

1: Villagers to Government



Arlington, Va. Jan-18th-1888

The Honorable,

Wm. C. Endicott,

Secretary of War,

Washington, D.C.

Sir: Having been chosen by the colored renters living on the Arlington reservation as their representative ... I beg leave to present... the following facts. As the army advanced, during the war, several thousand colored people, men, women, and children, of all ages, and every condition, were quartered on this place by the agents of the government. Many of this number were employed by the United States, a portion of their pay being withheld for the support of the aged and infirm. When buildings were **erected**, Gen. O. O. Howard entered into contract with each tenant, demanding payment in money for rent of land. After the **abolition** of the Freedmen's Bureau, they were required to work out rent at Fort Myer which they have continued to do until the present time.

Agents representing the government fully impressed upon the people the idea that in some way they would come to possess a valid claim to a part of Arlington...

Many began to plant trees, and make such other improvements... They paid in **ready money** for their houses, churches, and other buildings, which were all sold to them by the government through its agent. About nine years ago, Lieut. R.P. Strong, then commanding at Fort Myer, gave permission to erect a brick church on the reservation, costing nearly two thousand dollars, and here again, they were made to believe that their stay would be **indefinitely prolonged**, therefore, several houses were built, and the

erected: built
abolition: closure

ready money: cash
indefinitely prolonged: without a set end



1: Villagers to Government, cont'd



spirit of improvement again revived... Although no taxes have been paid on the Arlington land, yet the colored people have been fully taxed upon their general property, and have been no unjust burden upon the community... these people have proven...more thrifty, and less vicious than could be reasonably anticipated; and they have never failed, after the teachings, and traditions of their fathers, to implore Almighty God for help and protection.

There are about one hundred families here, who own their dwellings. Nearly all of these houses are so constructed, and in such condition of decay, as to be useless to take down and move away; besides, **contemplated** improvements... have made the price of land, in this **vicinity**, beyond the reach of the poor... I most respectfully ask that an **appropriation** be recommended of not less than three hundred and fifty dollars a-piece for each owner of a house...

Twenty-four years residence at Arlington, with all the elements involved in this case inspire the hope that full and ample justice will be done even to the weakest members of this great Republic.

As many of the farmers desire to prepare their land for spring work, and are in doubt as to another year, I will be glad, as early as possible, to receive a reply to this letter.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

John B. Syphax

contemplated: proposed
vicinity: area
appropriation: money set aside for a payment



2: Cemetery, Army, Gov't



Arlington, Va.,

National Cemetery.

November 12th, 1887.

G.B. Dandy,

Major and Qr. Mr., U.S.A.

Depot Quartermaster.

Sir:

I would respectfully report that for years past some of the colored people who live on the **reservation** have been in the habit of entering the cemetery during the late hours of the night for the purpose of getting wood for fuel.

On my arrival here, one year ago, I was informed that several hundred young forest trees, from 2 to 6 inches in diameter were cut down and carried away. The remains of these trees can yet be seen.

It has been the custom of these thieves, to use a cross cut saw to cut down trees. By so doing, very little noise is made, in order to avoid detection. It is said, that very few of these squatters buy any fuel, and depend mostly on what they can pick up within the **enclosure**. It would be necessary for a man to remain on watch all night, to arrest the guilty parties. It has been suggested, that the most effective way of preventing such thefts, is to cause the removal of these people from the reservation.

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

J.A. Commerford,

Supt. Nat'l. Cemetery.

reservation: property that the U.S. government has exclusive control over
enclosure: area inside the cemetery



2: Cemetery, Army, Gov't, cont'd



From Dandy's office, the letter was sent to the Quartermaster General's Office on Nov. 15.

War Department.
Quartermaster General's Office,
Washington, D.C., November 17th, 1887.

Respectfully forwarded to the Honorable, the Secretary of War. In Violation of paragraph #138 Army Regulations, amended by General Order #26, Adjutant General's Office, 1883, civilians are **residing** upon the Military reservation, upon which the Arlington National Cemetery and the Military Post at Fort Myer, Va., are located.

This occupation has continued many years, and since the title of the land passed to the United States by purchase, May 18th, 1883, no steps have been taken for the removal of these occupants, mostly colored people.

In consequence of the complaints now made, it would seem to be proper that they should be ordered to **vacate** their holdings, giving them sufficient time for moving their property to prevent suffering.

I therefore recommend that the Military Authorities at Fort Myer be directed to serve notice upon all Civilians residing on the reservation, and not employed by the Government, that they must remove therefrom, within 90 days after date of notice.

