



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
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New Perspectives On Teaching Afro-American History

Curriculum Unit 80.06.02
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As the unit title indicates “New perspectives on Teaching Afro-American History” is geared toward suggesting a new approach to the teaching of Afro-American History, an approach that I like to think is appropriate to the demands educational and professional of the 1980’s. Apart from the specific historical information transmitted the unit affords student an opportunity to develop and refine those skills which relate to!

- A. organization and presentation of data;
- B. documentation;
- C. identification and usage of source materials.

Afro-American history courses, which were so plentiful during the 1960’s began to taper off during the 1970’s and as we approach the year 1981, are experiencing a steady decline. Many institutions no longer offer such courses, and many of the newly created departments of Afro-American studies have likewise been dismantled.

It was the census politics of the 1960’s and 1970’s which pushed Afro-American history courses and programs of study into the educational institutions of the larger society (prior to the 1960’s most Afro-American history courses were taught in Negro-colleges and some southern high schools). The inclusion of Afro-American history in the curriculum of predominantly white institutions and northern inner-city high schools was in part a method of placating a certain segment of the population. As a consequence, standards of content and direction were deemed secondary to the immediate necessity of advertising such courses and programs of study.

Afro-American professional organizations and/or individuals did not come together to chart a clear course of action. The opportunity to lay a solid foundation and to strengthen Afro-American history was allowed to slip by. The sense of urgency which ushered Afro-American history courses into the educational institutions of the larger society has greatly diminished. This loss of commitment, when combined with current economic conditions, have placed Afro-American history courses in a precarious position. The conditions which pushed Afro-American history courses to the top of the educational agenda no longer exist. If Afro-American history courses do not adjust to these changes in conditions, the decline will continue.

The Afro-American history courses which were introduced in the 1960's and 1970's were mainly information-oriented. The general consensus among both black and whites at the time focused on an overall feeling of ignorance about the black experience in America. People felt that something had been withheld from them, and they wanted it brought to light. The culmination of this thirst for knowledge was best reflected in the response to the book and television production of "Roots". This is not to say that there is now a much greater percentage of people who have a concrete knowledge of Afro-American history. However, there is a general feeling that the information is no longer hidden: that it is available in forms that the layman, or even the non-reader, can digest. As a consequence, the need for Afro-American history to emphasize the narrative of the black experience is no longer a top priority on the educational agenda.

The emphasis placed on the ninth-grade proficiency test given in the state of Connecticut (March, 1980) is indicative of the new order of educational priorities in the United States. Skill development and refinement are national concerns. Standards for teacher and student accountability have already been re-examined in many states, and will continue to be closely monitored. The acquisition of skills and/or information that can be used regardless of an individual's particular pursuit has become a theme of the 1980's. Afro-American history courses will have to conform to this directive: those courses which do not recognize the need to sharpen academic skills and provide a foundation for success in other disciplines are going to find the road more than a bit rough, in fact, the road might abruptly, and without warning end.

Objectives

The unit that I propose uses the "Great Migration of Negroes to the North (1900-1920)" as a point of reference. (See Betty Lapucia's unit in 20th century Afro-American studies, YNHTI, 1978 Vol. II). My unit's chief concern is not so much the movement of Negroes from the South to the North, or the reasons for their massive shift in population. Its chief concern is to provide students with a frame of reference (model) with which historical, sociological, and economic information can be organized and analyzed. Such an approach creates opportunities for students to utilize skills necessary to the collection and presentation of data. If this approach is used it is my belief that certain important messages will be transmitted to the students:

- A. That the Negro experience in America has not been an isolated experience but an integral part of the total American experience.
- B. That a frame of reference (model) can be used in clarifying points of view and experiences in Afro-American history.
- C. That for one to become involved in a positive way in today's world requires certain skills (organization of materials, computation and presentation of data etc.)
- D. That a multitude of sources (charts, graphs, maps, lectures, essays etc.) can be used in the investigation of social issues.

