

“Social Studies / History Activity”

“Slavery and the U.S. Legal System”

Background

By 1860, Missouri’s demographics had changed dramatically since its entry into the Union as a slave state in 1820. One hundred thousand Kentuckians had settled in the central region of Missouri where they found fertile lands for cultivation and invaluable waterways for transporting products to southern markets and the rapidly growing city of St. Louis. Many of these settlers lived the ideal agrarian life of Jeffersonian political thought. They believed America should be a nation of farmers, and argued that a virtuous life on the land was the true destiny of America. The fertile soil of the region allowed for cash crops, especially hemp, to be cultivated. The combination of fertile soil and easy access to transportation made slavery profitable throughout the Missouri River Valley. By 1860, 77 percent of Missouri’s 114,509 slaves resided along the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers where the cash crops of the South were prevalent.

Likewise, slavery was profitable in southeast Arkansas, where cotton production boomed along the Mississippi River. Many of the settlers in Arkansas believed that slavery was an essential way of life. They saw the expansion of the federal government’s power as a threat to individual freedoms and property rights. Arkansas Democrats and Whigs alike lobbied in favor of slavery. The northwest corner of Arkansas and the southwest corner of Missouri are commonly known as the Ozarks. In contrast to the river regions of Missouri and Arkansas, the Ozarks had relatively few slaves.

A majority of the Ozarks’ emigrants were from Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. They found the landscape similar to their native state. White farmers settled the region, working the land and building communities without chattel labor. While tobacco and cotton were grown in the Ozarks, the region’s lack of railroads or navigable rivers made it difficult to transport cash crops. Instead, farmers grew corn and other cereal grains for consumption.

The traditional conception of a slave owner, who lived on a large plantation with multiple slaves, was not common in the Ozarks. In fact most owners worked alongside their slaves to cultivate crops. The Ozarks also contained Unionist slave-owners. Lucy M. Garrett, a Unionist in Greenfield, Missouri, exchanged her slaves for land in fear that they would be confiscated by Rebels. As the war progressed more and more African Americans earned their freedom, either legally or illegally. Some had the opportunity to join the Union Army. Views of African American soldiers varied from regiment to regiment, but many white soldiers were eager to have help fighting the Rebels, especially if it ended the war more quickly.

As the War came to its bloody conclusion in mid-1865, the freed slaves of the Ozarks were faced with a choice of where to go, what to do, and how to do it. Data from the 1870 census shows an overall drop in the number of African Americans who lived in each county, with only a few, among them Greene county, showing population gains. This would suggest that a great number of freedmen relocated outside of the Ozarks to cities of industry, in order to seek employment and the benefits of urbanization.

The slave trade was a complex legal system and there was a set of laws which governed the buying and selling of slaves. Buyer completed legally binding contracts when they purchased slaves and each slave had documentation papers verifying their status. As time progressed, African-Americans gained a more vocal role in this system and in some instances even incited legal action to gain their freedom and rights.

Task

This task is designed for use at the fourth, eighth, and high school grade levels. Questions and activities corresponding with the respective levels are located with each activity. Teachers are encouraged to use or adapt the provided sample questions for their individual classroom. Students will read four historical narratives involving slaves: Mary et al vs. Buffard William, State of Missouri vs. Drew, Charles Wadlow Case, and Higdon R. Jarrett Case. They will choose one of the cases to write a newspaper article describing the case and slavery in the Ozarks. The article should be written for the local newspaper during the 1850s-1860s. Students should consider the following issues: the average number of slaves and slave owners in the Ozarks, economic value of slaves, effect of John Brown and Jim Lane on slaves and slave owners, economic activities performed by slaves, and views of white civilians and soldiers African American soldiers. Students are expected to provide verbal or written feedback regarding the primary source documents. Students may have to do additional research to complete the assignment.

