

Activity: Mapping Activist Communities

This activity invites students to contemplate where and how politics have been practiced outside of designated gatherings. Students will read convention proceedings alongside the newspapers in which they were printed. This document pairing will enable students to interpret the convention's attendance, issues, and demands in the broader context of the community. By considering the relationship between a Black political convention and the community in which the convention gathered, students will gain a fuller sense of how political and social change has been effectuated throughout history.

Pair this activity with the document sets included on the following page.

1. After reading the convention proceedings, browse the remainder of the newspaper issue. Focus on identifying churches, meeting halls, boardinghouses, dressmaking parlors, and other community and business establishments in the community where the convention was held.
2. Draw a map of the community according to the places identified in the newspaper issue. Your map might include homes, meeting places, businesses, and other sites mentioned or discussed in the proceedings.
3. Referring to your map and to the convention proceedings, consider the following:
 - a. What are some places that delegates might have visited before and after the convention? Where might delegates have eaten and slept?
 - b. Who in the community might have interacted with delegates throughout their stay?
 - c. What relationships with the community did delegates have before and after the convention? Did they own, work for, or otherwise interact with any of the places on your map?
 - d. How do you think the community of newspaper readers might have responded to news of the convention?

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.