

**Document Based Question - Port Royal Experiment**  
**Heather Wasemann, McKeel Academy of Technology**

Directions:

- In your color group number off 1-6.
- Now break off into number groups that will be known as topic groups.
- Groups 1 -2 will be the topic Education. Groups 3-4 will the topic land. Groups 5-6 will be the topic military service.
- In your topic groups read the documents that go with your topic.
- Then discuss the questions on the activity worksheet in your group.
- Fill in your answers to the questions on the worksheet to take back to your home color group.
- Share your findings with your color group and write down the information for the other documents not in your topic.
- Create a brace map as a prewriting tool for you DBQ
- Complete the DBQ using the information you gained in your group and by reading the documents over yourself.

Documents (A-H).

Some of these documents have been edited for this exercise. This question is designed to test your ability to work with historic documents. As you analyze these documents and answer the questions; take into account the sources of the document and the author's point of view.

Assignment:

- Analyze documents
- Answer questions for each document
- Write a well-organized essay (introduction, supporting paragraphs and a Conclusion)
- Use evidence from the documents and your knowledge of American History to answer the essay question
- Answer every part of the essay question

In 1861 General Sherman of the United States Army during the Civil War took control of the islands of the coast of South Carolina to use as a base for Union military operations. When the majority of the whites ran away before the siege Union forces were left with the difficult responsibility of what to do with the thousand of slaves left behind. This issues' importance increased as slaves on the nearby mainland began escaping from plantation to the islands in hopes of gaining freedom. The vision of what Reconstruction would entail for African Americans after the war was uncertain. Sherman and others used the opportunity to conduct their own experiments on the possible roles of African Americans in society after the war. Sherman began requesting aid for the slaves from various antislavery organizations in the north. They sent food, clothing and supplies. Sherman then organized for the antislavery societies to send teachers to educate the slaves in order to help them obtain freedom. He declared the slaves contraband as neither free nor slave. Next he put leaders in charge of setting up a system for organizing the contraband or slaves into a labor force to prove they could work out of bondage the same as whites. Finally Sherman's predecessors established opportunities for the Africans to serve in the military to prove whether or not they could contribute to ending the war by fighting for their own freedom.

**Question: Northern and Southern whites during the 1800's held the prejudice that African Americans were inferior. These beliefs made them question emancipated African Americans' abilities to become contributing, successful, law-abiding members of society after the Civil War. Evaluate the effects of the Port Royal Experiment. How did the experiment validate or challenge beliefs of African American inferiority through educational opportunities, military service, and economic freedom?**

Document A

Teacher Charlotte Forten

The first day at school was rather trying. Most of my children were very small, and consequently restless. Some were too young to learn the alphabet. These little ones were brought to school because the older children-in whose care their parents leave them while at work-could not come without the... But after some days of positive, though not severe treatment, order was brought out of chaos, and I found but little difficulty in managing and quieting the tiniest and most restless spirits. I never before saw children so eager to learn, although I had had several years' experience in New-England schools. Coming to school is a constant delight and recreation to them. They come here as other children go to play. The older ones, during the summer, work in the fields from early morning until eleven or twelve o'clock, and then come into school, after their hard toil in the hot sun, as bright and as anxious to learn as ever.

Of course there are some stupid ones, but these are the minority. The majority learn with wonderful rapidity. Many of the grown people are desirous of learning to read. It is wonderful how a people who have been so long crushed to the earth, so imbruted as these have been,-and they are said to be among the most degraded negroes of the South, can have so great a desire for knowledge, and such a capability for attaining it. One cannot believe that the haughty Anglo-Saxon race, after centuries of such an experience as these people have had, would be very much superior to them. And one's indignation increases against those who, North as well as South, taunt the colored race with inferiority while they themselves use every means in their power to crush and degrade them, denying them every right and privilege, closing against them every avenue of elevation and improvement. Were they, under such circumstances, intellectual and refined, they would certainly be vastly superior to any other race that ever existed.

...They listened attentively, and seemed to understand. We found it rather hard to keep their attention in school. It is not strange, as they have been so entirely unused to intellectual concentration.

Charlotte Forten, 19 "Life on the Sea Islands, " *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 13 (May 1864), pp. 591-592.

Document B:

W. C. Gannett

The first inquiry in regard to them naturally concerns their intellect. Of the mental faculties, those in close connection with the outward senses are alone developed. That they observe well, is proved by their quickness in imitation; and their memory often surprises persons used to note-books and memoranda. But while they apprehend and hold detached facts easily, they are slow to comprehend them in connection,-are deficient in the more ideal operations, which require reflection and reasoning. Hence arises an appalling mental inaccuracy. Nothing reveals more strikingly this mental degradation than the confusion of ideas that blurs their common statements. It even accounts for much of their apparent dishonesty, and most curiously distorts the structure of their language. .... The impression made by a short acquaintance with the Sea Island negroes, and confirmed by a longer one, is that they have capacity, but lack ability,-the term properly applicable to the mind which by discipline has control of its powers. ....

