# Colored Conventions Project Teaching Guide for College/AP
# EXHIBIT:
# Black Women's Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s

Prepared by Samantha de Vera (History PhD candidate at UC San Diego) in collaboration with P. Gabrielle Foreman (CBDR Co-director, Penn State).

Reviewed by Janel Moore Almond (Colored Conventions Project Teaching Advisory Board).

This teaching guide can be taught in conjunction with Psyche Williams-Forson's article "Where Did They Eat? Where Did They Stay?: Interpreting Material Culture of Black Women's Domesticity in the Context of the Colored Conventions," and P. Gabrielle Foreman's "Black Organizing, Print Advocacy, and Collective Authorship: The Long History of the Colored Conventions Movement," which both appear in the volume *The Colored Conventions Movement: Black Organizing in the Nineteenth Century* (2021), edited by P. Gabrielle Foreman, Jim Casey, and Sarah Lynn Paterson, published by the University of North Carolina Press. For more information on the contents of the volume and where to find it, click here.

**"Black Women's Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s"** curated by Samantha de Vera
Questions:

1. This exhibit features an interactive map of Philadelphia's Black community, which includes nineteenth-century photographs of the streets and buildings. It also locates where Black Philadelphians lived, attended church, ran their businesses, printed their literary productions, held meetings, and buried their loved ones. *Why is it important to visualize the spaces where African Americans built their lives and community? How can this map be used?*
2. *What do you make of the geography of churches, boarding houses, and etc. What does mapping the proximity of Black businesses, boarding houses, and meeting houses—the neighborhoods where these multi-day Black conventions were held—tell us about the larger spatial scope of the meetings themselves?* Consider the visualization included here.
3. The curator of this exhibit, Samantha De Vera, and the author Psyche Williams-Forson posit that Black women's boarding houses are "sites of intellectual production." As this page shows, Black delegates and activists' published a thank-you card to hostess Serena Gardiner. *How does acknowledging Black women's work of facilitating and providing spaces for political discussions help us understand early nineteenth-century organizing and the practices that undergirded it? How does it complicate the notion of gendered separate spheres? As P. Gabrielle Foreman compels readers to ask, how do we center "Black women's intellectual and infrastructure-building labor in*

*convention organizing, even as the written proceedings and records too often marginalize and anonymize them[?]"*[1]

4. Besides running boarding houses, Black women in Philadelphia also worked as dressmakers and milliners, their crafts displayed upon the bodies of their patrons who conveyed their respectability, status, and economic wealth through them. As Jasmine Nichole Cobb writes, "Free Blacks used clothing to transgress norms relating to civil status as well as socioeconomic privilege. Dress portrayed entitlement to respect, and it offered a pleasure that was no longer accessible to Whites only."[2] Compare the carte de visite of a well-dressed Black lady and a Philadelphian caricaturist's racist attempts to denigrate Elizabeth Wilson Hinton, a well-to-do member of Philadelphia's free Black community. *What insights can you draw from looking at Black women's articulation of freedom and contestation of slavery's visual culture through dress? How do we fit this form of resistance alongside the performances within the Colored Conventions?*
5. This exhibit offers brief biographies of Black business owners who joined a cadre of Black activists through their financial support and business activities. For example, bakers Jacob and Elizabeth Gilmore sold tickets to William Whipper's and John C. Bowers's talks. While scholars have focused on Grace Bustill Douglass's father and husband, as this exhibit page shows, she earned money through her trade as a milliner and was active in several antislavery circles and advocated for Black education. *How do we unpack the connections between economic power and community leadership within the Black community?*
6. The five Colored Conventions held in Philadelphia during the 1830s attracted delegates from all over the Northeast. This exhibit maps out where delegates from each convention traveled from, helping viewers to comprehend the effort and commitment that attendees devoted to the Colored Conventions movement as well as the connectedness of Black communities in the North. *How do maps such as this help us understand early nineteenth-century Black mobility? How can we use digital tools to explore the challenges and dangers involved in travelling as a Black person during the nineteenth century?*
7. CLASS ACTIVITY: If your class were to create/hold a convention today, what issues would be its focus? Write a convention call that outlines the convention's objectives, urgent issues at hand, and the active measures delegates and attendees would need to consider, discuss, and plan. Write a comprehensive call and brief version of it (see examples here and here). Prepare to address the following questions:
    a. How would your convention be organized?
    b. What organizations and which leaders would be invited? Who are the non-famous people who would need to be there and from what communities/entities would they draw? Consider how an unprecedented number of Black women participated in the 1854 Emigration

[1] Foreman, 22.
[2] Cobb, Jasmine Nichole. *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (NYU Press, 2015), 120.

Convention and how their presence informed the issues that were discussed and the resolutions that were passed.

c. What objectives do you think most attendees would agree on?
d. What major differences in approaches do you think delegates might have?
e. How do you think it would be covered by the press?

This teaching guide was created by Samantha de Vera in collaboration with P. Gabrielle Foreman.

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Suggested Readings:

Cobb, Jasmine Nichole. *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century*. NYU Press, 2015.

——. ""Forget Me Not": Free Black Women and Sentimentality." *MELUS* 40, no. 3 (2015): 28-46.

Dunbar, Erica Armstrong. *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008.

Millward, Jessice. "Charity Folks, Lost Royalty, and the Bishop Family of Maryland and New York." *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): 24-47.

Winch, Julie. "Sarah Forten's Anti-Slavery Networks." In *Women's Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, edited by Skylar Kathryn Kish and Stewart James Brewer, 143-57. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2007.