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
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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.
“Sent girl Susan” stampless folded letter  APRIL 16, 1850

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.
“Servant girl Lucile” stamped envelope  c. 1853–1860
LOAN FROM SCOTT R. TREPEL

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.”
The Business of Slavery

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.
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.
Our market is fair at this time several here who wish to buy some good negroes...
This indenture made this 3 day of March 1863 between Margaret Jones of the first part and David Clark of the second part, both of the County of Nelson and State of Kentucky, witnesseth that the said Clark has loaned to L. D. Jones the sum of six hundred dollars as evidence of a promissory note of the date payable with interest at six months from date signed by the said L. D. Jones and Margaret Jones of the first part, the said sum of money to be paid to said Jones on the delivery of this deed and beneath the part of the first part in consideration of said loan and as an inducement therefor has agreed to give the negro named Zeke, which negro being the part of the first part has sold and hereby conveys in mortgage to the part of the second part, her nego man named Zeke, of copper color and aged about forty five year. The condition of the mortgage is that if the said L. D. Jones and Margaret Jones shall soon and truthfully pay off and discharge said debt, it shall be void and cease to remain in full force and effect.

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

[Signature]

[Stamp]
First Federal Issue revenue stamps on slave sale document  
OCTOBER 1, 1863  
LOAN FROM MICHAEL MAHLER

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.

First Federal Issue revenue stamps on slave mortgage document  
MARCH 3, 1863  
LOAN FROM HERMANN IVESTER

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.
The New Method of Sorting the Mail, As Practiced by Southern Slave-Holders 1835

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.
Abolition and the Mail

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. 23, 1832, favorable to the immediate abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia. The Meeting was called to order by FRANCIS JACOBUS, and, on motion of Edward Quincy, WILLIAM LARDEN HARRISON was unanimously called to the Chair.

On motion, Filed, That there be chosen six Vice Presidents, to be nominated by the Chair. The following persons were thus chosen, viz.: FRANCIS JACOBUS, Joseph Otis, of Massachusetts, George Brinton, Esq., Col. J. P. Miller, of Vermont, Nathan P. Roche, of New Hampshire, James C. Smith, of New York.

The following persons were then appointed Secretaries, viz.: William Barrett, of Lynn, Charles Erskine, of Boston, Henry W. Walling, of Boston.

The Chairman said it would be necessary to press on the Meeting in the interest of our cause, in the following resolutions, which expressed the feelings of his own heart, and the spirit of which he hoped should animate the bosoms of every friend of Liberty:

1. Resolved, That this meeting in the District of Columbia is neither a part nor a constituent of any State, but belongs to the people of the United States, and to the great legislative function of Congress it is of vital importance. On whatever ground it is founded, be it a nation or a State, that district contains the inhabitants of all the States, and at any moment they can constitutionally assert it.

2. Resolved, That in the midst of war, may the God of nations; and by the exaltation of justice, humanity, and religion, we and these Congresses perpetually guard the Nation and make the heavy burdens, which God hath made, and let that oppressed go free, in the advanced District; and to give our attention to the protection of slavery in any part of the republic.

3. Resolved, That the safety of Congress to receive the petitions of the people, in relation to this great national and civic issue, is an act of high-handedness, flagrantly unconstitutional, and let it be understood by a few people, and if prevented in such manner, must necessarily lead to the most despicable consequences.

4. Resolved, That the indirect rejection, by Congress, of the petitions of the Legislature of Vermont and Massachusetts, in relation to slavery in the District of Columbia, is a bold denial of the sovereignty of these States, a most usurping procedure in the legislature of the country, and a plain demonstration of the fact, that northern liberty is but the foothold of the shrinking power.

5. Resolved, That the Legislature of Vermont and Massachusetts cannot lawfully assert to such indignities without great vexatious, and the exhibition of a cowardly and touching spirit; and that, by their allegiance to the principles of the Constitution, by a due regard to their own character, and by the respect which they entertain for their own constituents, they are bound to modify this measure, and by law, Congress to pass, before again perpetrating the crime so infernal.