Show-Me Knowledge Standards Addressed

SS 2 (knowledge of) continuity and change in the history of Missouri, the United States and the world

SS 6 (knowledge of) relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions

SS 7 (knowledge of) the use of tools of social science inquiry (such as surveys, statistics, maps, documents)

CA 1 (knowledge of) speaking and writing standard English (including grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, capitalization)

CA 3 (knowledge of) reading and evaluating nonfiction works and material (such as biographies, newspapers, technical manuals)

CA 4 (knowledge of) writing formally (such as reports, narratives, essays) and informally (such as outlines, notes)

CA 6 (knowledge of) participating in formal and informal presentations and discussions of issues

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and ideas

MA 3 (knowledge of) data analysis, probability, and statistics

Show-Me Performance Standards Addressed

- 1.2 conduct research to answer questions and evaluate information and ideas
- 1.5 comprehend and evaluate written, visual and oral presentations and works
- 2.1 plan and make written, oral and visual presentations for a variety of purposes and audiences
- 2.3 exchange information, questions and ideas while recognizing the perspective of others
- 3.1 identify problems and define their scope and elements
- 4.1 explain reasoning and identify information used to support decisions
- 4.3 analyze the duties and responsibilities of individuals in societies

Activities

Read the historical narrative for the case of Mary et al vs. Buffard William (See Resource Packet)

- The full transcripts of the case are available through *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- <http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/744>

Read the narrative for case of the State of Missouri vs. Drew (See Resource Packet)

- The full transcripts of the case are available through *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- <http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/1537>

Read the narrative of the Charles Wadlow Case (See Resource Packet)

- The full transcripts of the case are available through *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- <http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/3319>

Read the narrative of the Higdon R. Jarrett Case (See Resource Packet)

- The full transcripts of the case are available through *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- <http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/3518>

Study the Missouri County Population Table and The Average Number of Slaves per Owner Table use the information to answer the following questions

Discussion Questions

(4th Grade)

- Explain why African-Americans were not allowed to testify in court.
- Why do you think the Supreme Court overturned the decision in the Wadlow case?
- Tell what the slave codes were.
- Add how many slaves were in the Ozarks in 1860. What county had the highest slave population? What counties had the lowest?

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(8th Grade)

- *Explain why African-Americans were not allowed to testify in court.*
- *Why do you think the Supreme Court overturned the decision in the Wadlow case?*
- *What were the slave codes?*
- *Add how many slaves were in the Ozarks in 1860. Give reasons why this number was either higher or lower than you expected. What county had the highest slave population? What counties had the lowest?*
- *Why would Greene County have such a high slave population?*

(High School)

- *Explain why African-Americans were not allowed to testify in court.*
- *Why do you think the Supreme Court overturned the decision in the Wadlow case?*
- *Tell what the slave codes were.*
- *Look at the Population Table. Were there a large number of slaves in the Ozarks? Why or Why not? What county had the highest slave population? What counties had the lowest?*
- *Why would Greene County have such a high slave population?*

-Write a newspaper article about one of the court cases you read discussing slavery in the Ozarks.

- The article should be written for the local newspaper during the 1850s-1860s.
- The article should be a minimum of two paragraphs and a maximum of five.
- Students should consider the following issues: the average number of slaves and slave owners in the Ozarks, economic value of slaves, effect of John Brown and Jim Lane on slaves and slave owners, economic activities performed by slaves, and views of white civilians and soldiers African American soldiers.

Extra Enrichment Activity: Acting out the Charles Wadlow Case

- Have students read for the different individuals involved in the case.

Case of Wadlow vs. Perryman Script

Characters needed: Charles Wadlow, John G. Perryman, Court Clerk, Judge, Mrs. Whittenburg, Foreman, jurors

Court Clerk: Here on 16th day of November 1857 Charles Wadlow the Plaintiff has filed suit against John G. Perryman the Defendant in Greene County in the State of Missouri. The Plaintiff states that the Defendant on September 20th of 1856 sold him a slave name Violet and her child named Aaron for the price of Eight hundred & seventy five dollars which sum Plaintiff paid to Defendant. The Plaintiff states that at said Sale said slaves were not sound but diseased and unsound and are worth nothing and are an expense to Plaintiff. Plaintiff is seeking \$1,000 in damages.

