

A Former Slave to His Former Owner

Jourdon Anderson

August 7, 1865

After the Civil War is ended, Jourdon Anderson, who had lived as a
5 slave in Tennessee but moved to Ohio during the war, was contacted
by his former enslaver, Patrick Henry Anderson, who invited him to
return to Nashville and work on his farm. Anderson replied in an open
letter that was first published in the Cincinnati *Commercial* and later
reprinted in *The Freedmen's Book*, published by abolitionist Lydia Maria
10 Child in 1865.

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
Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you
15 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 Col. Martin's to
kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable.
20 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. It would do
me good to go back to the dear old home again and see Miss Mary
and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to
them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not
25 in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working
in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me Henry
intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

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
30 victuals and clothing; 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; the teacher says Grundy
has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday-School, and Mandy
and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated; sometimes we
35 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 Col. Anderson.
Many darkies 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,
40 I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage
to move back again.

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
 45 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
 50 served you faithfully for thirty-two years and Mandy twenty years.
 At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for
 Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred
 and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages
 has been kept back and deduct what you paid for our clothing and
 55 three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the
 balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the
 money by Adams Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio.
 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
 60 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. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night,
 but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the Negroes any
 more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of
 65 reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter please state if there would be any safety
 for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up and both good-
 looking girls. You know how it was with Matilda and Catherine. I
 would rather stay here and starve, and die if it comes to that, than
 70 have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of
 their young masters. 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.

75 P.S. —Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the
 pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

From your old servant,
 Jourdon Anderson