S.B. Holabird.

Quartermaster General, U.S. Army.

residing: living
vacate: leave



3: Newspaper Article #1



Excerpts from the New York Herald, Thursday Dec. 8, 1887.

Industrious Colored People To Be Evicted to Satisfy **Speculators**.

Fair Rental Value Paid but They Must Go Nevertheless.

TO APPEAL TO CONGRESS.

An attempt to deprive several hundred colored families of their homes is being made ... in the interest of several speculative jobs.

...poor and helpless colored men, women, and children shall be driven out of their little homes next February in the bleakest part of the winter—homes in which they have lived undisturbed for nearly a quarter of a century and which in every case they have paid for.

... the War Department had been **deluded** into issuing an order favoring those speculators and **inhumanly** evicting these...honest laboring people- from their little homes.

They are the residents of freedman's village...

and have been ordered by the Secretary of War...to vacate their homes within ninety days.

TRUMPED UP CHARGES

...The settlement existed before the cemetery, and for twenty years no one has ever before heard a word of complaint that it was thought had reasonable foundation.

The charge that the settlers are now guilty of **desecrating** the graves by cutting an occasional stick of timber, is regarded as a mere **subterfuge**...

It may be true that as squatters on a government reservation they are subject to the order of the War Department. Nevertheless they bought their houses from the government and yearly have paid rent for the occupation of the ground.

The government cannot **deprive** them of

speculator: someone who buys land hoping to make money by selling it
bleakest: coldest
deluded: tricked

inhumanly: without kindness
desecrating: treating disrespectfully
subterfuge: deception
deprive: take unfairly



3: Newspaper Article #1, cont'd



property it has sold without making them **compensation** and yet none is proposed...

PROSPERITY WITHOUT PROPRIETORSHIP

...The houses ... are neatly whitewashed, and their general appearance is **indicative** of respectability and thrift.

...When the HERALD correspondent visited the village to-day the old fashioned bell outside the schoolhouse was calling the children to their afternoon exercises. A glance indoors showed them to be as bright and intelligent a set of youngsters as could be found in any school ... The children were neatly dressed and apparently interested in their lessons...

The complaint...comes from the superintendent of the Arlington Cemetery. He complains that the colored people steal wood. He even claims that they cut down trees on the cemetery grounds. This would be impossible if he

and his employees did their duty in watching the limited portion of the reservation under their charge.

THE LAND GRABBERS DID IT

There are at least three schemes which are believed to be back of this strange order. There is a project of a great park to be established on the south side of the **Potomac** on the Arlington estate and this cannot be carried out without evicting the colored people...

Another project which seems to be connected with this affair is that of building Mount Vernon avenue from Georgetown to the new memorial bridge to Mount Vernon...

There is also a political element in the case. The votes cast by the colored citizens on the Arlington reservation have several times controlled the elections of Alexandria County...

compensation: payment
indicative: demonstrating or showing

Potomac: river between Virginia and Washington D.C./Maryland



4: Newspaper Article #2



Excerpts from the New York Herald, Thursday Dec. 8, 1887.

Industrious Colored People To Be Evicted to Satisfy **Speculators**.

Fair Rental Value Paid but They Must Go Nevertheless.

TO APPEAL TO CONGRESS.

An attempt to deprive several hundred colored families of their homes is being made...in the interest of several speculative jobs...

They are the residents of freedman's village, a settlement opposite Washington, and have been ordered by the Secretary of War...to vacate their homes within ninety days.

The news of this order has caused the greatest **consternation** among a thousand poor negroes who for so long have...occupied the ground... under government protection and **sanction**...

HOW THE VILLAGE GREW

The freedmen's village grew from the **influx** of fugitive slaves into Washington, which began in

the fall of 1862, and swelled to a flood after the emancipation proclamation...the pay rolls of the depot and department quartermasters bore the names of fully ten thousand by the fall of 1863.

These men were paid \$10 per month and one **ration** per day, and from the monthly pay of each a deduction was made for the support of aged, **infirm** and young blacks who...were huddled together on a part of the Arlington estate...

Upon the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau the freedmen's village...was **administered** as an establishment of that bureau till the bureau itself was discontinued...