Judge: Mr. Wadlow please state your case before the jury.

Charles Wadlow: On September 20th 1856, Mr. Perryman sold me two slaves for cash. I took possession of them four or five weeks later and he gave me a receipt for my purchase. Mr. Perryman was not skilled in legal phraseology so he used his own words describing the slaves to be sound. Once I had received the slaves I found them to be in poor condition and requested a refund from Mr. Perryman, which he refused to give me.

Judge: Thank you Mr. Wadlow for your testimony. Now, Mr. Perryman please give the court your account of the events that occurred between you and Mr. Wadlow.

John G. Perryman: I did just as the plaintiff, Mr. Wadlow has stated, but the slaves were sound and healthy at the time of the sale.

Charles Wadlow: Your honor, I would like to call Mrs Whittenburg to the stand. Mrs. Whittenburg what do know about the condition of Ms. Violet?

Mrs. Whittenburg: I was asked to wait on Violet when she was put to bed after arriving at your home, and while waiting on her I discovered that she could not lay on one side. I asked her why she couldn't lay on that side and she said she had never been able to lie on that side because it hurt too much.

Charles Wadlow: Did you try and convince Violet to lay on the other side.

Mrs. Whittenburg: I did try and get her to lay on the other side but she refused and said she couldn't on account of the pain and hurting which she then complained of for the rest of the night.

Judge: The jury will ignore the testimony of the witness, when making their decision.

Foreman: We the jury rule in favor of the Defendant, Mr. John G. Perryman.

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(Charles Wadlow, displeased with the outcome decided to appeal the case to the State Supreme Court, in which they sided with Mr. Wadlow, sighting that the lower courts had erred in not allowing the testimony be submitted into evidence.)

Missouri County Population Table (1860)

Counties in Missouri	Slave Population in 1860	Total Population in 1860	% of population that were slaves
Barry County	257	7,748	3.31
Barton County	21	1,817	1.15
Bates County	443	6,773	6.54
Camden County	136	5,000	2.72
Cedar County	211	6,428	3.28
Christian County	NA	5,263	----
Dade County	350	6,727	5.20
Dallas County	138	5,778	2.38
Douglas County	NA	2,429	----
Greene County	1,668	11,470	14.5
Hickory County	196	4,511	4.33
Howell County	36	3,133	1.14
Jasper County	334	6,548	5.10
Laclede County	305	5,200	5.86
Lawrence County	245	5,000	4.90
McDonald County	72	3,976	1.81
Newton County	49	8,895	0.55
Ozark County	43	2,404	1.78
Phelps County	NA	5,630	----
Polk County	522	10,000	5.22
Pulaski County	56	3,777	1.48
St. Clair County	NA	6,235	----
Stone County	16	2,384	0.67
Taney County	82	3,494	2.34
Texas County	56	6,013	0.93
Vernon County	140	4,707	2.97
Webster County	270	6,886	3.92
Wright County	66	4,441	1.48

Average Number of slaves per owner in Missouri (1860)

County	Total Slaveholders	Total Slaves	Avg. Number of Slaves per owner
Adair	33	86	2.6
Andrews	240	880	3.7
Atchison	29	59	2
Audrain	327	1,166	3.6
Barry	54	247	4.6
Barton	11	21	1.9
Bates	112	442	3.9
Benton	123	599	4.9
Bollinger	55	245	4.5
Boone	885	5,034	5.7
Buchanan	468	2,011	4.3
Butler	15	52	3.5
Caldwell	72	222	3.1
Callaway	855	4,523	5.3
Camden	66	266	4
Cape Girardeau	302	1,533	5.1
Carroll	262	1,068	4.1
Cass	307	1,010	3.3
Carter	8	20	2.5
Cedar	72	111	1.5
Chariton	410	2,839	6.9
Christian	66	229	3.5
Clark	122	455	3.7
Clay	651	3,455	5.3
Clinton	283	1,144	4
Cole	169	987	5.8
Cooper	732	3,800	5.2
Crawford	52	182	3.5
Dade	107	346	3.2
Dallas	40	114	2.9
Davies	116	358	3.1
DeKalb	52	137	2.6
Dent	45	156	3.5
Dunklin	44	171	3.9
Franklin	293	1,601	5.5
Gasconade	28	76	2.7

