

# **Richard Blue**

## **Classroom Resource Packet**

1. Student Biography of Richard Blue
2. Vocabulary List
  - a. Vocabulary words are pulled from the student biography, the actors' scripts, and the Character Information portion of our Guide Script. Words are organized alphabetically.
3. Supplemental Resources
  - a. "Black soldiers served as 'sable arm' of Union Army" by Bill Kemp
  - b. "Frederick Douglass frequently spoke in Bloomington" by Bill Kemp

# Richard Blue

1841-1921

Richard Blue was born on February 22, 1842, in Dayton, Ohio. The names of his parents are unknown. He was recorded as “**mulatto**,” an outdated and now offensive term for a person of both white and Black ancestry. Blue was a member of the white Rayburn family household for much of his youth. Because of this, he was likely not **enslaved**.

In 1851, Judge James Rayburn and his family left Ohio and moved to Old Town Township in McLean County, Illinois, which is located southeast of Bloomington, IL. Blue, then nine years old, moved with them and worked as a farm laborer for the family.

When the Civil War broke out in 1861, many free Black men attempted to join the Union Army, but were refused. It was not until 1863, after the **Emancipation Proclamation** had been issued by President Abraham Lincoln, that they were allowed to join. On February 3, 1865, Blue enlisted in the Union Army, joining the 29<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Infantry, Company A, in Springfield, initially serving as a private. Blue was somewhat **disabled** due to a foot injury he received while chopping wood on the Rayburn farm in 1857. Because of that disability, he was assigned to musician duties, soon achieving the rank of **principal musician**.

In May 1865 (after the war had ended), the 28<sup>th</sup> Indiana, 29<sup>th</sup> Illinois, and the 26<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> New York (all of which were Black regiments) were transferred to Texas for **garrison duty**, guarding the U.S-Mexican border, as well as looking out for **Confederate** uprisings. By coincidence, many of the regiments—including the 29<sup>th</sup>—were present in Galveston when General Gordon Granger issued General Order No. 3 on June 19 which declared that all enslaved people were free. Today, this date is recognized and celebrated as **Juneteenth**. The Emancipation Proclamation was issued two years prior to this, but that news had been purposefully kept from the enslaved individuals in Galveston. News of emancipation relied on the ability of Union Troops to communicate that information, thus the news traveled slowly making Texas the last state to free enslaved people.

The 29<sup>th</sup> Regiment served along the Rio Grande until they finally mustered out in Brownsville, TX on November 6, 1865, six months after the war ended. Blue was among the roughly 180,000 Black soldiers who served in the Union Army (roughly 10% of the total Union Army).

Black soldiers were almost always treated unequally when compared to white soldiers. They were paid \$10 per month, while white soldiers were paid \$13. Furthermore, Black soldiers had an additional \$3 per month deducted from their pay for a clothing **allowance**, bringing their **net pay** down to \$7 per month, while white soldiers received their full \$13 per month. It took eighteen months of **debate** in Washington D.C. to decide on equality for pay and supplies for Black soldiers.

Blue married Emily L. Cooper on May 5, 1870. She was born in Shawneetown, Illinois on March 7, 1840, and moved with her family to Bloomington in 1857. Emily and Richard would go on to have six children, three of whom survived to adulthood. Unfortunately, Emily (called Letitia in her obituary), died on March 22, 1898. She contracted **influenza** in the fall of 1897, which resulted in kidney trouble. Her funeral was held on March 24 in their home on South Madison Street. She was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery.

Sometime around 1868, Blue opened a barbershop in downtown Bloomington. Blue’s patrons were *exclusively* white, because at this time it was not considered acceptable for a barber to serve

both white and Black customers, regardless of the race of the **proprietor**. The accepted norm was not to “cross the color line.” Additionally, with the relatively small population of Black individuals in Bloomington, there was more money to be made by cutting white people’s hair.