Of course the instruction which the children principally have received during the last three years cannot have visibly affected this condition. It is to these children alone, and not at once to them, that we may fairly look for evidence of greater mental ability than that exhibited by their parents. Many friends of the Port Royal movement have a very exaggerated notion of the extent of the education already accomplished there. We have even been asked, how many negroes were yet qualified to take the place of teachers. Perhaps the teachers, for want of material to form definite reports, were obliged to make general statements at first, and may have colored them too warmly. Attention has been given chiefly to reading, spelling, and writing. The higher classes have gone through the multiplication table, and in many schools the cardinal operations of arithmetic, with a little geography and history, have been introduced. None can read with perfect confidence, few without frequent hesitation. The majority of the scholars are young children still in their First or Second Primer. In writing and spelling, for the length of time spent, the relative advancement has been greater than in reading.

Elizabeth Hyde Botume, *First days amongst the contrabands* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1892), pp 42-43, 68, 107-109.

Document C

Direct Tax Commissioner for the State of South Carolina to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, December 12, 1863.

I think it proper to inform you that I have heard from different persons who have been present that speeches have been made to the negroes at their gatherings on the Sabbath, urging them to adopt the squatter sovereignty plan and prevent white men if possible bidding against them at the public sales. Mr. French, Chaplain on General Saxton's staff advocates this plan; and to me he tried to underrate the President's Instructions. Judge Smith goes out with Mr. French on these appointments. I was told by the best authority that they got the negroes on St Helena Island, at their church, to adopt some very violent resolutions. The negroes consequently in some instances have been placing stakes for themselves on lands not selected for them, and I fear, instructed as they are, they will be either greatly disappointed or may give us some trouble. The true friend of the negro, it seems to me, ought to encourage white men to purchase plantations among them as protectors, teachers and employers; and their own homesteads, so generously allowed them by the Government, will thereby be greatly increased in value intrinsically.

Edward S. Philbrick to Albert G. Browne, March 25, 1864, in *Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Series 1, General Correspondence, Library of Congress.

Document D Gannett

"The Freedmen at Port Royal."

The laborers, during the first year under the new system, have acquired the idea of ownership, and of the security of wages, and have come to see that labor and slavery are not the same thing. . . . A superintendent on St. Helena Island said, that, if he were going to carry on any work, he should not want better laborers. . .

Next as to the development of manhood. This has been shown in the first place, in the prevalent disposition to acquire land. It did not appear upon our first introduction to these people, and they did not seem to understand us when we used to tell them that we wanted them to own land. But it is now an active desire. At the recent tax sales, six out of the forty-seven plantations sold were bought by them, comprising two thousand five hundred and ninetyfive acres, sold for twenty-one hundred and forty-five dollars. [The purchases] were made by the negroes on the plantations combining the funds they had saved from the sale of their pigs, chickens, and eggs, and from the payments made to them for work,-they then dividing off the tract peaceably among themselves.

Berlin, et al., eds., *The Wartime Genesis of Free Labor*, series 1, 1Vol. 3, pp. 291,297-298.

Document E

Rutter and Towne to Lincoln, May 29, 1864. Rutter dictated his thoughts to Towne, who transcribed them.

My name is Don Carlos, and I hope my letter will find you and your family in perfect health. Will you please to be so kind Sir, as to tell me about my little bit of land. I am afraid to put on it a stable, or cornhouse, and such like, for fear it will be taken away from me again. Will you please to be so kind as to tell me whether the land will be sold from under us or no, or whether it will be sold to us at all. I should like to buy the very spot where I live. It aint but six acres, and I have got cotton planted on it, and very fine cotton too; and potatoes and corn coming on very pretty. If we colored people have land I know we shall do very well- there is no fear of that. Some of us have as much as three acres of corn, besides ground-nuts, potatoes, peas, and I don't know what else myself. If the land can only be sold, we can buy it all, for every house has its cotton planted, and doing well, and planted only for ourselves. We should like to know how much we shall have to pay for it-if it is sold.

I am pretty well struck in age Sir, for I waited upon Mrs. Alston that was Theodosia Burr, 24 daughter of Aaron Burr, and I remember well when she was taken by pirates, -but I can maintain myself and my family well on this land.. My son got sick on the Wabash (Flagship at Hilton Head) and he will never get well, for he has a cough that will kill him at last. He cannot do much work, but I can maintain him. I had rather work for myself and raise my own cotton than work for a gentleman for wages, for if I could sell my cotton for only .20 cts a pound it would pay me.

What ever you say I am willing to do, and I will attend to whatever you tell me.

Your most obedient servant.