Gentry	44	118	2.7
Greene	338	1,688	4.9
Grundy	97	285	2.9
Harrison	13	25	1.9
Henry	298	1,245	4.2
Hickory	69	195	2.8
Holt	88	309	3.5
Howard	801	5,886	7.3
Howell	67	136	2
Iron	67	313	4.7
Jackson	898	3,944	4.4
Jasper	107	335	3.1
Jefferson	137	564	4.1
Johnson	465	1,896	4.1
Knox	94	1,895	20.2
Laclede	67	305	4.6
Lafayette	909	6,374	7
Lawrence	76	284	3.7
Lewis	350	1,279	3.7
Lincoln	573	2,840	5
Linn	143	577	4
Livingston	139	605	4.4
Macon	200	660	3.3
Madison	197	467	2.4
Maries	26	64	2.5
Marion	817	3,017	3.7
McDonald	25	72	2.9
Mercer	12	24	2
Miller	71	238	3.4
Mississippi	160	1,010	6.3
Moniteau	137	745	5.4
Monroe	733	3022	4.1
Montgomery	373	1647	4.4
Morgan	138	649	4.7
New Madrid	238	1,777	7.5
Newton	141	426	3
Nodaway	35	127	3.6
Oregon	13	26	2
Osage	71	256	3.6
Ozark	11	43	3.9

Pemiscot	74	268	3.6
Perry	187	739	4
Pettis	393	1,882	4.9
Phelps	24	84	3.5
Pike	871	4,055	4.7
Platte	674	3,313	4.9
Polk	145	512	3.5
Pulaski	20	56	2.8
Putnam	12	31	2.6
Ralls	378	1,791	4.7
Randolph	504	2,619	5.2
Ray	475	2,047	4.3
Reynolds	14	38	2.7
Ripley	30	78	2.6
St. Charles	379	2,181	5.8
St. Clair	133	574	4.3
St. Francis	195	877	4.5
St. Genevieve	119	618	5.2
St. Louis	1,156	3,346	2.9
Saline	693	4,876	7
Schuyler	16	39	2.4
Scotland	51	131	2.6
Scott	91	503	5.5
Shannon	3	13	4.3
Shelby	234	724	3.1
Stoddard	83	215	2.6
Stone	8	16	2
Sullivan	28	102	3.6
Taney	24	82	3.4
Texas	21	57	2.7
Vernon	54	136	2.5
Warren	229	1,034	4.5
Washington	188	1,028	5.5
Wayne	71	261	3.7
Webster	73	220	3
Wright	29	66	2.3
Total	24,320	114,931	4.7

Resource Packet

Mary et al. vs. Buffard, William T – Petition for Freedom

The Freedom Papers comprise of a series of court documents regarding a petition for freedom filed on October 30th, 1843, in Greene County, Missouri, by a female African American slave named Mary.

This twelve page collection is a classic example of the personal strife and injustices African Americans were forced to endure before emancipation. Mary filed a petition in Greene County, Missouri for her freedom, and for that of: Jefferson, Mariah, and Jerry, her three minor children. Mary claimed that she had been freed in the will of her former owner, Matthew McClain, Sr. in the County of Henderson in the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Mary claimed that McClain Sr. “forever freed” her upon his death. However, the Administrator of the estate, ignored the wishes of McClain Sr. as stipulated in his will, and sold her to William B. Edwards. Edwards later brought her to Missouri. In Missouri, Edwards sold Mary and her children again, this time to William T. Buffard, of Niangua County.

