

FREEDOM SCHOOLS

Curriculum - - Negro History

This outline for the Negro History section of the Freedom Schools curriculum has four major sections, or units. The units are made on a basis of content, not of what we think is a day's or a week's class work. Also included is an introductory unit on the Amistad Munity, as a sample of what can be done. The Amistad unit is divided into individual lesson. The general course outline was prepared by Barbara Jones, of New York SNCC, and the Amistad study was prepared by Beatrice Young, of the Amistad Society in Chicago.

The AMISTAD Case -- a Curriculum study for the Mississippi Freedom Schools.

Proposed as a sample introductory unit; submitted by the Amistad Society, Chicago, Illinois.

I. Breif Synopsis of the Amistad Incident: The AMISTAD is the name of a slave ship on which the slaves revolted in 1839. (Ironically, "Amistad" means "friendship" in Spanish.) Joseph Cinques (Pronounced French, i. e. "sank"), the son of a Sierre Leone chief, was one of 53 Africans captured and taken to Havana, Cuba, where the ship picked up additional cargo and two Cuban planters. On the passage between Cuba and New York, Cinques exhorted his fellow slaves to break their chains and gain their freedom. The slaves were able to take over the ship and kill the pilot and captain, but they realized they must save some one to sail the ship back to Africa. With sugar cane knives at their backs, the two Cuban planters were directed to sail the Africans home.

By day the planters sailed the ship toward Africa, but by night they sailed toward New York. With this zig-zag course, they managed to land at a New York harbor, whereupon the duped slaves again taken captive. A New York judge heard the case of the slaves and decreed that they be returned to their homes, but the President of the United States, Martin Van Buren, disturbed that decision might encourage additional slave revolts, requested the Attorney General of the U. S. to appeal the case to the Supreme Court.

While awaiting the trial, many New England abolitionists organized the American Missionary Society, in order to raise funds for the slaves' eventual return to Africa.

Also, an ex-President of the U. S., John Quincy Adams, then 73 years old, and with a full career behind him, came forth to ague the case before the Supreme Court in behalf of the slaves. Adams argued eloquently for nearly five hours and gained freedom for the slaves. He states in his diary that this was the most important act of his life.

In the meantime, the American Missionary Society was able to procure a vast amount of money, part of which enabled the slaves to return home. Prior to leaving the U. S., Cinques and several of the slaves toured the country for the anti-slavery cause. When Cinques arrived home, he found his entire family and tribe had been enslaved, but after a few years he was made an African chief of another tribe.

The American Missionary Society used the remainder of its funds to found several Negro colleges, such as Hampton Institute, Berea College and after the Civil War, Tougaloo College.



**II. Purpose of the unit:** The Amistad Society feels that this story, so lost in the mainstream of history (along with most important aspects of the history of the Negro), would most adequately set the tone for the Freedom School curriculum. Within this story can be found most of the major issues to be included in the subsequent curriculum. Our experience with teaching Negro history to high school students shows an immediate interest and delight in the Amistad incident. The students not only remember the story, but are able to recall many of its aspects when they are reflected in a further study of Negro history. We therefore, submit that the Amistad outline could serve the following purposes:

1. To elicit immediate interest on the part of Negro youth to a summer of study.
2. To set a tone of pride in their heritage.
3. To offer an introductory or orientation study with several themes which will allow for obvious relationship and parallels to be made in subsequent studies.

This study is flexible, so that it will be suitable for both day and residence schools. It can be used as a three-session day school study or a three-day to one week study in the residence schools. We have provided a bibliography both for teachers and students, so that reading skills are included.

**III. Outline** -- First recount the incident informally.

1. African background: The study of African culture and politics before the coming of the white man. To place Cinques and the slaves in their home setting from which they were removed and placed into slavery. Example: Cinques was the son of an African chief and expressed the pride of a "Son of Africa."

During this first session, depending on the time allowed, one can discuss with the students some of the great African empires such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, the African universities, the politics of these African states and the important African inventions, such as the smelting of iron; or they can simply discuss the organization of African life before its complete destruction by the slave trade.

**Suggested books:** for teacher--Manuel Wallerstein, Africa, The Politics of Independence. (paperback), chapter 1. Basil Davidson, Black Mother.

Lerone Bennett, Before the Mayflower, chapter 1. for students: Emma G. Sterne, The Long Black

Schooner.

