

# Primary Source

Albion W. Tourgée's Letter to Senator Joseph C. Abbott, May 24, 1870



To what extent did Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice become a reality for African Americans from Reconstruction to the end of the nineteenth century?

- ☐ I can interpret primary sources related to Founding principles of liberty, equality, and justice from the colonial era to the outbreak of the Civil War.
- ☐ I can explain how laws and policy, courts, and individuals and groups contributed to or pushed back against the quest to end slavery.
- ☐ I can create an argument using evidence from primary sources.
- ☐ I can analyze issues in history to help find solutions to present-day challenges.

## Essential Vocabulary

Garden pallings	Fencing around a garden
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## Building Context

Albion Tourgée was a noted lawyer, writer, and politician. After the Civil War, he moved to North Carolina where he established himself as a lawyer and editor of a Republican newspaper. Tourgée was a pioneer civil rights activist who wrote about and exposed Klan atrocities, and he later served as Homer Plessy's chief attorney in the landmark Plessy v. Ferguson case (Document 22) argued before the Supreme Court. The following letter to the North Carolina governor from an African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) pastor and teacher describes the violence in his local community in Hillsboro.

## Albion W. Tourgée's Letter to Senator Joseph C. Abbott, May 24, 1870

Source: [https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/after\\_slavery\\_educator/unit\\_nine\\_documents/document\\_8](https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/after_slavery_educator/unit_nine_documents/document_8)

<p>[Greensboro, N.C.]</p> <p>Gen. Jos. C. Abbott-My Dear General:</p> <p>It is my mournful duty to inform you that our friend John W. Stephens, State Senator from Caswell, is dead. He was foully murdered by the Ku-Klux in the Grand Jury room of the Court House on Saturday or Saturday night last. . . . He was one of the Justices of the Peace in that township, and was accustomed to hold court in that room on Saturdays. It is evident that he was set upon by some one while holding this court, or immediately after its close, and disabled by a sudden attack, otherwise there would have been a very sharp resistance, as he was a man, and always went armed to the teeth. He was stabbed five or six times, and then hanged on a hook in the Grand Jury room, where he was found on Sunday morning. Another brave, honest Republican citizen has met his fate at the hands of these fiends. . . .</p> <p>These crimes have been of every character imaginable. Perhaps the most usual has been the dragging of men and women from their beds, and beating their naked bodies with hickory switches. . . . From 50 to 100 blows is the usual allowance, sometimes 200 and 300 blows are administered. Occasionally an instrument of torture is owned. . . . I could give other incidents of cruelty, such as hanging up a boy of nine years old until he was nearly dead, to make him tell where his father was hidden, and beating an old negress of 103 years old with <b>garden pallings</b> [fencing around a garden] because she would not own that she was afraid of the Ku-Klux. . . .</p> <p>Four thousand or 5,000 houses have been broken</p>	<p>Notes</p>
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<p>open, and property or persons taken out.</p> <p>And yet the Government sleeps. I am ashamed of the nation that will let its citizens be slain by scores, and scourged by thousands, and offer no remedy or protection</p>	
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### Comprehension and Analysis Questions

1. According to Tourgée's description, who are the targets of the Ku Klux Klan? Does this represent change or continuity from the description of Klan violence in S. B. Williams' letter?

2. What evidence does Tourgée provide that this violence is routine?

3. Why is Tourgée ashamed of the nation?