

Primary Source Reading 12-2 ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

## A Letter to a Former Slaveholder

### ▣ About the Selection

When the Civil War was over, many planters tried to hire their former enslaved people to work their land. Many freed African Americans did remain with their former masters and worked for wages. Some wanted no part of their former masters, however, choosing instead to start new lives far from the plantations on which they had been born and labored. In this 1865 letter, Jourdan Anderson, a formerly enslaved person, responds to an invitation from

### Reader's Dictionary



**victuals:** food  
**recompense:** pay

Colonel P. H. Anderson to return to his "Old Master's" plantation.

### GUIDED READING

As you read, try to imagine that you are Jourdan Anderson, and decide what you would do if you were him. Then answer the questions that follow.

CREATED BY THE McGRAW-HILL COMPANIES

*Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865*

To My Old Master, Colonel P. H. Anderson  
Big Spring, Tennessee

Sir: I got your letter and was glad to find you had not forgotten Jourdan and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt and am glad you are still living. . . .

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get \$25 a month, with victuals and clothing. [I] have a comfortable home for Mandy (the folks here call her Mrs. Anderson). And the children, Milly, Jane, and Grundy, go to school and are learning well. . . . They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves down in Tennessee." The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks, but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many . . . would have been proud, as I used to [be], to call you master. Now, if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

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As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free-papers in 1864 from the Provost Marshal General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you are sincerely disposed to treat us justly and kindly. And we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for 32 years and Mandy 20 years. At \$25 a month for me and \$2 a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to \$11,680. Add to this the interest for the time our wages has been kept back—and deduct what you paid for our clothing and three doctor's visits to me and pulling a tooth for Mandy—and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. . . . If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. . . .

You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education and have them form virtuous habits. . . .

From your old servant,  
Jourdan Anderson

**READER RESPONSE**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions on the lines below.

1. How did Jourdan obtain his freedom?

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2. Why does Jourdan like living in Ohio?

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3. How does Jourdan propose to test Colonel Anderson's sincerity?

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4. **Critical Thinking** How does Jourdan show he is honest?

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