6. Resolved, That the thanks of the friends of Liberty, sincerely and especially in Massachusetts, are due to John Quincy Adams, for his firm, faithful, and indestructible advocacy of the right of petition, under circumstances of great difficulty and peril, and that the Senators of the State of Massachusetts, and the Representatives of Congress at large, are not only to be commended, but to be congratulated, in such measures, and in the determination to maintain law in every constitutional right that he may make in defense of the rights of men, irrespective of constitutional differences.

7. Resolved, That when the Senators and Representatives of this Commonwealth, in Congress, find themselves deprived of the liberty of speech, or the time, and prohibited from defending the right of their constituents to petition, that body in a constitutional manner, they are entitled to silence, and return to their particular homes, leaving the people of Massachusetts to devise such ways and means for a redress of their grievances as they shall think advisable.

8. Resolved, That the union of Liberty and Slavery is not just and equal compact, is that which it is not in the power of God to bring about, because it is a moral impossibility, as much as the personal annihilation of fire and gasolder; and, therefore, the American Union is such only in form, but not in substance, a hollow mockery instead of a glorious reality.

9. Resolved, That if the South be really bent upon perpetuating her starvation slave system, and thereby
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, February 15, 1849.

6 Massachusetts Block, Court Square.

Dear Sir,

We are so much the more the more we believe the soundness of your policy in the cause of Free Soil as to add our names to the list of those who will exert every influence in the cause of Black America from Civil War to Civil Rights. We herewith extend our support to the following names:

VAN BUREN AND ADAMS.

Never was a party framed upon a better basis than the Whig Platform. Never was a party founded with candidates more deserving of public confidence, or more keen to the platform which they represent. It remains that we are not sufficiently organized in order to carry out our will. In order to carry out our will, we must be organized. It is impossible to bring out our whole strength without systematic and organized effort, on a regular and political plan. The following plan is earnestly recommended to be adopted in every town.

The State Committee believes that the adoption of this plan, in every town, if faithfully carried out, will secure the State vote for Free soil, at the coming election. We hope this town will voluntarily assume the responsibility of extending this plan by immediate action.

PLAN OF ORGANIZATION.

1. A County Committee, consisting of a few men, centrally and compactly situated, or they that can meet and act together, and can rally such every town, by letter, or personal visits.

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

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

4. The County Committee will furnish to the State Committee the names of the Chairmen of Town Committees, and also the names of every town, residing in the neighborhood of the Post Office, of whose circumstances, etc., they may be aware, when necessary.

5. That every correspondent should either be a person who is in the constant practice of getting promptly to every town, or he should make it a point to do so at any time, during the campaign, so that information may not be lost in the Post Office.

6. The County Committee should see the proper call of every town, and also take measures, when possible, for more meetings in the county. They should encourage the county post, and, as to the formation of publications, generally, as also the meetings and all others as far as possible.

7. The Town Committee will take the lead in the political action of the town, such as the choice of Delegates to State, County, and National Conventions, and the nomination of candidates. They will also, if necessary, get up lectures, neighborhood meetings, literary discussions, circulars, papers, and books, etc.
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

"Freedom Just Around the Corner"
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
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.
3¢ Landing of the First Colonists, Liberia  1949

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.
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.
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.

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 MANUMISSION AND RELEASE OF SERVICE.

Whereas my slave Mrs. Th Jones has enlisted in the service of the United States: now, in consideration thereof, I, Mrs. Hughes, of Howard County, State of Maryland, do hereby, in consideration of said enlistment, manumit, set free, and release the above-named Mrs. Th Jones from all service due me, his freedom to commence from the Thirty-first of December, 1863, the date of his enlistment as aforesaid in the 5th United Regiment of Colored Troops, in the service of the United States.

Witness my hand and seal, this ninth day of May, 1864.

[Signature]

William Hughes

Howard County,
State of Maryland, 1864.

