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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1999 Volume III: Immigration and American Life

Immigration and American Life on African-Americans

Curriculum Unit 99.03.09
by Joseph Wickliffe

Introduction

The focus of this unit will be the teaching of immigration explaining how human migration started in Africa. Students would be able to understand the migration, or the movement, from one region or county to the U.S.

This unit is going to be taught to students of various backgrounds and color, in other words students of diverse population. The grade level would be 9 and 10. The unit will cover a little on slave trade to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The idea of the unit is to allow the students to understand:

- What kind of immigration policy exists?
- Who are the major power brokers
- How policies were shifted?
- What constituted protections are in place for African immigrants?
- Why African-Americans failed to make headway?
- What happened after the initial immigrant niche was put into place?
- How the immigration system works?

This unit is being written to be taught all year round. The unit will open with a lesson on how to read a map of Africa, Asia, and the western hemisphere and how people migrated to America. Lesson two will entail writing an essay on Africa and America, While lesson three will require a hands-on teaching method.

Existence of Human Immigration

Human migration started in Africa. As the birthplace of human origin, Africa witnessed many firsts, including history's first great migration, or movement, from one region or country to another. Hundreds of thousands of years ago, ancient Africans made their way to what is now Europe and the Middle East-places where no humans had yet lived. Their pioneering journeys ensured the spread of human culture to other parts of the world. Migration is a fundamental human activity. The very first immigrant of whom we are aware-that African, Eve-was in the process of moving (migrating or returning "home"?), as evidenced by her footprints, still visible after three million years.

There were two great migrations of African-born species, first homo erectus, then homo sapiens. Many complex movements allowed interbreeding and enables homo sapiens to evolve at a number of places at once. Perhaps regional populations of homo erectus evolved into homo sapiens while intermingling with one another. The spread of homo erectus began as much as 1.8 million years ago and homo sapiens' proliferation began around 100,000 years ago. Every American Indian, from the Abenakis of Maine to the Zunis of New Mexico, descended from immigrant stock. The New World, last to be settled, was apparently uninhabited by man until some thirty thousand years ago. (Carl Switsher. How Man Began. Institute of Human Origins Berkeley. Time Magazine, March 14, 1994. P. 82)

Asian-Americans came over 12,000 to 20,000 years ago, probably crossing a glacial land bridge between Siberia and Alaska and deployed throughout the two Americas, creating cultures of great variety and complexity. The human race had peopled almost the entire globe by migration ("The Migrations of Human Populations," Scientific American 231, No. 3, September, 1974: 105).

The several hundred thousand Europeans who came into the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries came largely because of what we would now call the populations and/or labor policies developed by the various colonizing powers. The colonial period in American history, from 1607 to the adoption of the Constitution, is almost as long as the history of the United States. But there were not many people here then. Fewer than one million came-some six hundred thousand Europeans and, perhaps, three hundred thousand Africans. Since about half of the Europeans and all of the Africans were, to one degree of another, unfree, the free immigrant was in the minority during the colonial period. But if these numbers seem small, we need to know that the total French immigration to Canada between 1608 and 1760 was fewer than 10,00 persons. 1 (Phillip Curting. The African Slave Trade: A census (1969))

Migration from Europe

Among roughly fifty-five million immigrants who have, in historic times, come to what is now the United States, nearly seven out of ten came from Europe, and other people came from Africa as slaves. Asians, and Latin Americans have also come. Up until the 1960s Europeans predominated in migrations. A classic essay by the British historian Frank Thistlewaite, was presented to an international congress of historians in 1960 2(Thistlewaite;s Essay, :Migration from Europe Overseas in the 19th & 20th Centuries"). Ironically this was just before the point in history when the emigration of Europeans from Europe was becoming less numerically important than migration into Europe by persons from New World, Africa, and Asia. Coming to America, whether as a sojourner or a settler, was in many cases an adventure, a drama, even a dream. For many the

adventure became a disaster, drama a tragedy, dream a nightmare. Despite these and other negatives, American immigration was and is overall a success story. It reflects the positive gains of the nation.