Don Carlos Rutter and Laura Towne to Abraham Lincoln, May 29, 1864, in *Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Library of Congress.

Document F.

E. S. P., October 27, 1862.

The last time I saw General Saxton he seemed to think our whole destiny depended on the success of this negro recruitment. It *is* certainly a very important matter, but I think as before that it is doomed to fail here at present, from the imbecile character of the people.

Berlin, et. al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, series 2, *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 54-55, 526-527.

Document G.

Superintendent of Contrabands in the Department of the South to the Secretary of War, January 25, 1863.

Dear Sir. I have the honor to report that the organization of the 1st Regt. Of South Carolina Volunteers is now completed. The regiment is light infantry composed of ten companies of about eighty six men (each) armed with muskets, and officered by white men. In organization, drill, discipline, and morale, for the length of time it has been in service, this regiment is not surpassed by any white regiment in this Department. Should it ever be its good fortune to get into action I have no fears but it will win its own way to the confidence of those who are willing to recognize courage, and manhood, and vindicate the wise policy of the administration in putting these men into the field and giving them a chance to strike a blow for the country and their own liberty. In no regiment have I ever seen duty performed with so much cheerfulness, and alacrity, and as sentinels they are peculiarly vigilant. I have never seen in any body of men such enthusiasm and deep seated devotion to their officers as exists in this. They will surely go wherever they are led. Every man is a volunteer and seems fully persuaded of the importance of his service to his race. In the organization of this regiment I have labored under difficulties which might have discouraged one who had less faith in the wisdom of the measure, but I am glad to report that the experiment is a complete success. My belief is that when we get a footing on the main land regiments may be raised which will do more than any now in service to put an end to this rebellion[.] I have sent the regiment upon an expedition to the coast of Georgia the result of which I shall report for your information as soon as it returns. I have the honor also to report that I have commenced the organization of the 2nd Regt which is to be commanded by Col Montgomery. I am Sir with great respect Your Obedient Servant[.]

Berlin, *The Black military experience*, series 2, pp.388, 391-395.

Document H

Superintendent of Black Recruitment M. S. Littlefield to the Provost Marshal General of the Department of the South, June 3, 1864. Colonel.

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of a communication from you, dated June 2d, in which you ask me to state what I know of the mutiny, in the late 3d S.C. Vol. now the 21th U.S.C.T. which accured last fall, at Hilton Head, S.C. that you can report upon the guilt or innocence of those now in confinement at the Provost Guard House.

The conversation I had with Lt. Col. Bennett, in command of the Regiment, is all I know of the facts in the case: as I understand it is this: The 3d S.C. Vol was organized by Gen. Hunter, in the spring of '63. as Fatigue men, with a promis that they should have \$13.d per. month, The men immediately placed in camp, with inferior clothing, having no care, worked hard and with little or no instruction; they were commanded by inferior officers, a portion [of] whom have been dismissed from service: When the paymaster came to pay them they were offered but \$7.00 & not knowing what they were doing, supposing they could stop doing duty, as they had done when at work, if they pay did not suit them; they stacked arms, & refused to *longer* be *soldiers*: as soon however, as the worthless officers left & good officers took charge, & explained to the men, thir obligation *all at once entered willingly to their duties*: The Regiment is one of the best now, we have, & it under Lt. Col. Bennett, The points I make are these:

1<sup>st</sup> The men were guilty of no crime, as they did not know they were doing wrong, consequently no wrong was committed.

2<sup>nd</sup> The partial manner with which these men were tried and the irregularities of the records, has rendered it impossible for these men to have Justice: Humanity calls that they should be released from their long confinement; & the best interest of the service will be promoted by having these men in the ranks with muskets in hands, rather than being kept on public expence where they are.

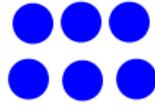
3<sup>rd</sup> Maj. Gen. Gillmore ordered these men all be returned to duty, in January last, when the men were consolidated with my own Regiment, hence they augh not to suffer from these long & vexatious delays, & their pay should at least commence January 1, 1864, but I urge as the colonel of the Regiment, that they all be returned to duty with *no* stopage of pay.

Berlin, *The Black military experience*, series 2, pp.388, 391-395.

### Worksheet Port Royal

Student Names	Documents	Supports or rejects beliefs African American Inferiority	What evidence is used to support their arguments	Weaknesses of the argument or (limitations of the experiment/ prejudice) that influenced their judgment	Strength of the argument and validity of the statement
	Doc. A Education Forten				
	Doc. B Education Gannett				
	Doc. C Land Tax Commissioner				
	Doc. D Gannett				
	Doc. E Land Rutter & Towne				
	Doc. F Service E.S.P.				
	Doc. G Service Superintenden t of Contrabands				
	Doc H Service M.S. Littlefield				

**Visual of Color Groups**



**Visual of Topic Groups**

