

Primary Source Analysis: Elizabeth Keckley



Source: Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or, Thirty years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House*, 1868.

Note: Elizabeth Keckley was born into slavery but after emancipating herself became a reputable seamstress. She worked for the wife of Jefferson Davis before the Civil War began (Davis was the President of the Confederacy) and then worked for Mary Todd Lincoln (Abraham Lincoln's wife) while he was U.S. President during the war. She spent a lot of time in the White House and around the Lincoln family.

One fair summer evening I was walking the streets of Washington, accompanied by a friend, when a band of music was heard in the distance... We quickened our steps, and discovered that it came from the house of Mrs. Farnham... We approached the sentinel on duty at the gate, and asked what was going on. He told us that it was a festival given for the benefit of the sick and wounded soldiers in the city. This suggested an idea to me. If the white people can give festivals to raise funds for the relief of suffering soldiers, why should not the well-to-do colored people go to work to do something for the benefit of the suffering blacks? ...The idea proved popular, and in two weeks "the Contraband Relief Association" was organized, with forty working members.

In September of 1862... I told Mrs. Lincoln of my project; and she immediately headed my list with a subscription of \$200... Mrs. Lincoln made frequent contributions, as also did the President. In 1863 I was re-elected President of the Association, which office I continue to hold...

Whoever visits the Freedmen's Village now in the vicinity of Washington will discover all of these evidences of prosperity and happiness. The schools are objects of much interest. Good teachers, white and colored, are employed, and whole brigades of bright-eyed dusky children are there taught the common branches of education. These children are studious, and the teachers inform me that their advancement is rapid. I number among my personal friends twelve colored girls employed as teachers in the schools at Washington.

THINKS Document Analysis

T (Topic)

H (Historical Context)

I (Intended Audience)

	Political
	Economic
	Social
	Religious
	Other

1. When was this document created and/or circulated? Who wrote it?

1. Who was the intended audience of this document?

2. What events were occurring during the time this document was written?

2. Whose voice or perspective is not shared in this document?

N (New Vocabulary)

1. What words are new to you or need to be defined?

K (Key Purpose)

1. How would you describe the author's perspective, or point of view?

2. Taking into account the author's perspective, why do you think this document was created? In other words, what is its purpose?

S (Significance)

1. List two things or ideas that make this document historically significant.

2. Provide one quote from the document that demonstrates why it might be considered historically significant. Explain your reasoning.