Ethnic Relations in American Life

We must not assume that there was a uniform ethnic attitude among people. The widespread prejudice against Irish, discrimination against Germans and other kinds of ethnic resentments found their way into the language: The phrase "Dutch treat" meaning no treat at all, for example, describes the alleged stinginess of the Dutch (George Fredrickson and Dale T. Knobel, "History of Prejudice and Discrimination", HEAG, p. 840). Discrimination against Germans was another matter, John Higham argued that the first major ethnic crisis in American history involved the Pennsylvania Germans whose settlements seemed to be an inassimilable alien bloc to many of Pennsylvania's non-German majority. Benjamin Franklin was a founding father of the non-religious activists. Franklin, who tried to boss colonial Pennsylvania politics was angry with the Germans because, in one of the state elections, they had voted against Benjamin Franklin. The concept of race relations between English and blacks and more so between all whites and Indians and blacks were largely ignored by colonial Americans. During the era of the American Revolution as in other great crises in our history, ethnic differences were played down. The American Revolution was viewed as the crucible of American nationality. It created fracture lines in every ethnic group in the nation. The most obvious evidence of these fractures was the evidence of emigration from the United States. Emigration was considered the most profoundly un-American act. Jefferson, in the Declaration of Independence, spoke blithely of "one people". He used the "one people" line but carefully noted that American's were "citizens by birth or choice of a common country" and that with slight shades of difference they had the same religion, manners, habits and political principles. Jefferson did spoke blithely of "one people." Part of his bill of particular complained that the King had endeavored to prevent the population of the states by the obstructing the laws of Naturalization of foreigners; refusing to pass others to encourage their migration. He commented on race relations, he made it clear that the United States was a white mans country.

Immigrants and the Constitution

The words "slave" and "slavery" do not appear in the original Constitution. In the famous three-fifths compromise, slaves are "other persons." Gouverneur Morris (1752-1816) did not approve of slavery and kept wordout. The Constitution of 1787 permitted Congress to ban the international slave trade after 1808. It also included a new "privileges and immunities clause in its Article IV, but it did not prohibit domestic slavery and slave trading and did not clarify if free blacks were citizens protected by the new "privileges and immunities" clause. The first Congress in 1790 took advantage of the specific constitutional empowerment and passes a naturalization statute. Very few free blacks came from Africa but after 1808 the international slave trade was indeed banned and immigration from Africa declined greatly. The naturalization statute required that the persons be "white" in order to be naturalized, provided that they had been in the United States for as little as two years (Raveinstein, E.G. "The Laws and Constitutional Journal of the Royal Statistics, 1889, p.301-241). Despite the prohibition, fifty thousand Africans who were taken as slaves were illegally imported from Africa and elsewhere in the New World after the 1807 prohibition. By 1820, there was debate over Missouri becoming a new State.

Privileges and immunities protect the right of northern free blacks to enter Missouri as citizens. These debates

over whether blacks could be citizens continued up through the Dred Scott case where the Supreme Court said "no." This carried on through the Civil War and the post-war. At last the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments said "yes." The 13th amendment ended slavery, the 14th made African-American citizens, and the 15th guaranteed them the right to vote. By 1870, Africans were eligible for naturalization. In spite of the eligibility to vote, equal citizenship was still a difficult hurdle for blacks 5(Maldwyn A. Jones, *American Immigration* (Chicago, 1960), p.65.).

From 1808 up until after 1965, there was little immigration of African-descended persons to the U.S. Some immigrants came chiefly from the Caribbean (like Marcus Garvey in 1916), and their numbers were not very many. Nonetheless they played huge roles in American history. Those Africans who were brought to the United States represented almost a third of all the black people then living in the Western Hemisphere 6(Franklin E. Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (New York, 1916) p.60). The 1965 Act ended the national Origin Quota system and made it possible for more Africans to immigrate to the U.S. though still not in huge numbers.

