

Subject: Theory of Knowledge/US History

Unit: American Slavery/Introduction to Historiography/History as an Area of Knowledge

Lesson Plan Title: Slavery & Historiography

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Rationale: The week has been emotional and introspective for me and I feel that a justification of our lesson plan is therefore necessary.

During my time here, as I confront images and hear the stories of those who lived through America's most horrifying institution, I have not been able to help but feel a renewed disbelief at the capacity for human cruelty. Studying this content is difficult on many levels. Most obviously, it is heart-wrenching to see human beings treat each other with such horrific disdain. Beneath the surface however, as I try to reconcile the sadness, it becomes increasingly more complicated. After all, it is impossible not to view the content of this workshop through a racial lens. In doing so, I become acutely aware that the heinous crimes perpetrated here and throughout the country were done by those with the color of my own skin. In this space, I am forced to reflect on just how much I have benefited, and continue to benefit, from both my race and gender in our society, and how connected this privilege is to the suffering of so many in the past and present. Ultimately, I cannot help but to feel guilty.

That being said, I do understand that guilt is necessary. That it is the product of a history that has produced inequities in society that bestow benefits and penalties on certain ethnic and racial groups. If there is any hope of addressing these inequities and creating a more just society, guilt, one of the most tangible and fundamental indicators of injustice, is necessary in order to spark change. In other words, it is not so much the guilt, as what one does with it that matters. Fortunately, as educators, we are in the position to do a lot to combat social injustice.

Here is a basic and pervasive fact: The legacy of slavery in the form of institutional racism is alive and well in the America of today, but white people, on the whole, are either largely oblivious to this fact, or unwilling to make tangible change to combat this injustice. Examining the way we *teach* slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, reveals that our pedagogy surrounding race in the classroom is perhaps partly to blame for this fact. Slavery, while horrifying, is taught as something that happened in the distant past, exclusively in the American south, and is accompanied by virtually no discussion as to the origins and purpose of racism. The Civil Rights Movement is taught as a movement that began in the 1940's and ended in the late 1960's- a problem we have solved and moved on from. Professor Matt Ferrence refers to the conscious or unconscious tactics employed by white educators to stifle meaningful dialogue surrounding institutionalized racism when discussing slavery and the Civil Rights Movement as the "filibuster of race," and I have seen it at work at every school I have ever worked at.

With no discussion about the origins or creation of racism in this country, our students are left to assume that it is natural for humans to enslave one another based on race, and that, institutionalized, contemporary, racism, was not the product of a sustained and intentional campaign to justify the continued use of slave labor in America. Furthermore, with no discussion of the shifting treatment of the historiography of slavery, students miss a valuable opportunity to address the critical role that the teaching and writing of history plays within a society. After all, as James Horton points out in the introduction to his excellent anthology, *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory*:

"...what we understand today as racism is largely a legacy of the slavery that formally ended nearly a century and a half ago. The history of American slavery is a shameful tale of inhumanity and human exploitation and of the attempt to hide national hypocrisy behind tortured theories of racial inequality.

The history of slavery continues to have meaning in the twentieth century—it burdens all of American history and is incorporated into public interpretations of the past.”¹

By focusing on the manner in which historians have written public interpretations of slavery, we are presented with a challenge, but also a wonderful opportunity. This duplicity is illuminated by James Oliver Horton in his essay, *Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue*, when he proclaims, “Sometimes history ‘accuses’ us, as Hayden says, and we cannot ‘stare down’ its moral responsibilities. But history also forces us to interpret, explain, and imagine ourselves into the events of the past.”² Perhaps nowhere in our curriculum are we given a more pressing or important opportunity to do this than in historiography of slavery in the United States. If Americans are to have meaningful conversations about race, they must understand that slavery provided the political, social, economic, and philosophical foundations for the entirety of American race relations for centuries.

The dispelling of the myth of slavery as an exclusively southern institution in particular, presents educators with an incredible opportunity to not only address its legacy, but also the public treatment of slavery and its shifting historiography. While historians have done the work to fill in this period, and illuminate the role slavery played in the northern colonies, it is time for teachers to address this deficiency in their curriculum. As our illustrious workshop leader and historian, Joanne Melish, points out:

“...while it is the histories of people of color that are missing or distorted and need to be acknowledged and restored to the historical record, in a very real sense it is American history as a whole that is ailing as a consequence of their absence and needs repair. One of the most important aspects of the notion of reparations, then, is its promise of restoring completeness to everyone’s American history.”³

By repairing and addressing this common misconception, perhaps we can begin the process of healing as a whole. As educators, we must find the courage and the conviction to begin racial discourse in our classrooms. If we ever hope to have our children engage in authentic discussions surrounding race then we, as adults, surely must have the courage to face our nation's history, and foster the capacity to model these discussions for them.

This lesson is the first in a planned series of three that will be intended to address the “Filibuster of Race” by encouraging a discourse surrounding the importance and purpose of historiography surrounding slavery, as well as the social and political role of the historian in creating the past. The follow-up lessons will address the concept of restorative justice, institutionalized racism, and white privilege in contemporary American society. It is intended for use with colleagues or with 11th or 12th grade students. If used in the classroom the lesson is intended to precede or follow a unit on American slavery, or as an introduction to the concept of history as reconstruction.

As I progress in my career and continue to have open and honest dialogue with more and more people of color, the discourse surrounding issues of race takes on an increasingly central role in my curriculum. Educating students about the political, social, and economic forces that continue to shape America today, is a responsibility I do not take lightly. Being here, while difficult, has renewed my commitment to this responsibility. Thank you so much for this opportunity, I honestly feel that I have grown as a person as a result of my participation in this workshop.