John A. Williams, Africa: Her History, Lands and People (Cooper Square, paperback)

2. Slave Trade :

Description of the slave ships and the manner in which the slaves were packed into the hold of the ship. The route of the slave ships would illustrate the economic basis of slavery, as well as the various nations involved in the trade. Example: the Amistad slave ship and the Cuban planters.



**Suggested books: for teachers: Bennett, Before the Mayflower, chapter on the slave trade.**

**John Hope Franklin, From Slavery to Freedom, chapter on slave trade.**

3. **Slave Revolts:** Illustrates the many revolts occurring even before the slaves arrived on American shores. Further could include a description of the utter despair on the part of the slaves, as witnessed by cases where Africans jumped overboard in order to escape a life of servitude. Slave revolts on board the ships can be recalled during a study of insurrections in America, e.g. Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey. The underground railroad; and Harriet Tubman, even John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry might be included in a discussion of revolts. One could include here a general discussion of slavery, if time allows, and use Frederick Douglass as a guide. All of these things can be mentioned and discussed so that when the same issues come up later, they can be recalled. It is most important that the students understand that protest is nothing new for Negroes and this study clearly illustrates that point.

**Suggested books: for teacher, Herbert Aptheker, Documentary History of the Negro in America (several documents written by Negro insurrectionists). Aptheker, Slave Revolts.**

chapters in both Bennett and Franklin books listed above.

Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, autobiography.

for students, Ann Petry, Harriet Tubman, etc.

Katherine Scherman, The Slave Who Freed Haiti

Corothy Sterling, Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman

Anna W. Bontemps, The Story of George Washington Carver

4. **Abolitionism:** The founding of the American Missionary Society lends itself to a discussion of the many persons both white and Negro, who devoted their lives to abolishing slavery. This might include a discussion of men well as Wendell Phillips and Loyd Garrison as well as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth. One should also include Elijah Lovejoy of Illinois, who was killed because of his abolitionist newspaper.

**Suggested books: for teachers, chapters from both Bennett and Franklin documents from Aptheker's Documentary History**

for students: Anna Bontemps, Frederick Douglass, Slave-Fighter-Freeman excellent film available on Frederick Douglass, House on Cedar Hill

5. **The Case in the Courts:** One should introduce this discussion with a contrast of the U. S. Presidents involved and their attitudes toward humanity, i. e. Martin Van Buren, who opposed freedom for the slaves, and John Quincy Adams, who secured their freedom. This, of course, allows for much reflection later in the curriculum on the present freedom struggle and the President's role.

The case was first heard in a lower court of New York, and was appealed by the Attorney General of the U. S. to the highest court of the land. One can discuss

here the manner in which cases are brought through our court system.

Aptheker's Documentary History of the Negro in America includes documents which span most of the aspects of this case and excerpts of these documents can be duplicated for distribution to the students.

For students, Russell Adams, Great Negroes Past and Present (Chicago: Afro-American Publishing Co., 1963) offers a brief summary of the incident and a picture of Cinques.

### Outline of Negro History Section of Freedom School Curriculum

Four major sections: Origins of Servitude, Negro Resistance to Oppression, Reconstruction and Twentieth Century.

The primary assumption of this course outline is that America is the result of the fusion of African European, Indian and other peoples and their cultures.

#### Study of the African in America

A) Origins of Servitude (1600 - 1800) --- The three major divisions of the peoples who were later to become Americans all experienced some form of servitude during the first 200 years of settlement by the Europeans in America.

- a. Purposes of this unit of study
  1. To understand the economic and political forces which created the system of servitude in America
  2. To pierce through the fallacies about the origin of Slavery in America.
- b. Focus of this unit of study --- Why did Negro servitude survive and flourish and the European and Indian servitude decline?
- c. Background
  1. Ancient European, Indian and African peoples---tradition of enslavement of captives.
  2. Medieval slavery---primarily enslavement for debt.
  3. Iberian slavery--- Spain and Portugal as the first Europeans in the modern world to enslave Africans as a profitable economic venture.
  4. Slave trade---England, France, Denmark and the Iberians traded slaves from Africa to New World plantation for four centuries.

Sources: World Book Encyclopedia  
Carmen, Syrett, and Wishy, History of American People, vol. 1.  
Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen

- d. European Servitude in America (Purpose was to increase the labor supply in the New World)
  1. Indentured Servants---One-half of all Europeans in the Middle



Colonies served for an average of two to seven years as bondsmen, usually for their passage to America.

