

Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois

Scavenger Hunt

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Skills Addressed

The following lesson draws from multiple skills identified in the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) C3 Framework. The table below represents some of the skills highlighted in this lesson. The full framework of NCSS skills can be viewed [here](#).

D2.His.3.9-12.	Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.
D2.His.8.9-12.	Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.
D2.His.14.9-12.	Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.
D2.His.16.9-12.	Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past.
D4.1.9-12.	Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

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Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois: Scavenger Hunt

Activator: Students should take a few minutes to journal a response to the prompt “describe a time in your life when you stood up for something you believed in.” What were some obstacles you faced? How did you overcome those obstacles? Since students may struggle with the prompt, consider modeling by sharing a story of your own. Feel free to provide scaffolding by suggesting students consider the many ways in which we oppose authority or perceived wrongs (standing up for a friend or classmate, pushing back against a punishment, speaking up in class, supporting a sibling or family member, partaking in a march or protests, etc.).

Materials

- Warm up slide
- Delegate cards cut and scored
- Scavenger Hunt Handout
- Access to CCP website
- Closing Activity

Procedure

This lesson will introduce students to some Black activists from early Illinois, both men and women.

Here is the recommended procedure.

1. Open with the activator described above (optional)
2. [Warm up slide/image](#) with photograph of John and Mary Jones
 - a. Describe what you see in the image
 - b. What do you notice about the content/what can you infer about the time?
 - c. What questions do you have about the photograph?
3. Inform students that they will participate in a scavenger hunt where their goal will be to meet Black activists from early Illinois. If students aren't familiar with the *Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois* website, you may want to preview the [Introduction to Profiles page](#) for the delegates and their families.



John and Mary Jones, 1840s. (Source: Courtesy of Wikimedia commons and Bruce Purnell.)

4. You may want to preview the following terms that come up frequently in the delegate cards.
 - a. **Illinois Colored Convention of 1853.** This conference met in Chicago on Oct. 6-8, 1853. Black leaders in Illinois [were outraged](#) when the state legislature, in Feb. 1853, passed a law banning Black migration into Illinois. They responded by calling for African Americans from every part of the state to gather, discuss their situation, and decide how to protest the law and address the many other challenges they faced in Illinois. You can read more about the convention [here](#).

The Chicago convention was one of many conventions organized by Black activists in the free states during the antebellum period. The [Colored Conventions Project](#) at Penn State University provides a [good introduction](#) to the larger nineteenth-century Black convention movement.

You may want to talk with students about the project's use of the term "colored." Today the preferred terms for people of African descent in the United States are "Black" or "African American." By contrast, the Colored Conventions Project website uses the term "colored" because that is how Black American activists in the 19th century typically referred to themselves.
 - b. **A.M.E. Church.** The African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church was the first Protestant denomination founded by Black Americans. The church had many congregations and served as a source of faith, nourishment, community, and education for many Black people.
 - c. **Keeping House.** Census takers regularly used this term to refer to women who held no formal occupation but took care of the home. Duties could include caring for children and the elderly; cooking, cleaning, and laundry; and tending a garden.
5. Pass out the delegate cards. Ensure each student has a different card.
6. Have students read and annotate their cards. Circulate around the room to check for understanding.
7. Students should aim to memorize the main ideas of the individual they received, but may refer back to their card as needed.
8. Next, pass out the Scavenger Hunt Social handout to each student.
9. Inform students that they will circulate around the room to connect with one another about their assigned individual. Students should complete the scavenger hunt handout as

they meet a delegate who matches each description. (Note: for many scavenger hunt items there are multiple individuals who fit the description. Students may use each person only ONCE. Example: if an individual is used for helping with the Underground Railroad, that same person cannot be used for a different scavenger hunt item).