In 1962-1964, immigration reform was not the most pressing item on the agenda. The Congress took the matter of immigration up again after the 1964 election campaign. The debate in Congress at the time was on how to change the national origins system that President Kennedy had proposed. The basic thrust of the proposal was to scrap the national origins and substitute in its place visa issues.

The fallacy of the law was the belief that the law would benefit the large number of European immigrants who already qualified and were able to come to America. However, the 1965 law has not worked out as it was expected. Two major adjustments were written after 1965. One was the Refugee Act of 1980 and the other was the Immigration Reform Act of 1986. In this day and age, times have changed and immigration has retained its central position on the American agenda.

The experience of African immigrants and citizenship tends to set political bells ringing in the ears of all immigrants, not just African immigrants. The objective legal criteria for immigrants becoming citizens have not changed much over the years, except that race and ethnicity restrictions have been replaced by national quotas. To qualify, an applicant must have lived in this country as a permanent resident--the requirement now is at least five years--and have no criminal record or affiliation with any organization that advocates the violent overthrow of the government.

In the first century after independence, the naturalization process emphasized a loyalty test in which new citizens had to demonstrate their "allegiance to the constitution," and, later, "their attachment to the principles of the constitution." There have been a variety of different tests used, but since 1986, the Immigration Service has relied on a set of 100 possible history and civics questions as the guidelines for those who give citizenship interviews. The test questions cover basics like the structure of the federal government, the cause of the Civil War, the content of the Bill of Rights, and the name of the building where the President lives. Other possible questions include the name of the applicant's Governor, the number of stripes on the flag and the name of the first President.

For an immigrant, the status of citizenship is a solemn benchmark, a rebirth that comes with the change in our lives producing significant transition. For Africans, it introduces a new set of culture, freedom, liberty, dreams, and opportunities. These dreams have become reality, particularly in the fields of literature, politics, sports and, most recently, in the American military. For example, General Colin Powell, who in 1989 became the first black Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is the son of Jamaican parents. However, more still needs to be done. Unequal treatment still permeates our society. We need to eliminate such behavior in order to

have a "just" society for all, so that all citizens can connect to America.

Adeniyi Adeola, an African immigrant who came to the United States with two suitcases and \$2,000, celebrated last Fourth of July. He claimed that being a citizen of the U.S.A. is a way to fit in, to join in the annual rites and rhythms of his new found land. Only a few years ago, he never thought of living in the United States, let alone celebrating America's independence. He now appreciates his freedom and opportunities.

Following are fifteen of the 100 history and civics questions that the Immigration and Naturalization Service has used in its citizenship interviews since 1986. Interviewers can use some or all of the 100 questions, and have wide discretion in phrasing the questions and deciding who passes.

1. What are the colors of our flag?
2. What is the Constitution?
3. What do the stripes on the flag mean?
4. What are the duties of Congress?
5. How many Senators are there in Congress?
6. What Immigration and Naturalization Service form is used to apply to become a naturalized citizen?
7. Who helped the pilgrims in America?
8. Which President freed the slaves?
9. What is the Introduction to the Constitution called?
10. Name one benefit of becoming a citizen of the United States.
11. What are the 49th and 50th States of the Union?
12. In what year was the Constitution written?
13. How many changes or amendments are there to the Constitution?
14. Who is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court?
15. Who said, "Give me liberty or give me death"?

The truth is that the new African immigrants who study for the test know how government works. But in view of some African immigrants, the questions do not constitute a test of relevant or meaningful knowledge. Some claim that it does not test for understanding. There is no cohesiveness about the questions that lets the interviewer know that the person understands what it means to be a citizen in this country. Assessing proficiency in what is called "ordinary English" can be the most arbitrary part of the interview. For about one-third of those who fail the citizenship test, the language problem is the reason. "Ordinary," in my view, is ordinary life, and, generally, immigrants' main means of communication is through speaking. They are not given adequate opportunities to read and write in English. I feel that it is important that more English-training resources be made available so that immigrants can learn enough English to fully participate in all aspects of civic life. However, I'm not sure that the language standard is a fair one when it comes to citizenship. The fact is, we do not hold a high standard of language for those who are already citizens.