Content

The initial impetus for this unit came from a study of the work of an economic geographer, Walter Christaller. Christaller in his book, *Central Places in Southern Germany (1933)*, developed a theory based on the premise that a certain amount of productive land supports an urban center or central place. The basic requirement of a central place, according to Christaller, is that such a place be a source of goods and services for an area larger than itself. An urban center dominated by one particular industry may be large in relation to its adjacent population. However, this does not necessarily qualify it as a central place. It is the amount and complexity of services rather than the magnitude of a center's population that determine an urban place's rank as a central place.

Christaller used seven categories of urban places in his scheme, ranking urban places according to centralized activities which were concerned with administration, culture, health, social services, the organization of economic and social life, finance, trade, service industries, the labor market and traffic. As one follows the ranking from *One* (Market towns) to *Seven* (Regional capitol city), one notes that each level duplicates all the services of the urban places below it in the ranking. While providing additional services not offered in the urban place below it. The more services offered, the higher a town or city's rank as a central place.

Christaller makes it quite clear that the movement of people to a central place is related to the number and complexity of services offered.

I found certain elements of Christaller theory attractive, and useful in studying the "Great Migration". Christaller provides a frame of reference whereby the rationale for movement of people from one urban place to another could be scrutinized. A basic tenet of Christaller's theory is that people will travel in order to obtain goods and services not available locally. After a review of the work done by Christaller I felt that a similar method could be used to study the places Negroes chose to settle in both the South and North between 1900 and 1920. This method would also be used as a means of encouraging students to develop certain academic skills. For use in the classroom, I propose a modified version of the model developed by Christaller.

The Model

The organizational structure of the model calls for a division of the residential situation of Negroes into three categories:

1. Rural Communities: areas whose major activity is farming and/or towns whose population does not exceed 2,500 and are supported by one main economic activity.
2. Towns: those whose population exceeds 2,500 and/or, whose support is realized from one main economic activity.
3. Cities: those whose population exceeds 25,000 and which provides a variety of services and economic opportunities to the resident population.

Students and teacher will collect information to be channeled through each level of the model. The information collected should relate to the economic, social and demographic dimensions of the North and the

South. Attention will be focused on the impact of these dimensions on the availability of services for Negroes at each residential level. The experiences of the urban negro, the small town Negro, and rural Negro can be understood only in the light of the particulars common to each residential level.

As a means of evaluating residential desirability at each of the three levels the class must formulate a series of services that people consider important. The following listing is suggested for usage, however, depending on the skill level of students the teacher should feel free to modify, or expand.

- A. Economic opportunity
- B. Educational opportunity
- C. Opportunity for social contact, and association
- D. Housing
- E. Political Activity

From the various source materials introduced in class the main idea, or relevant experience is recorded on a service chart under the appropriate topic heading. The service chart is constructed from the series of services formulated by the class. When a service chart for a particular residential level has been completed, concluding evaluations for each topic heading are formulated from the information recorded in each column. These concluding evaluations are used to gain an overall view of the experience of Negroes at the residential level under investigation.

In using residential levels as a means of studying the Negroes experience in the South, students are encouraged to consider the extent to which Negroes were tied to the land, (rural communities). What effects the ravages of the boll weevil and droughts had on the southern economy in general, and Negroes in particular. As students investigate the succeeding residential levels they will be able to trace the impact these events had on Negroes in towns and cities. One such example would be the infiltration of whites into traditional Negro occupations such as barbering and food services.

In using the model to study the experiences of Negroes in the North, students can gain insight into the attraction large cities held for Negroes. They will see how the large northern cities courtship of Negroes was related to a need for labor—a labor need that was in part due to the commitment of the North to industrialization, and the loss of a source of labor because of immigration restrictions effected during World War I. Even with the need for labor many Negroes found the ghettos of the northern cities no better than the residential areas available to them in the South. When coupled with the racism also present in the North, and the loss of economic opportunity which accompanied the end of World War I, disillusionment with the North for many Negroes was imminent.

These are only a few of the points concerning the Negroes' experience in the South and the North that I feel the model proposed in this unit will help to clarify. The approach suggested by the model will offer students an opportunity to understand why many Negroes chose a particular residential level for settlement why many Negroes moved from one level to another, why Negroes moved from one section of the country to another.