Though Blue was successful in many areas throughout his life, politics proved to be his true passion. He remained active in both local and state politics for much of his life, working towards Black **empowerment** and fighting for Black rights.

On March 30, 1870, the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which granted Black men the right to vote, was formally adopted as part of the United States Constitution. The amendment stated that “the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be **denied** or **abridged** by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of **servitude**.” Blue, along with four other Black men, served on a committee to arrange a public demonstration in celebration of the adoption of the amendment.

Because of their newfound voting rights, combined with citizenship which was conferred upon all people born in the United States because of the passage of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Black men were now allowed to serve on **juries**. Richard Blue has the **distinction** of being the first Black person to serve as a juror in Bloomington’s history, and was called for that duty at least four times in his life.

The first case for which he served as a juror was that of Bloomington vs. Bateman in May 1870. H.M. Bateman owned two popular restaurants at 110 West Front Street and 111 North Street and was charged with violating “The Sunday Law,” a city ordinance that **prohibited** most business from taking place on Sundays.

Aside from his engagement in activities related to the **judicial branch** of government, Blue became heavily involved with the election activities. He often represented Bloomington at various political conventions across McLean County and Illinois, participating in general Republican conventions, as well as the **segregated** Black Republican conventions.

In 1879, Blue threw his hat into the political ring and ran as a candidate for **alderman** of the Third Ward, which had the highest percentage of Black residents of Bloomington living in it at that time. Blue was well respected by members of both the Black and white communities in Bloomington. That, combined with his long record of political activities, made him the logical choice for a Black candidate in the upcoming municipal elections. Despite support and confidence in his abilities, he received only 156 votes, losing to the **incumbent** alderman William W. Stevenson, who received 360 votes.

However, while Blue did not succeed in being elected as an alderman, he did receive a **political appointment**. Newly elected Mayor Elisha B. Steere (a fellow Republican) appointed Blue as a mail carrier for the City of Bloomington in May 1879. The role of the mail carrier was somewhat of a political position, often assigned based on **partisan** loyalty. Blue held the position, in addition to operating his barbershop, for at least one year.

In addition to his political activities, Blue was involved in a variety of cultural activities, and was an active member or officer in many local clubs. In June 1881, he contributed an essay to a meeting of a Black literary society. *The Pantagraph* noted that meetings of the club “are always largely attended.” **Black literary societies** were becoming popular throughout the United States during this time period. Also called reading rooms or debating societies, Black literary societies were seen as a way for members of the Black community to become more politically active, as well as better readers, writers, speakers, and thinkers. These groups were a way for “African Americans to develop a literary background as well as the oral and written skills needed to

express and represent themselves with confidence” in the safety and comfort of a group of their peers.

Following his musical experience in the Civil War, Blue continued to perform in a “**colored** glee club” in Bloomington-Normal, which frequently performed at political events. In October 1880, the club won first prize at a singing competition at a Republican rally in Bloomington, winning \$15. By December of that year, he was the leader of the club. The club performed at an 1883 celebration of the anniversary of the ratification of the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

Richard Blue died at St. Joseph’s Hospital on March 26, 1921, following a sharp decline after about four to five years of illness. He was universally praised, with *The Pantagraph* calling him “one of Bloomington’s oldest and most highly respected citizens,” and the *Sunday Bulletin* describing him as a “**staunch** and influential Republican.” He was buried on March 29 in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery after a funeral service at the Wayman A.M.E. Church, of which he had been a long-time member.

Richard Blue was a dedicated member of the Bloomington political community and **unparalleled** in his commitment to **civic engagement**. His **legacy** lives on as Bloomington remains a center for **progressive** politics in Central Illinois.

## Vocabulary

**Abrided (adjective):** sudden impairment or loss of consciousness, sensation, and voluntary motion that is caused by rupture or obstruction (as by a clot) of a blood vessel supplying the brain and is accompanied by permanent damage of brain tissue.