Mary also filed a petition against Buffard, seeking damages in the amount of one thousand dollars. She claimed Buffard was guilty of assault, having beaten, bruised, ill treated, and imprisoned her for the duration of one month without any probable cause. In the interest of each of child, Jerry, Jefferson and Mariah, she filed three additional petitions for damages in the amount of one thousand dollars for each. The charges were based on assault, having beaten, bruised, ill treated, and imprisoned them for a month without any probably cause.

Buffard, neither admitted to enslaving Mary and her children, or the violent means that he employed to do so. He further filed a motion to dismiss her claim for freedom and damages, citing that “there (was) no order of Court permitting said Plaintiff to sue (and) collect.”

State of Missouri vs. Drew, a slave – 1847

In 1847, Drew, a slave belonging to Edward Thomson, poisoned a fellow slave named Lige. The exact details of the murder may never be known, but other slaves on the estate submitted depositions in court. Such documents are rare because slaves had limited access to the courts in Antebellum America. Since no white persons were involved, slaves were allowed to testify with little or no restrictions. The validity of these depositions is questionable as some are hearsay, but they offer valuable insight into the lives and living conditions of slaves in Greene County, Missouri.

In the spring of 1847, Drew and Lige had several disagreements. The exact origins of the arguments are unknown, but their arguments were public knowledge. Abram, a fellow slave, witnessed Lige and Drew arguing on the Springfield Square in May 1847. The argument ended with Drew threatening to “fix” Lige. Mahailey, a female slave, added, “I heard Drew say that he allowed to give Lige his dose for whipping of him – I heard him threaten him Lige more than once making use of about the same Language.” Within the next month Lige became extremely ill. Doctors treated his Typhoid Fever like symptoms with “large portions of Opium.” Lige died two weeks after becoming sick.

Shortly after Lige’s death, Nancy, a fellow slave, saw Drew and Yellow John, another slave, having an argument. Approximately a week later, Yellow John contracted very similar symptoms to Lige. By July, Drew was charged with murder. Nancy learned that Drew and Titus, a younger male slave, purchased a pint of whiskey from a store in Springfield. They then brought the whiskey back to the estate and shared a portion of it with a third slave named Old John Haden. Obtaining the whiskey did not draw suspicion to Drew, as one slave noted, “It is common for the boys to have flasks of Liquor.”

Moses, also a slave, testified that Drew, Titus and Old John met in John’s quarters. After ushering all of the children from the room they locked the door to meet. Several slaves saw Drew with a fine white powder, similar in appearance to flour. Some of the witnesses identified the substance as ratsbane, a white powdered trioxide of arsenic. Ratsbane was used as a pesticide (rat poison) and weed killer. According to Moses, Drew offered Old John five dollars for mixing the powder and whiskey. Other witnesses testified that aqua fortis was also added to the whiskey. Aqua fortis is a solution of nitric acid and water, and was another pesticide. Moses testified that the trio became paranoid that someone might peer between the cracks in the wall and spot their mischievous deeds. They dispersed and relocated to a large “ruff” in the back of the field to mix the substances. This new location offered more privacy, as very few people passed through the area.

Once the poison was mixed it was given to Titus to pass to Lige. Perhaps Lige would have been suspicious of a gift from Drew, but Titus appeared as an innocent third party. Titus found Lige in the Layton shop with a couple other slaves.

I was in Layton shop when Titus came there with a bottle of liquor and asked Lige if he did not want a draw Titus handed Lige the bottle and he drank some of the Liquor

Finis and Horace slaves were in there at the time and he never asked them or myself to drink anything – When he gave Lige the bottle he told him to keep the bottle until he came after it and Lige set it down by him on the bench – Lige was taken sick the evening of the day he drank the Liquor

[Jim Sims Deposition – July 2, 1847](#)

Finis reported that he, Lige and Yellow John planned to meet later that night. Lige, however, became very sick. He offered the whiskey to both Finis and Yellow John, who drank from the flask. It is unknown if Finis or Yellow John became sick from their single draw.