Before me appeared this day William Hughes 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.
Capt. T. C. Carter, 1st U. St. H. M. Navy, Jan. 28th, 1864

Dear Captain,

I am glad to hear from you and that you are in good health and that your family are all well. I have been trying to get my affairs in order and am looking forward to returning to my home. I am very grateful for your letter and appreciate your kindness.

I have been working hard to earn money and save for my family. It has been a long and difficult time, but I am hopeful that things will improve soon.

I am doing well in my work and am looking forward to the coming of spring. The weather has been cold and cloudy, but I am hopeful that warmer weather will come soon.

Thank you again for your letter. I look forward to hearing from you again soon.

Yours truly,

[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.
**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.

**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.
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

Between

James H. Davis, and the undersigned colored laborers, Witness,

James N. Turner, obligate myself to give to the undersigned
cooled laborers,

of the cotton, ($2) of the corn; ($1) of the fodder; and
of all other produce raised on this plantation; and to furnish the said laborers with 

1000 pounds of good pick or bacon; and 

1000 lbs. of corn meal, each, per

week, until the first day of January, 1869.

For and in consideration of the above, We, the undersigned colored laborers, obligate ourselves to labor
faithfully, each day, from sunrise until sunset, Sunday excepted, until the first day of January, 1869, working according to, and obeying all reasonable orders
given by the employer or his agent. We also obligate ourselves to pay.

Signed at Montgomery, the 1st day of March, 1869.

Jabez Ayers

Witnesses:

Sarah Ayers

Benjamin Waller

Emily Davis

David Williams

Hannah Rogers

Walter Davis

John Davis

Sarah Billingsley

Witness:

P.T. Ayers

Sarah Ayers

James N. Turner

Henry W. Turner

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.

A number of African American veterans chose to remain in the army after the Civil War. They were organized into four segregated regiments known collectively as the “Buffalo Soldiers.” Colonel Benjamin Grierson, the white commander of the 10th U.S. Cavalry Regiment, sent this letter to his wife from the regiment’s headquarters at Fort Davis, Texas.
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.

“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  
c. 1870
COURTESY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION
“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.
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  
April 14, 1942

Noel F. Parrish “somewhere in Alabama”  
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.
Captain Dovey Johnson Roundtree jacket and insignia  c. OCTOBER 1942–JUNE 1943

LOAN FROM NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, MARY MCLEOD BETHUNE COUNCIL HOUSE NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE

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
Civil Rights Movement

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

Paul Laurence Dunbar cover June 11, 1895

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.
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.
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.
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
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.

**10¢ Salem Poor concept stamp art by Neil Boyle**
c. 1975

**Spirit of ’76 Political Pin**
c. 1974

 Loan from Tuskegee University Archives
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 Malcom 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.

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.
Literary Arts Series

37¢ Zora Neale Hurston approved stamp art by Drew Struzan c. 2003

A noted folklorist, novelist and anthropologist, Hurston is best known for her 1937 novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*

Distinguished Americans Series

23¢ Wilma Rudolph approved stamp art by Mark Summers c. 2004

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

*Freedom Just Around the Corner* was staged through the combined efforts of a very talented exhibit team that included Eric Chapman, Exhibits; Marshall Emery, Public Relations; Motoko Hioki, Education; Manda Kowalczyk, Conservation; Patricia Raynor, Collections; Elizabeth Schorr, Collections; Roxanne Symko Smith, Project Manager; and Allie Swislocki, Advancement. Many NPM staff worked on various aspects of the project, including Polone Bazile, Finance; Amy Borntrager, Advancement; Linda Edquist, Conservation; Lynn Heidelbaugh, Curatorial; Rebecca Kennedy, Conservation; Sharon Klotz, Exhibits; Bill Lommel, Web Design; Hannah Molofsky, Special Events; James O’Donnell, Collections; Kim Skerritt, Education; and Kim Wayman, Contracting.

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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
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