10. Students should circulate and exchange delegate information with one another until they have completed their Scavenger Hunt Social handouts (allow 15-20 minutes)
11. Next, lead a class discussion about their answers on the handout. Along the way, consider probing with open-ended questions like: Were students surprised by anything they learned? Was there a fact or piece of information they found especially interesting? Were there certain themes that came up frequently (such as faith, race, economics, etc.)? Were there things they learned that troubled them? What questions do students have?
12. Conclude the lesson with the Closing Activity. Have students write a paragraph or an essay in which they use the knowledge they gained about the Illinois delegates and their families to answer the question: **In what ways did Black Illinois delegates and their families protest or rebel against their conditions?** This prompt can be modified to suit the needs of learners in your classroom.

Scavenger Hunt Social/Find Somebody Who...

You're going to participate in a social in which you learn about Black activists who lived in Illinois in the 1840s and 1850s. Each student is assigned a card to learn from. Spend a few minutes studying your card, and try to remember as much about your assigned individual as possible. Then, circulate around the room to talk with classmates and get to know the people they have been assigned. When you meet someone who helps complete the scavenger hunt, **be sure to list their name and complete the prompt below.**

1. Purchased their own freedom from slavery. Provide one additional detail about this person that you found interesting.

2. Founded or supported a Black church. In what ways would this individual's faith-based work support enslaved people's liberation or help protest racist policies?

3. Helped Black people escape through the Underground Railroad. List one other detail about their life.

4. Served in the Civil War. Describe their experience getting involved in the war.

5. Went to college. What school did they attend? Provide one additional detail about this person that you found interesting.

6. Had a job or career outside of activism or ministry. What was it and how might it have made a difference in the community?

7. Befriended Frederick Douglass. Provide one additional detail about this person that you found interesting.
8. Advocated for suffrage (the right to vote). Provide one additional detail about this person that you found interesting.
9. Became wealthy before the Civil War. How did they acquire their wealth?
10. Voted in a presidential election in a southern state before the Civil War? Who did they vote for?
11. Was a mother. Provide one interesting detail about this person's life.
12. Moved to a new state or town. Where did they move to and from? Provide one additional detail about this person.
13. Attended a Colored Convention. Describe their role at the convention or one other detail from their life.

PRISCILLA BALTIMORE

Born enslaved in Bourbon, KY, Priscilla Baltimore eventually purchased her freedom and dedicated her life to helping her community and fighting slavery.

While enslaved, Priscilla was sold multiple times, separating her from family and community. While living in St. Louis, MO, Priscilla was able to save money to buy her freedom. She became a Methodist preacher who spoke out against slavery.

Priscilla married John Baltimore and together they founded the town of Brooklyn, IL, just across the Mississippi River from St. Louis. John was enslaved when they met, but Priscilla bought his freedom as well.

Priscilla and John's Illinois home was open to Black migrants and travelers. They donated land on which Brooklyn's A.M.E. Church was built.

JOSEPH H. BARQUET

Joseph Barquet was born free in Charleston, SC to a father from Saint Domingue (now Haiti) and a mother descended from a wealthy Scottish family. His family owned their own home and ran an umbrella-making business.

Joseph served in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848) and participated in the capture of Mexico City. After the war he moved to New York City and from there to the Midwest. In Wisconsin he found his voice as an activist, speaking out against the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

He attended the Illinois Colored Convention that met in Chicago in 1853. He later served as a soldier in the Civil War. In the early 1870s, Barquet lived in Galesburg, IL, where he helped lead a fight against racial segregation in the public schools.

JAMES D. BONNER

James and his wife Mary Louisa Bonner moved to Chicago in the early 1850s. Mary's father was a chef who has been credited with inventing modern catering.

Like many of his peers, James advocated for "industrial" education for young Black men and women – schools that would teach practical skills like building construction, typesetting, modern farming, and tailoring.

James was a leader in the Black freedom movement in Chicago. He advertised that he would help Black newcomers get jobs, including as seamstresses, clerks, and chambermaids. And he was among the Black Chicagoans who first called for a statewide convention that he said would "take action" in "awakening our dormant powers . . . and bringing about a more general activity in the work of our own redemption."