PROSPERITY WITHOUT **PROPRIETORSHIP**

...The village lies along the river front, three-quarters of a mile southeast of Arlington Cemetery...The houses are frame structures of

speculators: someone who buys land hoping to make money by selling it
consternation: dismay or disappointment
sanction: permission or approval
influx: moving in

ration: food allowance
infirm: sick, unable to work
administered: managed
proprietorship: ownership



4: Newspaper Article #2, cont'd



one and two stories in height...they are neatly whitewashed, and their general appearance is **indicative** of respectability and thrift.

A pretty little brick church stands at the further **extremity** of the village, in which weekly services are held. The church could not have cost less than \$1,500 or \$1,800, all the expense of which was born by the **communicants**...

[ILLEGIBLE] RIGHTS

Many of the older people have lived in the village or its immediate vicinity for a quarter of a century. Most of them have seen their children and children's children grow up around them...

It should be remembered that some of the people hold their homes by right of inheritance. In all cases the houses were purchased of the government originally and a ... rent of \$30 a year has been paid by the head of each household in labor... It is not to be wondered therefore that the

inhabitants should, as years rolled by, come to regard their title as a fixed and **legitimate** one.

THEIR OWN IMPROVEMENTS

In this belief they built additions to their homes. They economized from their **scanty** savings and **erected** a church wherein they might worship God... They purchased text books and sent their children to school.

All this they did out of the money earned by them...

The officers of the garrison at Fort Myer do not desire the removal of the colored people. Much of the labor about the fort and the quarters of the officers and men is performed by these black laborers...

The village and the rest of the colored residents are so settled on the reservation as not to be near enough to any of the other occupants to raise annoyance...

indicative: demonstrating or showing
extremity: far side
communicants: church members

legitimate: following recognized rules
scanty: small
erected: built





FREEDMAN'S VILLAGE FAST FACTS

Village Location

- Located on the Arlington estate in Virginia, which the government confiscated from General Robert E. Lee and his family
- Arlington also had a national cemetery and a military fort
- Wooden frame houses were built for residents

Life in the Village

- The government provided housing, education, medical care, and training in job skills
- Residents were encouraged to move out when they could support themselves
- Residents voted and held public office

Important Years:

- 1862:** Fugitive slaves (called contrabands) came to Washington D.C.
- 1863:** "Contraband Camps" in D.C. were crowded and unsanitary
- 1863:** The government opened the Village with the first 100 settlers
- 1887:** The Secretary of War ordered the closing of the Village

By the Numbers

- Rent was **\$3** a month
- Population ranged between **1,000-3,000**
- Each house could hold **2-4** families

Problems in the Village

- The village home for the aged wasn't well heated or cleaned
- There were problems with neighbors: reports of stealing and threats

Panoramic view of Freedman's Village, Arlington, Virginia. (LOC, 1864)





Map of Freedman's Village near Arlington, Virginia, July 10th, 1865. (NARA)

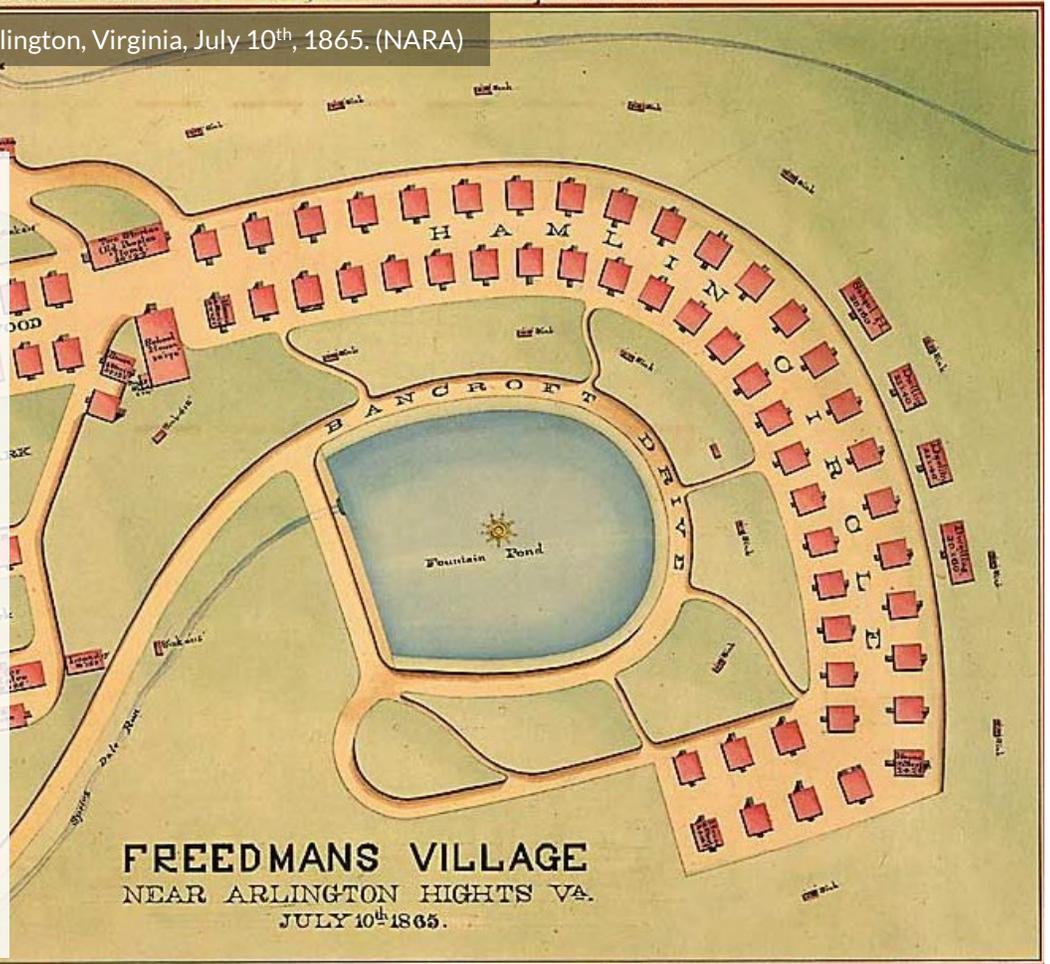
Buildings:

