

Analyzing a Primary Source

KEY STANDARD
RH.6-8.1

Searching for Answers

During the Civil War, African-Americans began to post newspaper ads to help them find family members they had been separated from as slaves (see “*Slave Families Lost and Found*”).

They included as many identifying details as they could and then hoped for the best. Read the three ads below, adapted from the Last Seen database at informationwanted.org. Then answer the questions.

Do You Know Her?

I wish to find my daughter Patience Green. I have no trace of her since she was sold at Richmond, Virginia, in 1859. She was then 12 years old.

I also desire information regarding the whereabouts of my son, John William Harris. He went to Washington after [Confederate General Robert E.] Lee’s surrender¹ with some servants of Mr. Batts, who lived in Virginia. He was 14 years old at the time. They were both formerly the slaves of Dick Christian, by whom my daughter was sold. Any tidings of either will be thankfully received by their mother.

Mrs. Clara Baship, Richmond, Virginia
Richmond Planet, Aug. 10, 1895

Information Wanted of My People.

My mother was sold from me when I could but crawl. She belonged to Jim Finley in Missouri. I had two sisters and two brothers. Mother’s name was Sicler Finley. When sold she was taken to Arkansas. At the age of three years Jim Finley’s father gave me to Dave Long’s wife. I never saw any of my people [again]. I was about 39 years old last March and am married and living at Panama, Vernon County, Missouri.

Mary Delaney, Panama, Missouri
The Christian Recorder (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), April 17, 1902

Information Wanted of the Whereabouts of Robert Gideon.

[My father] was born in or near the town of Harrisonville, Cass County, Missouri. He was a slave and at the outbreak of the war enlisted in the First Kansas Colored² Infantry, and served until the close of the war. He may have went by the name of Rhine or McAfee, having been owned by both slave holders and therefore used both names. Any information concerning him or any expense incurred in doing so will be paid by his son.

Mr. L. E. Gideon, Brockton, Massachusetts
Topeka Plaindealer (Topeka, Kansas), July 27, 1906

¹ General Robert E. Lee was the chief commander of the Confederate (Southern) armies. He surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant, chief commander of the Union (Northern) armies on April 9, 1865.

² *Colored* was once a standard term for African-Americans but is now considered offensive.

Questions

1. What words would you use to describe the tone of these ads?
2. What do you think Mary Delaney meant when she wrote “My mother was sold from me when I could but crawl”?
3. What role did the Civil War play in separating the families of Clara Baship and L. E. Gideon?
4. What can you infer about L. E. Gideon based on his promise to repay “any expense incurred” by people who were able to provide him with information about his father?
5. Cite at least two examples from these ads that indicate how easy it was for slaves to lose track of their family members.