HENRY BROWN

Henry Brown was a minister in the A.M.E. Church in Springfield, IL, and a well known political activist who attended the 1853 convention in Chicago. Brown also served as a "conductor" for the Underground Railroad in central Illinois.

In addition, Brown worked for Abraham Lincoln in Springfield. After Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, Brown was asked to lead one of Lincoln's horses at his funeral procession.

After the Civil War, Black men gained the right to vote in Illinois. Brown celebrated that fact but worried that African Americans' rights were not secure. As the keynote speaker at an 1873 celebration in Springfield, he acknowledged that much had changed since the days of slavery but said he feared "that we may not obtain our rights under law."

MARY ANN KING BROWN

Born in Tennessee in 1830, Mary's family moved to Paris, Illinois, when she was young. Her father became a well known and wealthy farmer.

Widowed by the time she was 18 years old, she married A.M.E. minister and activist Henry Brown. A source from 1881 said that "a mutual admiration and a matrimonial engagement was the result of the first meeting," That is, they fell in love at first sight.

The couple settled in Springfield and had many children. The US Census listed her as "keeping house," meaning she performed labor-intensive domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. Mary probably also assisted her husband in his work with the church and with sheltering people who were escaping slavery on the Underground Railroad.

RICHARD H. CAIN

Richard H. Cain was born in Virginia to a Black father and Cherokee mother. He moved to Missouri at 19 and became a Methodist preacher. Richard frequently disagreed with leaders of the white-led Methodist church and eventually joined the A.M.E. church, a Black-led denomination.

By the late 1840s Richard had moved to Galena, IL, where he worked as a barber and A.M.E. minister. He was selected as a delegate to attend the statewide Black convention that met in Chicago in 1853. While there he served on the education committee.

Richard became a nationally prominent minister and politician. After the Civil War, the A.M.E. Church sent him to work as a pastor in Charleston, South Carolina, where he also became a newspaper editor and was twice elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

ELIZABETH GUY DONEGAN

Elizabeth Donegan moved with her husband, Spencer Donegan, from Kentucky to central Illinois in the early 1840s. The Donegans first settled in Springfield and then moved to Lincoln, IL, where they founded an A.M.E. church called Allen Chapel.

Elizabeth's profession was listed in the 1870 US Census as "keeping house." By that time, she and her husband controlled considerable assets, including \$1,000 in real estate (the equivalent of about \$36,000 today). They employed a white servant who helped around the house. Presumably much of Elizabeth's time was spent raising the eight children she shared with Spencer and managing their large household.

SPENCER DONEGAN

Spencer Donegan moved with his wife, Elizabeth Donegan, from Kentucky to Springfield, Illinois, in the early 1840s. He made a living as a barber and was the founding minister at Springfield's A.M.E. church. Spencer advertised himself in one local newspaper as "one of the best barbers now in the West." As a prominent and influential business owner, Spencer was nominated to serve as a delegate at the 1853 Black Convention in Chicago.

In the 1860s Spencer, Elizabeth, and their children moved to the town of Lincoln, IL. There the Donegans helped found Allen Chapel, the first A.M.E. church in Lincoln. The church played a particularly important social and spiritual role in for Black residents, as Lincoln was a deeply segregated town.

H. FORD DOUGLAS

H. Ford Douglas was an activist, orator, Civil War veteran and restaurateur who led an extraordinary life in his short 34 years.

Ford was born enslaved in Virginia but escaped to Ohio when he was 15. As an adult, he became a regular speaker at Midwestern Black conventions. He moved to Chicago in the mid-1850s and then to Canada, where he became part owner of an abolitionist newspaper. He met and married his wife, Sattira Steele, in 1857 as he continued his work in the movement for abolition and freedom.

At times, Ford was so pessimistic about African Americans' future in the United States that he advocated emigration to places like Canada. When the Civil War began, however, he enlisted in the U.S. army with a white Illinois regiment. Later, with the creation of Black regiments, he rose to the rank of captain.