Besides the wooden framed houses, other buildings included:

- a school
- stores
- a hospital
- workshops
- churches
- a home for the elderly

Residents made improvements while living there, including:

- building outhouses
- digging wells
- planting trees
- digging gardens

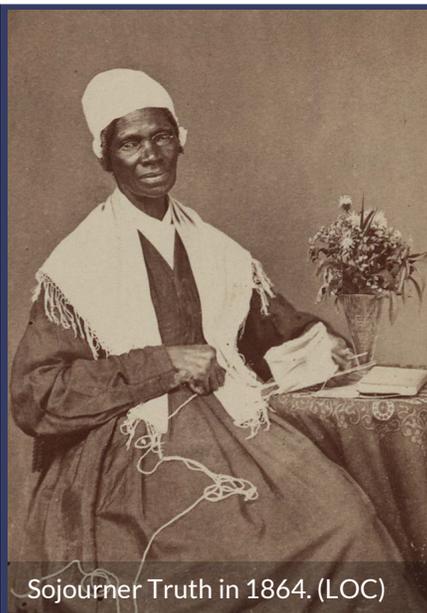


Sojourner Truth and the Kidnapping Plot

Sojourner Truth was a well-known American abolitionist and supporter of the rights of African Americans and women. In 1864, she moved to the village to offer counseling and help people exercise their civil rights.

Some plantation owners kidnapped young boys from the village and took them back to Maryland to work as slaves. Their mothers were upset and worried. Soldiers locked the women in the guardhouse for disturbing the peace.

Truth helped get the women released. She had been enslaved and never learned to read or write, but she knew their rights and worked with the women to get their sons released. She encouraged them to use the law and fill out warrants. It took time, but the courts ordered the boys to be returned to their families.



Sojourner Truth in 1864. (LOC)



Name: _____

Class Period:

RESIDENT EXPERT

1

Villagers to Government

When the villagers learned that the government was going to close the village, they held a meeting to determine what should be done. They chose John B. Syphax to write a letter to the secretary of war. Syphax was the son of Maria Carter Syphax, whose white half-sister, Mary Custis Lee, inherited the Arlington Estate.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What is Syphax's attitude toward Secretary of War Endicott? What words or phrases from the letter support your conclusion?

2. According to Syphax, why did residents of the village believe that they would be able to stay and have some claim to the land?

3. What improvements did the residents make to their homes and the village?

4. If residents are forced to move, what does Syphax ask for in compensation?

5. What is Syphax's opinion about closing the village? Do you agree with him? Why or Why not?

Name: _____

Class Period:



RESIDENT EXPERT (back)

1

Reasons to Continue Freedman's Village	Reasons to Close Freedman's Village

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read and discussed different viewpoints about closing the village, what is your opinion? Should the residents of Freedman's Village be removed from Arlington? If so, are they entitled to any compensation? Are there other solutions or compromises that could benefit both the villagers and the government?



