

Activity: Mapping Mobilities

This activity invites students to conceptualize the connections between local conventions and broader developments in abolitionist and civil rights organizing across the country. Local newspapers offer a means for tracing these connections. Students will read convention proceedings as they were printed in a newspaper and then contextualize these proceedings in the broader reporting and readership of the newspaper. Use the document pairings on the second page to complete the steps listed below.

1. After reading the convention proceedings, review the remainder of the newspaper issue. Make note of at least five of the cities or towns, states or territories, and countries named in the paper's coverage.
2. Review [Chronicling America's](#) "About" section for the newspaper you reviewed. Make note of the place of publication, the geographic coverage, and any other details about the places where the newspaper was circulated and read. Using this background information and your list of places, consider:
 - a. Who was this paper's primary readership?
 - b. What could readers expect to find in each edition of the paper?
 - c. Who did the newspaper's writers and editors aim to reach? What might they have wanted subscribers to take away from reading the paper?
3. Draw a picture of the newspaper in the center of a piece of paper. Then, drawing upon the list of towns and cities, states, regions, and countries you compiled, map out the connections that might have been produced by the newspaper.
 - a. Consider two kinds of connections:
 - i. Content: The connections produced by newspaper editors' decisions about what to cover in the paper
 - ii. Circulation: Connections produced by the paper's distribution around a certain community or geographic region
4. Having mapped out the newspaper's larger community, consider:
 - a. What might delegates have wanted to achieve by having the proceedings printed in the newspaper? Who did they want to reach?
 - b. How might readers have reacted to the proceedings?
 - c. Did having the knowledge that their deliberations would be circulated via newspaper shape how delegates proceeded in any way?

Resource: Document Pairings

The following document sets support students in studying Black political conventions alongside the Black newspapers that printed convention addresses, proceedings, and other reporting. Each set can be used to explore the above objectives and guiding questions or to conduct the activities.

Set #1: August 1865 convention in Nashville, Tennessee

[Convention proceedings](#)

[Colored Tennessean](#) (report on page 1 of the August 12, 1865, issue)

Gathering at St. John's Chapel, A.M.E. Church in Tennessee in August 1865, delegates called for "the ballot box and the jury box." Over the course of four days, delegates additionally called for quality teachers and education opportunities for Black children, declared their support and called for the expansion of the Freedmen's Bureau, and demanded stronger wage protections for Black laborers. Delegates cited Black men's military service in the Civil War as they petitioned the state legislature and white male voters for the vote.

Set #2: November 1865 convention in Charleston, South Carolina

[Convention proceedings](#)

[South Carolina Leader](#) (report on page 2 of the November 25, 1865, issue)

The November 1865 convention took place at Zion Church in Charleston, South Carolina. Gathering over the course of five consecutive days, delegates passed resolutions that declared their support for taxation only with representation, rebuked racially discriminative state laws, and petitioned the state legislature for the rights of suffrage and testifying in courts of law. Delegates rooted their calls for equality before the law in the Declaration of Independence and the constitutions of South Carolina and the United States.

Set #3: December 1873 convention in Washington, D.C. ("Equal Rights National Convention")

[Convention address by delegate D. Augustus Straker and reporting in the *New National Era*](#) (address on page 1-2 of the December 18, 1873, issue)

Delegates assembled at the December 1873 national convention called for suffrage and full citizenship. Lawyer and teacher D. Augustus Straker's address was printed in the *New National Era*, a Black newspaper printed in Washington, D.C. Straker drew upon the Constitution and other legal precedents to outline Black men's rights as voters and citizens.

Set #4: February 1888 convention in Macon, Georgia

[Convention proceedings](#)

[Savannah Tribune](#) (proceedings on page 3 of the February 11, 1888, issue)

300 Black men acted as delegates to the February 1888 state convention held at Cotton Avenue Baptist Church in Macon, Georgia. Conventioneers called for racial uplift, petitioning Congress to appropriate

money for Black education and denouncing the state penitentiary system. Delegates additionally demanded that the state government condemn lynching and protect Black communities from racial violence.

Set #5: October 1889 convention in Springfield, Illinois

[*The Appeal*](#) (proceedings on page 1 of the October 12, 1889, issue)

The October 1889 convention took place at the Illinois State House. The convention served as a planning forum for the organization of the Colored Men's State League of Illinois. The League was organized to support Black education and entrepreneurship by abolishing segregated schools, supporting the employment of Black teachers, and advancing industrial education opportunities.