



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1994 Volume IV: Racism and Nativism in American Political Culture

What About My Forty Acres & A Mule

Guide for Curriculum Unit 94.04.01
by Gerene Freeman

Unlike atrocities suffered by other ethnic groups that of the African in American under the American slave system has yet to be acknowledged as the crime to humanity it in fact was. It has been referred to as many things: “The Slavery Question,” “The White Man’s Burden,” “The Negro Problem” and so on. But never what it actually was, except perhaps by a few contemporary intellectuals who are quickly dismissed. However, there is no denying that a holocaust is exactly what it was. Perhaps without the official acknowledgment and redress that such an atrocity is due, and which has been afforded other groups (i.e. Japanese Americans; Native Americans; and Jews after the war with Germany) there is a certain misappropriation of blame on the part of the victims. This premise led me to the 40 acres and a mule ostensibly promised? considered? suggested? as redress to the Africans when they were “emancipated.” It came as no overwhelming revelation to discover that the only thing many of my students knew about “40 acres and a mule” was that it was the name of Spike Lee’s production company. Thus the reason for this particular curriculum unit.

I propose to have students examine the definition of reparations, retribution, and redress according to Webster as well as the legal connotations of each. I further intend to have them look at those groups (Native American, Japanese and Jewish) that have been successful in obtaining reparations for injustices perpetuated against them and or their ancestors. Finally, it is my intention to have the students address such questions as: Why have Africans been denied retribution? What are the steps that have been and may be taken to obtain their long awaited redress?

(Recommended for U.S. History, Social Studies and African American History, grades 9-12)

Keywords

Race Relations Prejudice Japanese Civil Rights Native American Afro-American Civil War

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