SATTIRA STEELE DOUGLAS

Born in North Carolina in 1840, Sattira (Sattie) Douglas moved to Racine, WI, when she was 10. In her late teens she attended Oberlin College, one of the few places where Black women could attend school beyond the elementary grades.

She became involved in the Black freedom movement in Chicago in the 1850s, and she married Ford Douglas in 1857.

During the Civil War, Sattie helped lead the Colored Ladies' Freedman's Aid Society of Chicago, an organization that supported Black soldiers and their families with food and clothing. She also wrote regularly for Black newspapers.

In 1864, Sattie moved to Leavenworth, KS, where she worked as a teacher of Black children who had recently escaped slavery. While there, she got to know Susan B. Anthony, who was advocating voting rights for all men and women.

HEZEKIAH ELLSWORTH

Hezekiah Ellsworth was an A.M.E. minister and delegate to the 1853 Colored Convention in Chicago.

Hezekiah was born in 1833 to devout Christian parents. The area of southwestern Illinois where they lived, known as Rocky Fork, was home to many Black landowners who participated in the Underground Railroad, helping people escape slavery.

At the 1853 Convention, Hezekiah served on the Agriculture Committee, likely representing the interests of Black farmers.

Hezekiah became an A.M.E. minister in the 1870s, and the church eventually sent him to New Mexico. When he died there in 1905, a local newspaper noted, "This community has lost a great counselor and the race[,] a herculean leader."

ANNA ELIZABETH HUDLIN

Anna Hudlin was a community activist and prominent member of Chicago's early Black community. Born free in Pennsylvania in 1840, she moved to Chicago with her mother and, at age 16, married Joseph Hudlin. The couple commissioned a large home in the city and made it a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Anna became a mother to 9 children and an active member of A.M.E. church. In the mid-1860s, she joined with other Black residents to defeat Chicago officials' effort to segregate the public schools. In 1871 she opened her home to families displaced by the Great Chicago Fire.

Anna continued her work in her senior years, often collaborating with her daughter, Joanna. The pair helped run a home for elderly African Americans. Anna also became a leader in preserving the early history of Black Chicago.

LEWIS ISBELL

Lewis Isbell was a prominent barber and activist in Chicago. Born into slavery, he moved with his enslaver from Kentucky to Illinois. He arrived in Chicago in 1838 and later started his own barbershop, where he gave shaves and haircuts to prominent white men including Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, and Ulysses S. Grant.

When he wasn't tending to his shop, in the 1840s Lewis made headlines as a track athlete. In the 1850s he was known as a leader of Chicago's Underground Railroad network—a position that nearly got him killed when a pro-slavery man shot at him in 1857. He attended the 1853 Colored Convention in Chicago and a second statewide Black convention that met in Alton three years later.

During the Civil War, Lewis worked to recruit Black soldiers for the U.S. Army.

ELEANOR MADDEN JOHNSON

Eleanor Madden Johnson was born enslaved in Missouri in 1813. By 1836, she and her mother gained their freedom. Eleanor married James Henry Johnson and the family moved to southern Illinois.

Over time the family managed to buy 200 acres of land near Alton, IL, and establish a prosperous family farm. Eleanor and Henry had 11 children, and the farm provided a way to make a living and pass down wealth within the family.

Eleanor was active in Alton's Salem Baptist Church, a Black church where several of her children attended school. That private school was important because most Illinois public schools served white children only.

Eleanor passed away at the age of 95. The family farm remained a source of pride in the family for many generations.

JAMES HENRY JOHNSON

James Henry Johnson was husband to Eleanor Madden, and a minister, organizer, and landowner in Alton, IL. James was born into slavery and purchased his freedom along with his mother's while in Missouri in 1836. Shortly afterwards James and Eleanor moved to southern Illinois.

While in Illinois James helped form several Baptist churches where he also ministered. He also purchased land for a farm and eventually owned 200 acres.