¹ Horton, James Oliver. *Slavery And Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* . The New Press. Kindle Edition.

² Horton, James Oliver. ““*Slavery in American History: An Uncomfortable National Dialogue*.” *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (p. 22). The New Press. Kindle Edition.

³ Melish, Joane. “Recovering from Slavery: Four Struggles to Tell the Truth.” Horton, James Oliver. *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (p. 133). The New Press. Kindle Edition.

LESSON: SLAVERY & HISTORIOGRAPHY

Standards Addressed:

- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#)
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3](#)
Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6](#)
Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence

General Goal(s): This lesson is intended to be the first in a series of three that will address the “Filibuster of Race” by introducing the topic of historiography as it pertains to the slave trade. The following two lessons (to be written later) will address the legacy of slavery, institutionalized racism, white privilege, and restorative justice. If used in the classroom the lesson is intended to begin a civil rights unit, slavery unit, or as a stand-alone lesson to introduce the concept of historiography to your students. The lesson is a work in progress and contains a lot of material. It can be augmented or edited to fit the needs of the educator.

Specific Objectives for Lesson 1: Historiography

SWBAT explain and describe the concept of historiography

SWBAT identify and explain the differing historical interpretations of the role slavery has played in the history of the United States.

SWBAT defend his/her position regarding the nature and role of the historian in the construction of history.

SWBAT discuss the extent to which moral judgements can and should be made about the past.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE LESSON CAN BE FOUND ON THE [PPT HERE](#).

***Teacher notes are contained in the PPT**

General Flow of the Lesson:

1. **Anticipatory Set (Lead-In):** Image Analysis - Students are asked to reflect on two images and choose which is the “best” representation of the history of slavery in the United States. They then do an A/B partner share, before participating in a group dialogue. *This exercise is intended to bring to the surface the mythology surrounding slavery, and our collective memory or history surrounding slavery in the United States. Potential things to point out: 1. Only 5% of slaves in the Atlantic slave trade ended up in North America 2. 1860 census reveals that 60% of slave owners owned 1-2 slaves. 3. There is a significant difference between what we understand as history, and its reality in this area in particular.
2. **Mini Lesson** - The discussion is followed by a brief 10-minute mini-lesson regarding the existence, characteristics, and role of slavery in the north. There are a few notes provided on the slide, however we recommend reading Joanne Melish’s excellent essay, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in Colonial New England”, <http://1704.deerfield.history.museum/popups/background.do?shortName=expSlavery> , to customize this section of the lesson to fit your needs.
3. **Board Storm** - Have students brainstorm a collective definition of history on the board. This can be done in small groups first, with one representative writing the group’s definition on the board. Discuss which definition is the most appropriate - make a list of the things that may affect the writing of history.

4. **Mini-lesson** - Introduce students to the concept of history as reconstruction and the historiography of slavery. (See slides for details.)
5. **Small Group Activity:** Introduce the survey of historiography pertaining to American slavery and allow groups to work before sharing out. (Instructions on PPT)
6. **Large Group Discussion:** Select from among the following questions to conduct a Brainstorm Carousel:
 - a. Could it be reasonably argued that the personal understanding of historians, despite or even because of their possible bias, is necessary or even desirable in the interpretation and recording of history? Is the power of persuasion a characteristic of a good historian?
 - b. How does the context within which historians live affect historical knowledge? To what extent might the position of historians within their own time period and culture undermine the value of their interpretation? To what extent might it increase its value in making it relevant to a contemporary audience?
 - c. Can history provide a guide to understanding contemporary affairs? Can it provide a guide to the future? What might be “the lessons of history” for future generations?
 - d. If truth is difficult to prove in history, does it follow that all versions are equally acceptable?
 - e. What knowledge of history might be gained by focusing attention on each of the following: the historian, the historical documents and written history, the readership?
 - f. About whom is history written? Are the lives of some groups of people more historically significant than the lives of others? Why do selected past events appear in books as historically important while others are ignored? To what extent is history dependent on who kept or preserved a written record?
 - g. Are value judgments a fault in the writing of history? Should value-laden terms, such as atrocity, regime, hero or freedom, always be avoided, or does exclusion of value judgments deprive history of meaning?
 - h. What is the role of the historian? Does the historian record history, or create it? Can the historian be free of bias in the selection and interpretation of material?

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

1. BACKGROUND READING:
 - a. **[History as Reconstruction](#)**
 - b. **[Northern Slavery and Its Legacies](#)**
2. **[Slavery and Historiography PPT.](#)**
 - a. ***All instructions and materials are also linked in the PPT***
3. **[Historiography Exercise: Historiography and the Slave Personality Exercise](#)**
4. **[Historiography Exercise KEY](#)**

Additional resources for discussing race in the classroom:

5. **[Appendix 1:](#)** *Costs of Racism to White People Check List. Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*, 2002, Paul Kivel, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC, Canada.
6. **[Appendix 2:](#)** **NAME-White Privilege PPT.** adapted from *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack* by Peggy McIntosh and *Moving Beyond White Guilt* by Amy Edgington.
7. **[Appendix 3:](#)** **Detour Spotting For White Anti Racists**, by Joann Olson

8. [Appendix 4](#) : Detour Cards
9. [Appendix 5](#): *Being a Strong White Ally*, by Paul Kivel; “Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice”; New Society Publishers-Canada, 2002; page 96
10. [Appendix 6](#): The Components of White Culture: Values and Beliefs by Judy H. Katz.
11. [Appendix 7](#): *Race, Memory and Historical Responsibility: What do Southerners Do With a Difficult Past* by Larry J. Griffin distributed during the workshop.
12. [The Case for Reparations](#) by Ta-Nehisi Coates