The doctors had difficulties determining the source of Lige's illness. They treated him with different types of medicine, which resulted in varying degrees of success. Lige eventually died from his illness. The doctors reported that Lige did not show signs of being poisoned, and they could not determine a cause of death without a postmortem examination, which was not completed.

Nancy added to her deposition that she saw Drew arguing with Yellow John shortly after Lige's death. She then saw Drew with a strange red liquid. She asked Drew about it, and he told her it was whiskey. Nancy noted it was too red to be whiskey, and about a week later Yellow John became very sick. One of the doctors that treated Lige also treated Yellow John. He noted that Yellow John displayed similar symptoms as Lige before he died. It is unknown if Yellow John was indeed poisoned, if he recovered or if he died from the illness.

Drew pled not guilty to the murder charge. He claimed to have no knowledge of the poison mentioned by the witnesses. Drew's fate and the ultimate outcome of the case are unknown, as the historical records did not survive. Drew posted \$500 for bail, paid for with his labor and produce from his master's estate. While the outcome of the trial is unclear, the witnesses offer depositions condemning Drew's actions.

Charles Wadlow vs. John G. Perryman-1857

Charles Wadlow lived in Cass Township, in Greene County, Missouri. He worked his land cultivating crops, and in 1860 he owned three slaves, a 36 year old female, 1 33 year old male and a 5 year old girl. Four years earlier, Wadlow purchased two additional slaves. On September 20, 1856, he bought a slave named Violet and her son named Aaron from Benjamin Perryman for \$875. However, when he received Violet and Aaron he found that they were “diseased and unsound” and not in the fit condition as Perryman stated. Wadlow attempted to seek refund for his purchase.

On May 4th, 1858 Wadlow filed a claim against Benjamin Perryman in the Probate and Common Plea court in Greene County, Missouri for one thousand dollars. The outcome of the case hinged on the definition of the slaves’ condition. The way to determine the “sound condition” of a slave was very subjective and the evidence to prove that a slave was “worthless” had to be quite substantial for a claim to hold any legal standing in a court of law. When Violet and Aaron came to Wadlow, they were very ill. Mrs. Whittenburg, another slave of Wadlow’s, testified that when she helped Violet into bed she “discovered that the Negro woman could not lie on one side because it caused her a lot of pain.”

The declarations of the Negro woman, Mrs. Whittenburg, were excluded by the court, and because the judge did not allow her testimony, the verdict came back in the favor of Perryman. Charles Wadlow, displeased with the outcome, decided to appeal the case to the State Supreme Court, in which they sided with Mr. Wadlow; sighting that the lower courts had erred in not allowing the testimony be submitted into evidence.

We see no difference between this case and that of Man vs Hill & Haynes, 10 Mo. 323. The evidence offered by the plaintiff of the declarations of the slave, made whilst she was laboring under sickness, as to the cause of her illness and the source of it, was admissible and the Court erred in excluding them. With the concurrence of the other Judges, the judgment is reversed and the cause remanded

[Charles Wadlow vs. John G. Perryman.](#)

The slave laws that prevailed during the time did not allow for a slave to testify against a white person in court. However, since Mrs. Whittenberg was not testifying against Mr. Perryman, only stating the condition she saw Violet in after Wadlow bought her, her testimony was legally admissible into court. The case was returned to the Common Plea court, and no documentation of further ruling could be located.

Higdon R. Jarrett vs. Joseph T. Morton, 1865-1868

On April 13th 1865, Higdon R. Jarrett filed suit against Joseph T. Morton for not fulfilling a contract he had entered into for the exchange of two slaves. The exchange took place so that the slaves could remain with their families.