James became a well known organizer who helped rally Black families against Illinois' anti-Black laws. He advocated Black rural land ownership and family farming. He helped establish a school for Black children in Alton while he also protested the state's policy of funding education for white children only.

JOHN JONES

John Jones was a prominent activist and businessman. He was born free to a free Black mother and a German immigrant father. After serving as a tailor's apprentice in Memphis, John moved to Alton, IL, to join his future wife and family. He and Mary Richardson married in 1841 and moved to Chicago in 1845.

In Chicago, John became wealthy as a tailor and real estate investor. He was a leading activist for repealing the state's oppressive anti-Black laws, one of which banned Black migration into Illinois. He vocally supported the Underground Railroad and other efforts to help people escape slavery.

A friend of Frederick Douglass, John attended and helped lead both local and national conventions for Black rights. After Black men gained the right to vote, he was elected Cook County Commissioner.

MARY RICHARDSON JONES

During the Civil War, Mary Jones served as president of the Colored Ladies' Freedman's Aid Society of Chicago, an organization that collected donations to support the families of Black soldiers serving in the war and provided aid to people who were becoming free.

Before the war, Mary, along with her husband John, had opened their doors to travelers along the Underground Railroad. At one point they received a visit from the famed white abolitionist John Brown, who was planning to provoke an uprising among enslaved people. Mary thought Brown was "a little off on the slavery question." In 1865, Mary welcomed the white activist Susan B. Anthony to Quinn Chapel, where Anthony lectured on the importance of voting rights for all men and women.

After the war, Mary was one of the wealthiest and most respected Black women in Chicago, and she remained active in a variety of causes.

MARY E. MANN

Mary E. Mann was the first Black woman to graduate from a Chicago public high school. She attended Dearborn Elementary School in what is now part of downtown Chicago. It was a neighborhood school that served Black and white students.

In 1861 she applied for entry to Chicago's only public high school. Admission required passing an entrance exam on four subjects. Mary qualified for admission, but the school board tried to keep her out. After a fight, Mary was admitted and studied to become a teacher. Upon graduating, she became principal of a new school for Black children. This made her the first Black principal in the Chicago public schools. Many Black Chicagoans, however, didn't approve of segregated schools, and the Black-only school was closed to make way for an integrated high school. Mary returned to working as a teacher. This incident was part of the long battle over segregation and inequality in education.

BYRD PARKER

Byrd Parker was a pastor, activist, and educator who was a key organizer of the 1853 Colored Convention in Chicago.

Byrd spent the early portion of adulthood serving the A.M.E. Church across the Midwest. By 1852 he settled in Chicago where he helped establish a school for Black children. A year later he helped organize the first statewide Black Convention and also served as a delegate to a national Black convention held in Rochester, New York.

In 1855 Byrd moved to Wisconsin with his wife. There he became a fierce advocate for voting rights for Black men, giving speeches all over southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. While lecturing in 1860, he suddenly collapsed and died of a lung condition. One of his children, Lillian Thomas Fox, became a prominent journalist in Indianapolis.

ALFRED H. RICHARDSON

Alfred Richardson was born free in Tennessee in 1808. Tennessee was a slave state, but free Black men were permitted to vote there until 1835. Alfred later expressed his feelings about having voted for Andrew Jackson for president in 1832: "I have asked God to forgive me, for I did not know any better then, and I promised that I would never vote a Democratic ticket again."

In 1835 Alfred moved to Alton, IL, where he helped establish a Black Baptist church after experiencing a racist incident at a white church. He went on to help organize a network of Black Baptist churches that partnered with white abolitionist centers of faith.

In the 1850s Alfred moved to Galena, where his blacksmith business blossomed. He helped establish a school for Black children in the town and served as a delegate to the 1853 Chicago Colored Convention.

ROBERT JONATHAN (R.J.) ROBINSON

R.J. Robinson was a minister, activist, and businessman. Born free in Virginia, he received some formal education there before he and his mother and siblings moved to Illinois in 1836.