**Activism (noun):** a doctrine or practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.

**Alderman (noun):** a member of a city legislative body.

**Alliances (noun):** a bond or union between families, states, parties, or individuals.

**Allowance (noun):** a sum regularly provided for personal or household expenses.

**Amenities (noun):** something that helps to provide comfort, convenience, or enjoyment.

**Appomattox Campaign (noun):** a series of battles fought during the American Civil War between Union Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant's troops and the troops of Robert E. Lee, a Confederate General. This campaign was fought in Virginia and ended with General Lee surrendering to General Grant at the Appomattox Courthouse.

**Assistant doorkeeper (noun):** someone who assists patrons in the lobby or entrance of a building. They could hail cabs, answer questions, open doors, or keep out those who were not supposed to be there.

**Black Codes (noun):** restrictive laws designed to limit the freedom and rights of African Americans after the Civil War. Although slavery was outlawed in the South after the Civil War, many places created restrictions to keep formerly enslaved people from finding economic success and political empowerment.

**Black Literary Societies (noun):** groups that met to debate topics that impacted Black Americans and gave members practice with public speaking and political advocacy. This was meant to increase their awareness of the world around them and prepare them to possibly become politicians and/or activists.

**Civic Engagement (noun):** active participation in some level of government, voting, or social movement.

**Civil War (noun):** wars fought by two groups, each part of the same population. More specifically, the American Civil War, fought between the Union (north) and Confederate (south) states over the status of existing and expanding slavery.

**"Colored" (adjective):** a word used to describe a person of color in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century; more specifically, a Black or African American person. This term is no longer commonly used as it can be considered disrespectful or antiquated.

**Colored State League (noun):** the Afro American League was a national organization that fought racial terror like lynching and abuse, as well as spreading information on the problems throughout the North, where the issues were not as visible.

**Confederate (noun/adjective):** one who supported the Confederate States in the American Civil War; of or relating to the Confederate States.

**Deadlock (noun):** a state of inaction or neutralization resulting from the opposition of equally powerful uncompromising persons or factions; a standstill.

**Debate (noun):** verbal disagreement or contention between two or more sides.

**Deliberated (verb):** to think about or discuss issues and decisions carefully, often with formal discussion.

**Denied (verb):** to declare (something) to be untrue.

**Disproportionately (adverb):** in an unfair or inequitable manner.

**Distinction (noun):** special honor or recognition, especially for a personal accomplishment.

**Emancipation (noun):** the act or process of freeing from restraint, control, or bondage.

**Emancipation Proclamation (noun):** President Abraham Lincoln's proclamation which declared that enslaved people in areas rebelling against the United States were to be freed. This act took effect on January 1, 1863 and opened the door for the eventual freedom of all slaves within the United States after the Civil War.

**Empowerment (noun):** the act or action of empowering someone or something : the granting of the power, right, or authority to perform various acts or duties.

**Endured (verb):** to remain firm under suffering or misfortune without giving up.

**Enslaved (adjective):** a word to describe someone who is being held in captivity and forced to do unpaid labor. At the time, the enslaved people in the U.S. South were considered property of the person who "owned" them.

**Free Ground (noun):** a space in a cemetery set aside to bury people who could not afford to buy their own gravesite or headstone.

**Freedmen (noun):** a name for individuals who were enslaved before the American Civil War but were legally considered "freed" at the end of the conflict.

**Garrison Duty (noun):** the job of guarding a town, city, or geographic area at a strategically placed outpost.

**Incumbent (noun):** the holder of an office; one that occupies a particular position or place.

**Influencers (noun):** individuals with a lot of impact in an area; they may have the power to influence others' perspectives or decisions whether conscious or not.

**Influenza (noun):** an acute, highly contagious, respiratory disease.

**Judicial (adjective):** of or related to a court or legal system; the branch of the government charged with trying court cases.