Col H. [Higdon] R. Jarrett and Col [Joseph T.] Morton had made a settlement of the difference between them in regard to the swopping of their negroes, Green [Greene] & Wyatt, & that Morton had given up to him Jarrett the note he held against him as payment of the difference in the terms of the use of said negroes & Jarrett told Morton there were some credits on said note which he had forgotten when he agreed to take the note, as a settlement of the transaction. Jarrett told Morton that he must pay him something more –since he had discovered there were credits on the note he had forgotten – but if Morton would pay him the amount of these credits he would then be satisfied

- Higdon R. Jarrett vs. Joseph T. Morton, 1865-1868. S/F 32, Greene County Archives and Records Center, Springfield, Missouri, Deposition of John H. Miller

The situation became even more complicated when Joseph T. Morton's son, John A. Morton, entered a trade agreement on January 1862, with Mr. Jarrett without the consent of his father. John Morton agreed to exchange the slave, Wyatt, back to Jarrett in exchange for the slave, Greene. As his testimony revealed, John Morton believed the arrangement he had negotiated was in error, stating that he thought his father would have preferred that he had not made the trade. However, John Morton explained that he made the exchange in an effort to save Greene's life, which was threatened since he had given information of some brandy a neighbor of Jarrett's, Mr. McCracken, had to some soldiers, who then threatened McCracken to obtain the liquor. Joseph Morton, his son John, and Greene all returned to Arkansas, but a month after arrival Greene ran away and went back to Missouri. John Morton returned to Springfield, Missouri in September of 1862 and took Greene back into his possession. Morton stated, "I moved out to father's farm—I took Greene with me when I moved out to the farm—Greene was shot & killed."

Wyatt Jarrett, one of the slaves involved in the dispute, testified in court on Jarrett's behalf. Before the Emancipation Proclamation slaves were considered property and therefore, had no legal standing in the United States. Jarrett's case showed the change within the legal system, which allowed for African-American testimony to be, submitted as valid evidence in legal proceedings.

The way the swap was My master [Higdon R. Jarrett] was to Keep Greene [Green], and Mr [Joseph T.] Morton was to Keep me until Mr Morton came back to this country – And it was also agreed that when Mr Morton came back, That if Greene & Myself wished to stay as the swap

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then was, we could do so, if not we could go back to our old homes – My Master H.R. Jarrett & Mr J.T. Morton, made a swap & swapped back again, the way I understood it – that is, my Master H.R. Jarrett, swapped Greene back to Mr Morton for me – Mr J.T. Morton the deft told me that he & Mr H.R. Jarrett, had swapped me back to Mr H.R. Jarrett, for Greene.

- Higdon R. Jarrett vs. Joseph T. Morton, 1865-1868. S/F 32, Greene County Archives and Records Center, Springfield, Missouri, Deposition of Wyatt Jarrett

Higdon R. Jarrett submitted his testimony to the court and explained that he was just seeking the difference between what he and Mr. Morton had agreed upon and what he was actually paid. However, he did not want payment in Confederate currency. It was virtually worthless and could be purchased for 10¢ on the dollar.

The entire case hinged on Wyatt being profitable to Mr. Morton. Morton informed Jarrett that he would “pay him what was right” if Wyatt made him any money in Arkansas. Unfortunately, only worthless confederate currency was in circulation and since Morton was unable to find work for Wyatt that paid more than it cost to feed and clothe him, he did not believe he owed Jarrett any money because no profit was made. So, Jarrett brought suit against Morton to regain some of his financial losses.

Jarrett though appeared to try and receive double payment from Mr. Morton by settling the dispute outside of the court system, but then sued Mr. Morton over the same business deal. Once the judge became aware of this transaction he reversed the ruling of the court and dismissed the case stating “that if the plaintiff intended to rely on the action he brought in the Court he should have rescinded the Compromise entirely and returned the 50 dollars... he cannot bring this action whilst he recognizes the Compromise by keeping the 50 dollars. Judgment reversed and cause remanded.”

This is a very confusing court case and the accuracy of the events that happened is questionable. Disputes over slave contracts and trades were common. They increased after the slaves were freed because many owners faced a significant loss in equity.