



Historians’ Perspectives on the Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois

Grade	Middle and High School
Level:	
Standards:	<p>CCSS.RI.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p>CCSS.RI.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.</p> <p>CCSS.RI.9: Compare and contrast one author’s presentation of events with that of another (e.g., a memoir written by and a biography on the same person).</p>
Sources Used:	<p>“Routes of the Underground Railroad: 1830-1865” compiled from Siebert, W. (1898). <i>The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom</i>. London: Macmillan Company.</p> <p>D. Dexter (2011). <i>Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois</i>. Cape Girardeau, MO: Center for Regional History Southeast Missouri State University.</p> <p>E. Germaine (2006). “Frontier Line of Freedom: African Americans and the Forging of the Underground Railroad in the Ohio Valley” by K. Griffler [Book Review]. <i>Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society</i>, 99(2).</p>

Introduction:

The Miller Grove settlement was established in the early 1800s by a group of freed slaves in Pope County, Illinois. African American settlements were not rare at this time in southernmost Illinois; however, it is fascinating that these communities continued to be established so close to the slave states Illinois bordered in the 19th century: Missouri and Kentucky. Tragically, the kidnapping of free African Americans in this region and selling them into slavery was profitable and common in this area. Yet, these communities continued to thrive. For this reason, many scholars have revised their earlier assumptions about the Underground Railroad in southern Illinois and are starting to uncover clues about these African American communities’ involvement in the Underground Railroad.

Source Information:

The sources provided in this exercise help students explore historians’ perspectives on the Underground Railroad (UGRR) in southernmost Illinois. Though this exercise can be completed with the documents provided here, learners are encouraged to use the Online interactive Geographic Information Systems (GIS) map available at <http://arcg.is/2xzJw80> as additional evidence to determine whether or not the UGRR existed in southernmost Illinois.

Historians' Perspectives on the Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois

The map below shows where historian Wilbur H. Siebert located the Underground Railroad (UGRR) in southernmost Illinois in his 1898 book. Also included is historian Darrel Dexter's description of the UGRR in the same region from his 2011 book and a review of Keith Griffler's 2004 book about African Americans' participation in the UGRR. Your task is to compare and contrast these perspectives about the UGRR in a region in Illinois known as "Little Egypt."

Perspective 1. The Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois



W. Siebert's 1898 depictions of the UGRR in his book, "The Underground Railroad: From Slavery to Freedom."



Perspective 2. The Underground Railroad in Southern Illinois

Underground Railroad activities in southern Illinois had a small role to play in the national network and reached their peak in Egypt [the region’s nickname] during the 1950s [...]

1

In Egypt, the Underground Railroad is known to have been active in Randolph County, especially in the community of Eden, at Cairo in Alexander County, and at Alton in Madison County.

2

Stations were also located in Washington, Bond, Marion, and Clinton counties and perhaps in

Perry and White Counties. The Underground Railroad operators in southern Illinois were a motley group. They were men and women, black and white, with different religious affiliations, occupations, and places of nativity. What united them was a central belief that slavery was wrong, so wrong that they were willing to violate federal and state laws in order to obey what they believed was a higher law. Their strong convictions that slavery was immoral gave them the courage to operate the Underground Railroad in the hostile regions of Egypt, and by so doing

3

most of the fugitives they helped found freedom [...] The only documented Underground

Railroad site in Illinois south of Randolph County is Cairo in Alexander County.

D. Dexter’s 2011 description of the UGRR in his book, “Bondage in Egypt: Slavery in Southern Illinois,” pp. 304-305, 319

Directions: Complete the following sentences with evidence from the map to justify whether the historians agree or disagree (**circle one**) about the Underground Railroad’s location in southern Illinois.

In Claim **1** (“In Egypt, the Underground Railroad...”) Dexter agrees/disagrees with Seibert because

In Claim **2** (“Stations were also located in...”) Dexter agrees/disagrees with Seibert because

In Claim **3** (“The only documented Underground...”) Dexter agrees/disagrees with Seibert because

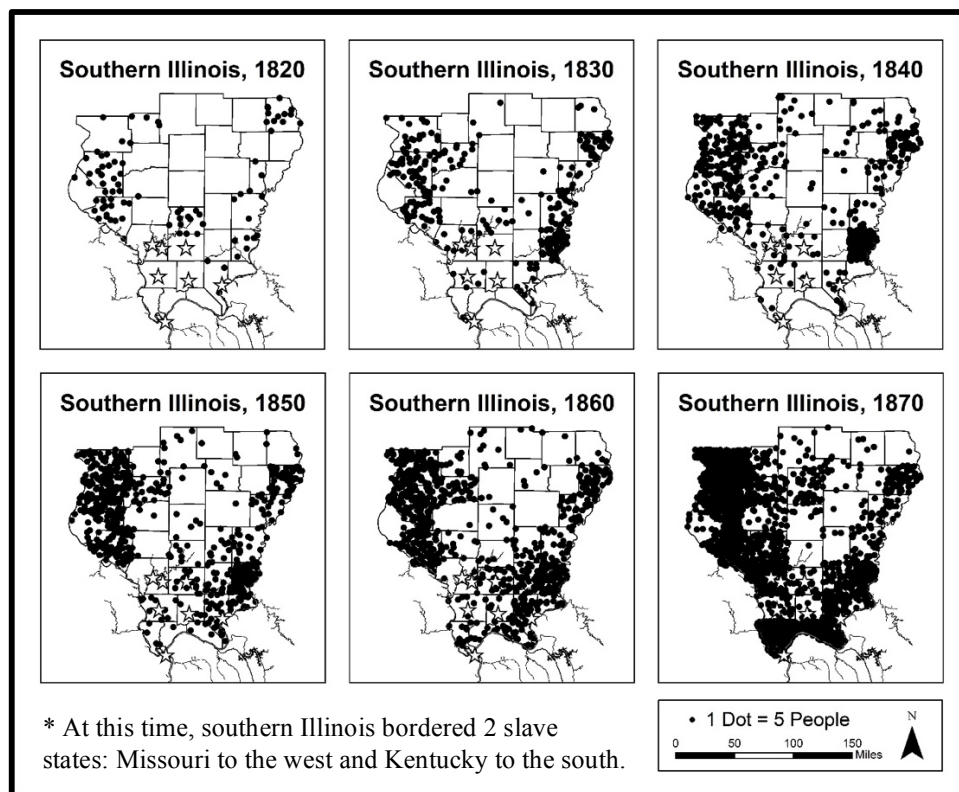
Perspective 3. “Frontier Line of Freedom” [book review]

1 Griffler sees the Underground Railroad as proceeding along two fronts: the “more intensive frontier struggles” undertaken by African Americans and “support operations in the rear (areas farther north)” orchestrated largely by sympathetic whites. Yet, these efforts were not always coordinated. Particularly during the early years of abolitionism,

2 Griffler describes a disjointed resistance network; one in which slave fugitives often were left to fend for themselves after receiving initial assistance from African-American “frontline operatives.” But, by the late 1830s, once the anti-slavery movement had matured and white abolitionists began to piggyback on the earlier efforts of African-American operatives, a more complete underground network emerged.

Excerpt of E. Germaine’s 2006 book review of “Frontier Line of Freedom” by K. Griffler from *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 99(2).

Map Source. African American Settlement Patterns in Southern Illinois, 1820-1870





Directions: Use evidence from the map of “African American Settlement Patterns in Southern Illinois” to complete the following sentence.

Claim **1** (“Griffler sees the Underground Railroad...”) connects with evidence in the map because

Directions: Use evidence from Darrel Dexter’s claims in Perspective 2 to complete the following sentence.

Claim **2** (“Griffler describes a disjointed...”) does not agree with Dexter’s perspective because

Making Connections: Write a short essay comparing and contrasting the major points historians Siebert, Dexter, and Griffler present about the Underground Railroad in southern Illinois. Be sure to cite evidence from the sources you use to justify your claims.