**Juneteenth (noun):** a holiday celebrated on June 19<sup>th</sup> each year. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger finally enforced the Emancipation Proclamation in Texas. Prior to this, many Texans who “owned” enslaved people had ignored the proclamation.

**Juror (noun):** a member of a committee for judging and agreeing on a verdict, especially in a court of law.

**Latrines (noun):** a receptacle (such as a pit in the earth) for use as a toilet.

**Legacy (noun):** something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past; how a person is remembered in the future.

**Legislature (noun):** an organized body having the authority to make laws for a political unit such as the United States.

**Levy (verb):** the seizure of one’s property or assets to pay off their tax debts.

**“Mulatto” (adjective):** an antiquated word used to describe someone who was mixed race in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This term is now considered offensive and derogatory and is no longer used in common conversation.

**Net Pay (noun):** the total amount somebody gets paid minus the amount that they lose to taxes, required payments, or fees.

**Oppression (noun):** unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power, especially against a specific group of people.

**Pathways (noun):** a path or course leading to an ultimate end goal.

**Platform (noun):** a series of beliefs and goals adopted by a political party or candidate.

**Political Appointment (noun):** a position in government that is chosen by an elected official rather than being voted on by constituents.

**Prejudice (noun):** preconceived judgment or opinion about someone that negatively impacts the way they are treated.

**Principal Musician (noun):** the lead player of one instrument in an orchestra or large ensemble.

**Private (noun):** a person of low rank in the marine corps or army.

**Progressive (adjective):** making use of or interested in new ideas, findings, or opportunities.

**Prominent (adjective):** widely and popularly known; readily noticeable.

**Proprietor (noun):** a person who has the legal right or exclusive title to something.

**Racism (noun):** the individual mistreatment or systemic oppression of a group due to their actual or perceived race.

**Ratification (noun):** the act or process of confirming a legal decision such as a treaty or amendment.

**Restaurateur (noun):** the operator or proprietor of a restaurant.

**Revenue (noun):** the total income produced by a given source.

**Segregated (adjective):** dividing or separating people based on certain attributes or labels, especially race.

**Servitude (noun):** the state of being enslaved or completely subject to someone with power over you.

**“Shoo In” (noun):** a person or thing that is certain to win or succeed.

**Slurs (noun):** an insulting or disparaging remark; insulting and derogatory terms.

**Staunch (adjective):** steadfast in loyalty or principle.

**Strife (noun):** hardship, difficulty, or conflict.

**Third Ward (noun):** one of nine districts within Bloomington, each with their own City Councilperson.

**Traitor (noun):** one who betrays another's trust or is false to an obligation or duty.

**Union Army (noun):** during the American Civil War, the army made up of soldiers from northern states that fought against the seceding Confederate States.

**Unparalleled (adjective):** having no equal match; unique in quality.

**Willfully (adverb):** doing something intentionally and of one's own free will.

**15<sup>th</sup> Amendment (noun):** an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that gave Black men the right to vote. However, many states put other requirements and roadblocks in place meant to target Black voters specifically. Women would not be given the right to vote in the United States until the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment was ratified in 1920.



## Black soldiers served as ‘sable arm’ of Union Army

Bill Kemp; February 13, 2011



Appearing in a March 1865 issue of Harper's Weekly, this image shows the "colored" 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment marching through the burned-out Confederate city of Charleston, S.C. Thirteen African-American soldiers from Mclean County served in the 55th. (Photo courtesy of the Library of Congress)

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the start of the Civil War, and commemorating this momentous event in American history lends special resonance to February and Black History Month.

Nearly 180,000 African-Americans served in the Union Army, or about 10 percent of all Northern troops. Some 40,000 of these "sable sons" in blue died in uniform, and this remarkable record of service played no small role in ensuring the monstrous evil of slavery would not survive the collapse of the Confederacy.

In McLean County, at least 39 African-Americans enlisted in the Union Army. Twenty-six served in the 29th Regiment Infantry U.S. Colored Troops, and 13 others enlisted in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, one of that state's "colored" units. Thirteen of the 39, or exactly one-third, never made it home.