R.J. worked as a barber and then became a prosperous grocer in Alton. A minister, he was active in Black Baptist organizations in southern Illinois and a leader in the movement for racial justice. In 1853 he chaired the education committee of the Colored Convention. He wanted Black Illinoisans to finance their own schools while also insisting that the state stop excluding Black children from public education.

R.J. and his family moved to Ohio in 1860. In the 1890s, however, he returned to Illinois. He gave lectures on "The Race Problem" and raised money for a monument to emancipation in Springfield and a memorial for the abolitionist Elijah Loejoy in Alton. The emancipation monument was never built.

SARAH ANN WIGGINS ROBINSON

Sarah Ann Wiggins Robinson was born into slavery near Washington, DC, and became free when she was 17 years old. As a young woman she moved to Illinois where she met and married R.J. Robinson, who at the time was a barber in Springfield.

The family lived in Alton for a while and then, in 1860, moved to Wellington, Ohio. Little is known of Sarah's own life, but we know that many of her 8 children and continued their parents' spirit of activism and education.

Three of Mary's sons served in the U.S. Army during the Civil War. One daughter, Mary Louise, graduated from Oberlin College in 1870. Other children, and well as grandchildren, went on to become teachers, librarians, activists for temperance (that is, encouraging people to drink less alcohol), and fighters for racial justice.

JOB VINCENT

Job Vincent was a delegate to the Colored Convention in Chicago in 1853. We know little about Job's life, but we did learn that he was born enslaved in Kentucky and freed in 1842 via his enslaver's will. He soon moved to Alton, IL, where he married Mary Ann McKee. They went on to have 5 daughters.

Job owned his own home and other real estate in the Alton area. Records show that he worked for a while as a barber, a trade that allowed Black men to make a decent living. He also worked as a "drayman" – that is, the driver of a horse-drawn cart that moved goods from place to place, often from riverboats to warehouses.

At the 1853 convention Job served on the agriculture and nominating committees.

HENRY O. WAGONER

Henry Wagoner was a prominent businessman, abolitionist, and leader in the Black freedom movement. Taught to read and write by his white grandmother, Henry helped with Underground Railroad activities in Baltimore for a while before moving to Galena, IL, in 1839.

He worked as a typesetter in Galena, moved to Canada for a while (where he married Susan), and arrived in Chicago with his family in 1846. He first worked as typesetter for an abolitionist newspaper and then opened a produce business and grist mill that made him quite prosperous.

Henry became lifelong friends with Frederick Douglass. The Wagoners opened their home for escapees on the Underground Railroad, and Henry fiercely opposed the Illinois law that prohibited Black migration to the state.

SUSAN M. LYONS WAGONER

Susan Wagoner was an activist, homemaker, and co-operator of a family-owned mill in Chicago.

Born in Indiana, Susan moved with her parents to Canada, where she met and married Henry Wagoner. The couple moved to Chicago, where they began raising their family and opened their home to travelers along the Underground Railroad. In 1859 her family helped hide a group of 12 people who escaped slavery in Missouri with the aid of John Brown.

During the Civil War, Susan worked with other Black women in Chicago to organize care packages and financial support for newly freed people in the South. Susan's oldest daughter, Marcellena, also helped support the Union war effort by working as a secretary to Martin Delany, a Black physician and activist who worked as a recruiter of Black soldiers for the U.S. Army.

Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois Scavenger Hunt Closing Lesson

Using the [Black Organizing in Pre-Civil War Illinois](#) website with the list of [delegates and their families](#) and your notes from the Scavenger Hunt Social, answer the following question in 1-2 paragraphs: **In what ways did Black Illinois delegates and their families protest or rebel against their conditions?**

Your response should include:

- ☐ A well-defined claim that answers the question
- ☐ 3 pieces of evidence you gathered from the scavenger hunt
- ☐ Analysis of how your evidence supports your claim

Type or write your response below: