ W. E. B. Du Bois approved stamp art by Higgins Bond  c. 1992

Targeted during the McCarthy era for his socialist views, W. E. B. Du Bois accepted Ghanaian citizenship and formally joined the Communist Party at the age of 93. Some critics felt that this should have prevented his appearance on a U.S. stamp.

33¢ Malcolm X concept stamp art by Chris Calle  c. 1999

Criticism of the 1999 Black Heritage stamp honoring Malcolm X centered on his early association with the Nation of Islam and his controversial view that blacks should advance civil rights “by any means necessary,” including violence.
Portraiture

The Black Heritage series has always commemorated people rather than organizations or events. As a result, its attraction lies in the strength of its portraiture. This presents challenges when representing early subjects for whom there are few source images, but it has also produced stunning and memorable artwork.

› 22¢ Jean Baptiste Point du Sable approved stamp art by Thomas Blackshear II  c. 1987

There are no extant portraits of Chicago pioneer du Sable or his cabin; other artists’ conceptions inspired Blackshear’s haunting portrait.

› 37¢ Marian Anderson approved stamp art by Albert Slark  c. 2005

Canadian-born artist Albert Slark created this full-color oil portrait of Marian Anderson from a circa 1934 black-and-white photograph. Easily one of the most beautiful designs in the Black Heritage series, it won numerous awards and was exhibited at the Society of Illustrators 48th Annual Exhibition in New York City.
Legacies

Due in part to the success of the Black Heritage series, since the 1980s there has been a substantial increase in the number of African American subjects included in other series.
The most prolific jazz composer ever, Edward “Duke” Ellington and his orchestra toured the U.S. for nearly fifty years and also popularized the genre in Europe.

Known for his melodic baritone voice, Cole was the first African American entertainer to have his own television variety show.
A noted folklorist, novelist and anthropologist, Hurston is best known for her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

Rudolph won three gold medals in track at the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome, despite having contracted infantile paralysis (polio) at the age of four.
**Curator’s Afterword**

*Freedom Just Around the Corner* is intended to commemorate the 150th anniversaries of the end of the Civil War and total abolition in the United States, as well as to celebrate the impending addition of the National Museum of African American History and Culture to the Smithsonian family. I think we have created a worthy tribute to these occasions.

In selecting the fifty or so NPM pieces that form the backbone of this exhibition, I was impressed by our collection’s strength in covers mailed to and by great figures in black history. It quickly became apparent that these were transferred to us by the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress in the 1970s and 1980s. Today’s exhibitions are always indebted to the foresight of previous generations of curators and administrators.

While I am on the subject of indebtedness, a curator accumulates many debts in the course of staging an exhibit such as *Freedom*. Without a doubt, my two largest creditors are Marvin Murray and Assistant Curator of Philately Calvin Mitchell. Marvin’s first-hand knowledge of twentieth-century military history helped to identify several important covers shown in the Military Segregation section of the exhibit, and he arranged our interviews with General and Mrs. Brown and Col. McQuillan for the audio portion of the exhibit.

Calvin indefatigably tracked down artifacts that I wanted on loan and commented thoughtfully on more versions of the exhibit script than he probably cares to remember. He cheerfully embraced the audio interview component of the project, even though it evolved late in the game. He worked on this project as a volunteer for more than a year before we were able to bring him on staff, and I am deeply grateful to him for his advice and dedication.

What a pleasure it was to be able to draw on the Postmaster General’s Collection of original U.S. stamp art, on permanent loan to the National Postal Museum since 2010! Having this collection on hand allowed us to trace the history of the Black Heritage series. In addition, Cindy Tackett and Bill Gicker of USPS graciously worked to get us the 2014 C. Alfred “Chief” Anderson artwork ahead of schedule so it could be featured in this show.

**DANIEL A. PIAZZA**  
Chief Curator of Philately
Message from ESPER

The Ebony Society of Philatelic Events and Reflections (ESPER) is an international community of stamp collectors who encourage and support Black people in all their philatelic pursuits, especially the study of stamps and philatelic material related to the African Diaspora.

ESPER was pleased to provide support for this first-ever Smithsonian exhibition devoted entirely to African American philately and history. Many of our members contributed items and expertise to this project, including Karen Bertha, John Hotchner, David Mielke, and Calvin Mitchell.

We hope this exhibition will inspire you to start or revive your own collection of stamps. If so, please consider joining the nearly 300 ESPER members throughout the United States and in other countries who read our award-winning quarterly newsletter, Reflections, and gather at shows for fellowship and philately.

Visit our website at esperstamps.org or write to ESPER, Box 1757, Lincolnton Station, New York NY 10037-1757.

WALTER LEE FAISON, JR.
PRESIDENT
Acknowledgements

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This exhibition was greatly enriched by numerous pieces generously loaned from institutions and private collectors, including Avery Research Center, College of Charleston; Carl J. Cruz; Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University; John M. Hotchner; Howard County (MD) Historical Society; Hermann Ivester; Patrick Maselis; David Mielke; Calvin N. Mitchell; National Park Service, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House National Historic Site; Smithsonian Institution Libraries, Dibner Library of the History of Science and Technology; Smithsonian Institution Libraries, National Postal Museum Library; Southern Poverty Law Center; Stampvestors LLC through Columbian Stamp Company; Scott R. Trepel; Tuskegee University
Archives; and United States Postal Service, Postmaster General’s Collection.

Several individuals kindly consented to be interviewed for the audio component of the exhibit, adding a personal dimension to object interpretation. Interviewees were Dr. Fosetina Baker; Karen Bertha; Dr. Francoise B. Bonnell, Director, U.S. Army Women’s Museum; Lt. Gen. Earl Brown (USAF Ret.); Gloria Brown; Dr. Rhea Combs, Curator of Photography and Film, Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture; Carl J. Cruz; Linda Edquist, Conservator, Smithsonian National Postal Museum; Lynn Heidelbaugh, Curator, Smithsonian National Postal Museum; Tina Jones; Col. James McQuillan (USAF Ret.); Michael Newton; and Scott R. Trepel.

Others who contributed to the exhibit’s success were Christine Lefebvre, Freedom’s designer; Smithsonian Institution Office of Exhibits Central, graphics printing; and Jayne Girod Holt and Catherine Valentour, contract conservators. Minuteman Press of Toledo, Ohio printed the exhibition catalogue.

Images, audio, and video came from many sources, including Carl J. Cruz; Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division; Library of Congress Recorded Sound Reference Center; National Archives and Records Administration; NBCUniversal; and Smithsonian Institution Libraries, National Postal Museum Library.
We must strive for the rights which the world accords to men.

W.E.B. DU BOIS