What's remarkable about several of these men is that they proudly and publicly scorned the generally subservient role expected of black troops. In December 1863, The Pantagraph ran a lengthy letter from John Abbott of the 55th Massachusetts. Dated Nov. 10 from Folly Island, S.C., Abbott complained of "mean partiality" when it came to the treatment black regiments received at the hands of Union brass.

A common complaint was that black soldiers shouldered an undue share what was called "fatigue duty," which included clearing roads and digging latrines. Abbott, a 22-year-old stable hand from Bloomington, pointed to disparities in both pay and responsibilities. "The gallant 55th has the praise of being the best regiment that has ever been in this department," he wrote, "and yet [Union commanders] don't feel disposed to give us what is the most essential to us as a people and a race — and that is, equality with the white man."

The 55th participated in William T. Sherman's Atlanta, Ga., campaign and the subsequent March to the Sea. On Nov. 30, the regiment suffered more than 100 casualties in five awful minutes during the Battle of Honey Hill, S.C.

The 29th, the other black regiment with Bloomington men, organized in Quincy, in the spring of 1864. After being dispatched to the Eastern Theater, the 29th saw more than its share of hard campaigning, most notably during the sieges of Petersburg and Richmond, Va.

The regiment took heavy losses on July 30, 1864 during Battle of the Crater at Petersburg. In order to establish a breach in Gen. Robert E. Lee's defensive works, Pennsylvania soldiers dug a tunnel under the Confederate breastworks and then filled the "mine" with explosives. Disastrously, the explosion created a massive crater into which the Union troops, black and white, poured into only to realize this made them little more than fish in a barrel, with Confederates raining fire from above.

During that Union defeat, the 29th attacked the Confederate works to the right of the crater. Eleven officers and 113 enlisted men from the regiment were killed, wounded or captured, with the dead including Chicagoan John A. Bross, the 29th's white colonel.

Bloomingtonian William McCoslin, who was a barber before the war, described the assault in a letter to his wife published in late August in *The Pantagraph*: "I hope you will not be uneasy about me for I am safe and sound, and feel as though I will go through all right," he wrote. "Give my respects to all my friends, tell them that the colored soldiers can fight and have the honor of being brave."

In early November 1865, *The Pantagraph* published another letter by McCoslin, this one written Sept. 14 from Ringgold Barracks, Texas, on the Rio Grande River. That spring, the men of the 29th had participated in the Appomattox, Va. campaign before finding themselves, at war's end, in Texas.

McCoslin, though proud of his regiment's role in quelling the "slaveocratic rebellion," said black troops shouldered an inequitable share of the most disagreeable assignments. While many white regiments had been mustered out and the soldiers welcomed home, the 29th was marooned in an "unhealthy country," with disease threatening to finish off those fortunate to survive the twin killers of Confederate fire and disease.

"Colored soldiers — volunteer soldiers — men of free birth and high aspirations responded to their country's call to see the day when justice, according to merit, and not prejudice according to color, would be their reward," he wrote. "Oh, my wounded country!"

The 29th mustered out on Nov. 6, 1865, six months after the end of the war. McCoslin returned to Bloomington, where he died 10 years later.

## Frederick Douglass frequently spoke in Bloomington

Bill Kemp; December 29, 2013



Frederick Douglass, the former slave turned abolitionist and champion of the disenfranchised, lectured in Bloomington no less than four times in the years before and after the Civil War. (Courtesy of the McLean County Museum of History)

Frederick Douglass, the former slave turned abolitionist and champion of the disenfranchised, lectured in Bloomington no less than four times in the years before and after the Civil War.

Born about 1818 (as a slave, his birthday — let alone birth year — were unknown), Douglass escaped to freedom around the age of 20. His autobiography, “Narrative of the Life of

Frederick Douglass, an American Slave,” remains one of the enduring works of American letters. And as a newspaper editor, orator, social reformer and statesmen, he is generally regarded as one of the more influential Americans of the 19th century.

Douglass’ first known appearance in Bloomington was on March 1, 1859, at Phoenix Hall on the Courthouse Square.

His visit sparked a row between competing Bloomington newspapers — The Pantagraph, a Republican Party organ that opposed the further expansion of slavery, and The Illinois Statesmen, a Democratic weekly that held far friendlier opinions on the “peculiar institution.”

The Statesmen often warned its readers that “Black Republicanism” (that is, opposition to slavery and/or support for certain African-American rights) would eventually lead to the horrors of integrated schools and mixed-race marriages. In the case of Douglass’ visit, The Statesmen craftily (even hypocritically) turned its own argument on its head, taking perverse joy by claiming local Republicans — now somehow described as closeted racists — ignored Douglass because he was black, and by doing so unwittingly demonstrated the folly of racial equality!

“Does not this treatment of ‘Fred,’ on your part, give the lie to all your profession about ‘equality of the races’ ... and that you really care as little about the inferior races as any other class of people?” asked The Statesmen of local Republicans. For its part, The Statesmen remained committed to its view that African Americans “are not, and ought not to be citizens of this country, enjoying equal privileges with the white race.”

Such was the political and social environment Douglass encountered — in the North!

The Pantagraph dismissed its competitor’s crude race baiting, noting that Douglass delivered an “able and eloquent lecture on slavery” to a “large audience, of all shades of political opinion.”

Yet truth be told, many Republicans (especially those interested in downplaying the radicalism of their anti-slavery party) were hesitant of appearing too chummy with an African-American abolitionist for fear of alienating white moderate voters.

Douglass was back in Bloomington on April 5, 1866, this during the tumultuous early Reconstruction era when President Andrew Johnson, who disdained the idea of African-American equality, clashed with radical Republicans in Congress, whose leaders called for civil and political rights for freed people.

Escorting Douglass onto the Bloomington stage that evening were representatives from the local African-American community, including the Rev. R. Allen from the African-Methodist-Episcopal (AME) Church, Samuel Witherspoon and Richard Blue. “His eloquent address on the assassination and Reconstruction, and his well-timed denunciations of A. Johnson, met the hearty approval of the large audience,” noted *The Pantagraph* of Douglass.

Less than two years later, March 4, 1868, Douglass returned to Bloomington, this time speaking at Schroder’s Opera House on the topic “Self-Made Men.”

“He made some fine points, and displayed at times not only gleams of native and sarcastic wit, but rose at intervals to eloquence,” remarked *The Pantagraph*. Not everyone was so kind. When Douglass talked of “lazy rebels in New Orleans” he was greeted by a hiss from someone in the audience. “Whether proceeding from a sibilant unreconstructed rebel, whom the imputation of native sloth hit, or not, could not be ascertained, though there were not a few who desired to identify the individual,” commented *The Pantagraph*.

From all available evidence, Douglass’ last appearance in Bloomington was on Jan. 9, 1873. “Although the evening was bitter cold,” *The Pantagraph* reported, “the hall was filled with people, quite a number of whom were Negroes, who always embrace an opportunity of listening to their gifted champion.”

According to local press accounts, Douglass’ lecture on “San Domingo” (now known as the Dominican Republic) was a rather uninspired affair. *The Pantagraph* observed that the audience was more interested in Douglass than his lecture — covering as it did the “unimportant matter” of San Domingo and the debate over its annexation (of which he was a strong supporter).

Douglass was said to lack “his usual vigor” that evening, choosing to “rather tamely and laboriously” read from his prepared remarks. Yet with a few fleeting discursions he returned to

form. “On one or two occasions,” noted a local reporter, “he left for a moment his manuscript, and then flashed forth the old eloquence and spirit that has rendered the name of Frederick Douglass famous, and placed him among the most gifted of American orators.”