Most African immigrants can quickly integrate into mainstream American life. We expect them to learn English and they do. We expect them to participate in politics and they do. So one could probably make a case, in terms of social trends, that the citizenship test hardly matters. But the naturalization exam has a value beyond its content. I think it has virtue—the virtue of solemnification, of rebirth that comes with change of status.

Lesson Plan #1

Objective: Students will learn how to read a map of Africa and identify where each region is located.

Material: Students will practice how to draw the map of Africa and how to place the names and the capitals of the countries.

Procedure: The teacher will ask students to name those regions aloud. The teacher will explain to the students why those regions are important.

Closure: The teacher will summarize the lesson and will explain its relevance to the unit. For homework, students will be given a blank map on Africa and be asked to identify the regions.

Lesson Plan #2

Objective: Student will write a short essay on Africa and America.

Material: Students will be asked to write on how Africans came to America. The teacher will ask questions and discuss what was written: the relationship, the journey, the slavery, etc.

Procedure: The teacher may call on volunteers to read aloud their essays on what they wrote about slavery and coming to America.

Closure: Students should be guided to include any feelings they have at this point as well as new, interesting or disturbing information.

Lesson Plan #3

Objective: Students will be required to make or bring a family picture with all the names of all the family members in the classroom.

Material: Students will be asked to tell stories about their grandparents, parents and how they came to America and where they originally came from.

Procedure: The teacher will introduce the unit by giving an overview of the immigration lesson and how it relates to the family-tree picture. Discussion will focus on when the first family came and why.

The teacher will generate ideas, write them on the chalkboard in a cluster or web. The teacher will proceed to inform students on how we all got to America.

Closure: Teacher will ask questions to make sure every student understands. Students will be asked to create a family tree, putting the names of all their families on a tree.

Notes

1 Phillip D. Curtin, *The African Slave Trade: A Census*, Madison, Wisconsin: 1969.

2 Thistlewaite's Essay, "Migration from Europe Overseas in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, first appeared in *XI Congress International des Sciences Historiques, Rapports* (Stockholm, 1969), vol. 5, pp. 32-60.

3 Edward v. California established in 1941 the right of poor immigrants to cross the state lines.

4 Maldwyn A. Jones, *American Immigration*, Chicago, 1960.

5 Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, New York, 1986.

6 Theodore Hesburgh, "Enough Delay on Immigration," *New York Times*, March 20, 1986.

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3. Johansen, Donald J. "The beginning of humankind" N.Y. 1981 pp 893-101.

4. Jones, Maldwyn A. "American immigration," *Perspectives in American History* 7, 1973, 3-92.

5. Curtin, Phillip D. *The African Slave Trade: A Census*, Madison, WI, 1969.

6. Commission on Immigration and Naturalization. "Whom We Shall Welcome," Washington, D.C., 1952.

7. Tsai, Henry Shih-Shan. *The Chinese Experience in America*, Bloomington, IN, 1986.

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2. Wade, Richard C. Slavery in the Cities. New York, 1964.
3. Ward, David. Cities & Immigrants. New York, 1971.
4. Franklin, John Hope. From Slavery to Freedom 6th ed. New York, 1988.

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Anecdote

This proposal on "Immigration And American Life", has been a good experience for me. One thing to believe is that immigrations and American life will retain central position on the American politics and agenda. The colonial past and the immigrant past cannot be erased. How they are seen in the twenty-first century will depend on the needs of our country. In our time, a heightened awareness of our immigrant past is a footsteps that has accompanied the revival immigration. Whether or not that revival continues, the million who have come in the last century will, with their descendants, be an important factor in American life in the new millennium and let us hope that they will continue to contribute to its growing diversity.

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