2. Involuntary Servitude--those kidnapped from Europe convicts from Europe.

e. Indian Servitude

1. Capture of Indian population and land by the Europeans
2. Captive Indians sometimes enslaved.

f. Negro Servitude

1. 1616-1669: Many Negroes indentured servants rather than slaves
2. Negroes a small part of the population of the colonies
3. South in the 17th century depended upon free and indentured labor, white and Negro
4. Slavery increased as the tobacco culture increased.

B) The Negroes' Earliest Resistance to Oppression.

As soon as enslavement of the Negro became entrenched, the Negro began to fight against it.

a. Aims of this unit of study:

1. To show that slavery was not a passive and static institution.
2. To indicate some of the roots of Negro protest in America.

b. Personal accounts of slavery

1. Three resisters: Booker T. Washington (Up from Slavery)  
Harriet Tubman  
Frederick Douglass (Life and Times of F. D.)

2. In their accounts they:

- a. describe the conditions of slavery
- b. relate the ways they fought against slavery.

c. Free Negroes. Through manumission laws were harsh, some Negroes were free.

1. Occupations of free Negroes.
2. Attitudes toward them by whites and slaves.

d. Revolts

1. 1822. Led by Denmark Vesey, a free Negro from Charleston, South Carolina. Plan was to attack the city of Charleston in mid-June. Preparations through as Negroes made arms.
2. 1831. Led by Nat Turner. Crusade started by killing Turner's master. Rebels were later joined by others.
3. Although there were many slave revolts and insurrectionist activities, the above two revolts were the largest in terms of numbers involved and extensiveness of plan. The background of both of them was similar:

1. The success of the Haitians
2. The decline of the white population in the area
3. General economic depression in the areas.

Similar, also were the long-range effects of both:

1. More stringent laws restricting free Negroes
2. Prohibition of the instruction of reading and writing.

e. Abolitionist Movement: Abolition of Slavery

1. 1812-1830: Background-- English prohibition of the slave trade. Church sects opposed to slavery. Slavery more entrenched.
2. 1831 -- The Liberator: the most influential abolitionist paper founded by Wm. Lloyd Garrison.



3. Underground railroad
  4. Other methods used by the Abolitionists
  5. 1. Factions
    2. Political parties:
      - 1840--Liberty Party
      - 1848--Free Soil
      - 1854--Republican
    3. John Brown's Raid on Harper's Ferry
- Sources: Arthur Browne, History of Negro Slave Revolts  
Levett Bennett, Jr., Before the Mayflower

6) Reconstruction (1865-1877) and the Beginning of Segregation  
The subject of Reconstruction has often been obscured because of its complex nature and generalizations of facts. Listed below are some relevant events in chronological order.

- 1865-1866: Lincoln-Johnson Plan: The Southern states should not be punished by the North for their insurrection, but allowed back into the Union without qualifications. As a result the Southern States enacted a program which was designed to re-enslave the Negro, with Black Codes restricting the economic and political activity of the freedmen, and also violence and force. Charles Sumner and Thaddeus Stevens, two powerful Senators and abolitionists, protested the lack of economic and political provisions for the freedmen.
- 1865: Civil Rights Bill passed over the President's veto  
Race riots continue in the Deep South (81 Negroes killed during May and June riots.)  
Edward Wacker and Charles Mitchell were elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives. They were the first Negroes elected to an American legislative assembly.
- 1867: Frederick Douglass leads a delegation to the President urging the ballot for ex-slaves.  
Acts were passed by Congress in March dividing the Confederate States into military districts. The freedmen were given the right to vote.  
Ku Klux Klan held their first national meeting.  
Knights of White Camelia (a white supremacist organization) were formed.  
Note: the relationship between the beginning of white supremacist organizations and military rule.
- 1868: The South Carolina constitutional convention met in Charleston in January. It was the first assembly of its kind in the West with a majority of Negro delegates (76 out of 124).  
Oscar Dunn, an ex-slave, was installed as Lt. Governor of Louisiana. It was the highest elective office held by an American Negro. Negroes were later elected Lt. Gov. in Mississippi and South Carolina.  
Fourteenth Amendment became a part of the Constitution Race riots continue in Louisiana.
- 1869: Ebenezer don Carlos Bassett became minister to Haiti and, as such, was the first Negro in the diplomatic service.
- 1870: Wright, a Negro, was made Associate Justice of the South Carolina Supreme Court.  
Hiram Revels succeeded Jefferson Davis as U.S. Senator from Mississippi.  
Fifteenth Amendment was made a part of the Constitution