The model provides students with a frame of reference with which they can view their own experiences, and compare those experiences to the experiences of the people who were a part of the “Great Migration”. Students will have a chance not only to learn about Afro-American history but to find out about themselves.

Example: *Rural Southern Communities*

Daily lessons should be focused on information that gives the student insight into life as lived by Negroes in rural southern communities. Either before the introduction of materials, or at the conclusion of the first lesson, the teacher should aid students in the construction of a service chart. Since it is important that students keep the information collected in front of them it is advisable to use construction paper, or to attach two sheets of paper together.

(figure available in print form)

The teacher should assist students in devising a method of identifying the source from which information placed on the chart originates. The method for identifying the source can be mutually agreed upon by the class, given by the teacher, or devised by the individual student. If students devise their own source labels, then an identifying key must be included on the chart. Students should not necessarily be discouraged from including opinions, or conclusions on the chart, but they must be identified as such. The service chart is a worksheet, and therefore flexibility of documentation is permissible. However when the student is ready for the final written assignment, time should be reserved for teaching the standard form for footnotes and bibliography.

Lesson Assignment

Student Reading Assignment - "The Life Story of a Negro Peon", in The Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves , ed. by Hamilton Holt (New York, 1906) pp 183-5.

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*, (New York, 1968) pg.26.

Information entered on chart and symbols

Housing: “As evidence of their regard they gave us a suit of furniture, which cost about \$25, and we set up housekeeping in one of the captain’s two-room shanties”. *LSNP LSUATT* pg.185

Housing : “Every house I had ever lived in was a one or two room shack with a out door toilet”. *CAM* pg.26

Educational opportunities : “I was a man nearly grown before I knew how to count from one to one hundred. I was a man nearly grown before I ever saw a colored teacher. I never went to school a day in my life. Today I can’t write my own name, though I can read a little”. *LSNP LSUATT* pg.184

Very few share-croppers owned books. *C + LSNP*

LSUATT pg. 184 *LSNP* *CAM* denotes source

LSUATT

"Life Story of Negro Peon" in *Life Stories of Undistinguished Americans As Told by Themselves* , ed. by Hamilton Holt (New York), 1906)

Anne Moody, *Coming of Age In Mississippi* , (New York, 1968)

C + LSNP denotes a conclusion drawn by the student, and the LSUATT source.

Once the information has been placed on the chart (more than one source should be used for each topic heading) the teacher should aid students in writing concluding evaluations for each column. Each concluding evaluations should be given a rating: Poor, Fair, Good, Excellent)

Concluding Evaluation I-Housing : Housing for Negroes in rural southern communities was usually very poor, consisting of one and two room wooden structures. With the birth of children, over crowding and lack of privacy were unavoidable situations. Housing: Poor __x Fair __ Good __ Excellent __

When a concluding evaluation for each column has been written the teacher should assist students in using the evaluations for a final written, or oral presentation. If written the student would list all sources used, symbols would not be allowed. If oral then student would mention all sources used. These exercises (oral, written) will give students an opportunity to improve skills related to presentation of data.

Charts, graphs, tapes, records, lectures, and maps should be used on the daily lessons, and homework assignments to give students a total view of the sources from which information can be obtained, (examples may be found in the sample lesson plans). These various sources would also allow students to improve such skills as map reading, reading for the main idea, identifying primary sources from secondary sources, and the construction and usage of tables.

I feel that usage of this model will give students an opportunity to gain the skills necessary for academic success. The model is centered around the organization of data, the presentation of data, documentation, the investigation and usage of sources which in themselves afford an opportunity for the development of certain skills. The value to be gained from this approach provides (for students) a foundation for academic success that goes beyond the subject matter of a particular discipline.

Sample Lesson I

Moving North to Jobs

Objective Students will use a primary source to obtain information as to why some Negroes wanted to leave the South.

Materials Letter from Negro laborer.