Name: _____

Class Period:

GOVERNMENT EXPERT

2

Cemetery, Army, Gov't

The decision to close Freedman's Village began with the letter from J.A. Commerford on November 12, 1887. Commerford was the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery. The letter was sent to S.B. Holabird, the quartermaster general of the U.S. Army. Holabird then sent his own letter to the secretary of war who decided to close the village. The U.S. government had purchased the Arlington land and there are different regulations for government-owned land than for privately-owned land.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What is Commerford's attitude toward the residents of Freedman's Village? What words or phrases from the letter support your conclusion?

2. Commerford accuses the villagers of cutting down trees. Is cutting down the trees really such a big problem? Why or why not?

3. Commerford says that removal of the villagers is the most effective way to prevent theft. Do you agree? Is there another solution they could try?

4. In Holabird's letter he barely mentions Commerford's original concern. Why do you think that is?

5. What are the opinions of the cemetery, army, and government about closing the village? Do you agree with them? Why or Why not?



Name: _____

Class Period:

GOVERNMENT EXPERT (back)

2

Reasons to Continue Freedman's Village	Reasons to Close Freedman's Village

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read and discussed different viewpoints about closing the village, what is your opinion? Should the residents of Freedman's Village be removed from Arlington? If so, are they entitled to any compensation? Are there other solutions or compromises that could benefit both the villagers and the government?



Name: _____

Class Period: _____

PUBLIC OPINION

3

Newspaper Article #1:

The New York Herald sent a reporter to observe the village and speak to residents as part of his research for the article. Published on December 8, 1887, the article is a contemporary view of the situation. The article is not an objective presentation of facts: the author has a decided viewpoint. Your excerpt includes sections of the article that focus on possible reasons the closure is happening.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What is the author's attitude toward the residents of Freedman's Village? What words or phrases from the letter support your conclusion?

2. What evidence does the article give that residents are possibly being treated unfairly?

3. The author suggests that the superintendent of Arlington Cemetery isn't doing his job well. Do you agree with the author? Why or why not?

4. The article suggests 3 other reasons that people may want to close the village. What are these reasons?

5. What are the writer's opinions about closing the village? Do you agree with him? Why or Why not?

Name: _____

Class Period:



PUBLIC OPINION (back)

3

Reasons to Continue Freedman's Village	Reasons to Close Freedman's Village

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read and discussed different viewpoints about closing the village, what is your opinion? Should the residents of Freedman's Village be removed from Arlington? If so, are they entitled to any compensation? Are there other solutions or compromises that could benefit both the villagers and the government?



Name: _____

Class Period: _____

VILLAGE HISTORY

4

Newspaper Article #2:

The New York Herald sent a reporter to observe the village and speak to residents as part of his research for the article. Published on December 8, 1887, the article is a contemporary view of the situation. The article is not an objective presentation of facts: the author has a decided viewpoint. Your excerpt includes sections of the article that focus on the history of the village.

READING QUESTIONS

1. What is the author's attitude toward the residents of Freedman's Village? What words or phrases from the letter support your conclusion?

2. What evidence does the article give that residents are possibly being treated unfairly?

3. Why did the village begin? Why was it needed at the time?

4. What improvements have the residents made to the village?

5. What are the writer's opinions about closing the village? Do you agree with him? Why or Why not?



Name: _____

Class Period:

VILLAGE HISTORY (back)

4

Reasons to Continue Freedman's Village	Reasons to Close Freedman's Village

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read and discussed different viewpoints about closing the village, what is your opinion? Should the residents of Freedman's Village be removed from Arlington? If so, are they entitled to any compensation? Are there other solutions or compromises that could benefit both the villagers and the government?



Name: _____

Class Period:

VILLAGE FACTS

5

Freedman's Village Fast Facts

This page contains background information about the history of the village.

READING QUESTIONS

1. When did the village begin? Why was it needed at the time?

2. What made the village a good place for newly freed people to live?

3. In what ways could the village be considered a disappointment?

4. Do you think the village should be closed or remain open? Use information from this resource to support your opinion.

Name: _____

Class Period:



VILLAGE FACTS (back)

5

Reasons to Continue Freedman's Village	Reasons to Close Freedman's Village

REFLECTION QUESTION

Now that you have read and discussed different viewpoints about closing the village, what is your opinion? Should the residents of Freedman's Village be removed from Arlington? If so, should they be paid for their houses? Are there other solutions or compromises that could benefit both the villagers and the government?