- The first of a series of Enforcement Acts (Ku Klux Klan Acts) put federal elections in the hands of federal officials and guaranteed civil and political rights to the freedmen through federal courts.  
Joseph Rainey became the first Negro in the House of Representatives. Sworn in as Congressman from South Carolina.  
Robert Wood, a Negro, was elected mayor of Natchez, Mississippi
- 1871 Race Riots in Meridian, Miss. (possible reaction to growing power of the Negroes in the state)
- 1872 P. Pinchback became acting Governor of La. and then U.S. Senator in 1873.
- 1873 Sixty Negroes killed in Louisiana.
- 1874 White League, a racist organization, was founded in Louisiana  
More violence in Tennessee and Louisiana. Several Negro and Republican office-holders were slain.  
Race riot in Vicksburg--35 Negroes killed.  
President issued a proclamation on violence in Mississippi.
- 1875 Civil Rights Bill was enacted by Congress. The bill gave Negroes the right to equal treatment in inns, public conveyances, theaters, and other public places.  
Blanche Keso Bruce, a Negro, entered the U. S. Senate from Miss. Racial conflict in Yazoo City, Mississippi  
Racial conflict in Clinton, Miss. Negro Leaders and Republicans Killed. The Governor of Mississippi requested federal troops to protect the rights of Negro voters. The request was refused.  
Conservatives won in Mississippi elections and initiated the Mississippi Plan, staging riots, political assassinations and massacres and social and economic intimidation. Used later to overthrow Reconstruction government in South Carolina and La.
- 1876 Racial conflict in South Carolina
- 1877 Hayes agreed to withdraw federal troops from the south  
Pres. Hayes appointed Frederick Douglass Marshall of Washington, D. C.  
Federal Troops were withdrawn from the south
- 1878 Tennessee initiated the modern segregation movement with Jim Crow railroad car law.
- 1883 The Supreme Court declared the Civil Rights Act of 1875 unconstitutional.
- 1884 John Roy Lynch, former Congressman from Miss., was elected temporary chairman of the Republican Convention, and became the first Negro to preside over the deliberations of a national political party.  
Massacre of Negroes in Carrollton, Miss.
- 1890 The Mississippi constitutional convention began the systematic exclusion of Negroes from the political life of the South (Aug. 12 - Nov. 1)  
Other Southern States followed Mississippi's lead.
- 1895 Booker T. Washington delivered his "Atlanta Compromise" speech.

1896 The Supreme Court decision (Plessy vs. Ferguson) upheld the doctrine of "separate but equal"

Source: Lerone Bennett, jr., Before the Mayflower  
W. E. B. DuBois, Black Reconstruction

D) Twentieth Century

a. Before 1954

1. DuBois -- Washington Controversy
2. Founding of the NAACP and Crisis
3. Marcus Garvey
4. War years and effect on Negro movements

b. 1954 School Decision: its background and implications

1. Little Rock Ark.
2. De facto School Segregation in the North and West
3. Prince Edward, Virginia, situation
4. University of Mississippi's situation

c. Post 1954 -- Spontaneous movements became organized in the South.

1. Montgomery Bus Boycott
2. Sit-in
3. Freedom Rides
4. Voter Registration

d. Breaking down the barriers of discrimination in the North

1. Discrimination: Jobs and Housing
2. The Negro middle class vs. urban masses.
3. Rise of black nationalism

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Nostrand, 120 Alexander St., Princeton, N. J., \$ 1.45.

Frank Tannenbaum, Slave and Citizen, Vintage Books, 457 Madison Ave.  
New York 22, New York, \$1.45.



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C. Vann Woodard, Strange Career of Jim Crow, Galaxy, Oxford U. press,  
New York, \$ 1.50.

Robert Williams, Negroes with Guns.

Optional: Herbert Aptheker, American Negro Slave Revolts, New World  
Paperbacks, International Publishers, New York, \$ 2.25

Wm. Brink and L. Harris, Negro Revolution in America

Melville Herskovits, Myth of the Negro Past Beacon, \$ 2.25.