Source Emmett J. Scott, "Letters of Negro Migrants of 1916-1918", Journal of Negro History, Vol. 4 (July, 1919 pg. 435)

Granville, Mississippi May 16, 1917

Dear Sir: This letter is a letter of information of which you will find envelop for reply. I want to come North

some time soon but I do not want to leave here looking for a job where I would be in doors all winter. Now the work I am doing here is running a gauge edger in a saw mill. I know all about the grading of lumber. I have been working in lumber about 25 or 27 years. My wedges (wages) here is \$3.00 a day 11 hours a day. I want to come North were I can educate my 3 little children also my wife. Now if you can not fit me up at what I am doing down here I can learn anything anyone els (else) can. Also there is a great deal of good women cooks here would leave anytime all they want is to know where to go and some way to go. Please write me at once just how I can get my people where they can get something for their work. There are women cooking for \$1.50 and \$2.00 a week. I would like to live in Chicago or Ohio or Philadelphia. Tell Mr. Abbott that our pepel are tole that they can not get anything up there and they are being snatched off the train here in Greenville and arested but in spite of all this, they are leaving every day and every night 100 or more is expecting to leave this week. Let me here from you at once.

Procedure

A. Students will read the letter aloud in class. Teacher will explain any words that students find difficult.

B. Student will give written responses to the following questions?

1. What is the man's only reservation about going North?
2. What type of work is the man doing?
3. What are his wages and working hours?
4. What does the man feel he might be able to do for his wife and children in the North?
5. According to the man who else is willing and ready to move North? What type work are they qualified to do? How much do they presently earn for their labor?
6. Where in the North would the man like to live?
7. What is happening to people who are attempting to leave Greenville, Mississippi?
8. Does the man give any indication of the number of people who want to leave Greenville?
9. Student can use a map to trace the best route from Greenville, Miss.—to Ohio, Philadelphia, Chicago (This can be an expanded map lesson)

C. Students will write statements to be placed on their service chart for the following categories:

1. Educational opportunities
2. Economic opportunities

Sample Lesson II

Objective Students will obtain information concerning funding for black and white schools in the Cotton Belt region of the South by reading a table.

Material (Table) *Funding of Black and White Rural Schools In the Cotton Belt Region (1917).*

Source *U.S. bureau of Education, Negro Education in the United States , Vol. I, Chap. II. 1920*

(figure available in print form)

Procedure

- A. Teacher will introduce the vocabulary words. Teacher will explain the meaning of the words.
- B. Teacher will go over each column of the table with the student.
- C. Students will answer the following questions.
 1. At what point is the amount of money spent on Teachers salaries in white schools more than 3 times that allocated for Teacher salaries in black schools? Ten times as much?
 2. Complete
 - A. When Negroes are less than ___ percent of the population in a county the amount of money spent on teacher Salaries in Black and White schools is almost the same.
 - B. As the Negro population in a county increases the amount of money spent for teacher salaries in Negro schools.
 1. increases
 2. decreases
 3. stays about the same
 4. none of the above
 - C. Based on the information given in the table write a statement to be placed on the service chart in regard to educational opportunities for Negroes in the Cotton Belt region.
- D. *Optional*

The teacher can take this opportunity to show students how to construct a bar graph based on the information in the table.

Sample Lesson III

Objective *Students will write two statements about the economic situation of a share-cropper. Students will draw a map of the farm and surrounding area described in the story.*

Material (short story)

1. "The Man who Saw The Flood", by Richard Wright Copyright 1937 by Weekly Masses Co. Inc.
2. Apartment lease

Procedure

- A. Teacher will talk briefly about the duties and responsibilities of one who rents an apartment, or house. Student will be given copies of a lease to aid their comprehensive of certain points.
- B. The teacher will introduce the short story to be read aloud in class student will do the reading.
- C. Student will answer the following questions (orally or in written form).
 1. What damages were done to the farm by the flood?
 2. What things did Tom need to get the farm started again?
 3. What would have happened to Tom if he had decided to leave the farm and move his family elsewhere? Why?
 4. *Defend or Attack*
The farm represented a good economic opportunity for Tom and his family?
- D. Students will write a statement(s) to be entered on the service chart in regard to economic opportunity for (Negro) share-croppers.

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