

Slavery, Jim Crow, & The Great Migration

Overview: This 3-day lesson plan situates students deeply in African American experiences of migration to, within and across the United States. Lesson one considers the transatlantic slave trade and the institution of American slavery, specifically the notion of “inherited bondage.” It considers theological, economic, and societal/cultural arguments within the debate over abolition. Lesson two covers the Emancipation Proclamation and the Jim Crow South while encouraging students to think chronologically and thematically about African American migration during this time. Finally, lesson three covers the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance through primary source cultural products, mostly poetry, in order to highlight how migration and movement (whether voluntary or involuntary) can lead to the significant production of arts, music, and literature.

Lesson Objectives (Students will be able to...):

- Understand the history of the transatlantic slave trade.
- Describe how racial categories were written into the law and created a slavery system based upon the concept of “inherited bondage.”
- Describe various arguments about the institution of American slavery between the 17th-19th centuries.
- Locate, decipher and describe primary source materials.
- Define migration and differentiate between voluntary and involuntary migration.
- Explain chronologically and based upon primary sources how the anti-slavery movement achieved its goals in the US.
- Understand that Jim Crow laws arose following the abolition of slavery and how these structures/events related to the Great Migration.
- Articulate the relationship between the Great Migration and the Harlem Renaissance.

Essential questions:

- How have African Americans moved across the U.S. in ways both voluntary and involuntary?
- When was the concept of “inherited bondage” built into the U.S. legal code and how was it unique?
- What economic, theological, and social arguments undergirded 17th-19th century debates about the U.S. institution of slavery?
- What was the Emancipation Proclamation, why was it issued, and what did it ensure?
- Was a system of racial hierarchy redrawn after Emancipation?
- Did Jim Crow function as a mechanism of social control?
- What historical circumstances led to the Great Migration?
- What was the Harlem Renaissance and how did it result from movement and migration?

Materials

- [“Wreckage of the Past”](#) video
- [“Inherited bondage”](#) video

- [“The African American Migration Story”](#)
- [Definitions table](#) - The Great Migration
- [“The Harlem Renaissance’s cultural explosion”](#) video
- [Southern economy video](#)
- [Emancipation Proclamation Louisiana literacy test](#)
- [“The Great Migration”](#) poem by Minnie Bruce Pratt
- Pratt [reciting](#) her poem
- [“Harlem: A Poem”](#) with guiding questions
- [I Hear America Singing”](#)
- [“Let America be America Again”](#)
- [Whitman](#) geography video
- [Hughes](#) biography video
- [“An Independence Day Double-Header”](#)
- [“Migrations”](#) video
- [“Revisiting the Great Migration Through Paintings and Poetry”](#) video
- [The Liberator excerpt](#)
- [Jim Crow Museum image collection](#)

In-Class Activities

Day 1 - Slavery

- 1) Facilitate a class-wide conversation to create guidelines for how to navigate the difficult topics you will be covering in class.
- 2) Play the [“Wreckage of the Past”](#) video and encourage students to answer the following questions as they watch:
 - How many people are estimated to have been taken from Africa to America over three centuries?
 - What is the “Middle Passage”?
 - Who is investigating sunken slave ships, and what is their background?
 - Where are the ships located, and when did they sink?
 - Why are the divers seeking out these shipwrecks, according to this piece?
- 3) Present the timeline of the history of slavery and civil rights in the context of US history at-large (included in PowerPoint).
- 4) Introduce the transatlantic slave trade. Explain that it was the enslavement and transportation, primarily of African people, to the colonies of the New World to build and uphold an economy based on slave labor. Over ~300 years, some 12.5 million captured men, women, and children were put on ships in Africa, and 10.7 million arrived in the Americas.
- 5) Play [this video](#) about the concept of “inherited bondage.” Have students answer the following questions in small-groups and be prepared to return to a class-wide discussion to report on what their groups discussed.

- Was there motivation behind a law ensuring Black people could be born into slavery?
 - Is there a relationship between building generational wealth and living in freedom?
 - How might people held in bondage have experienced removal or migration?
- 6) Introduce theological, economic, and social arguments about the institution of American slavery between the 17th-19th centuries. Explain that abolitionists were arguing to end to slavery based upon religious scripture and theological arguments (use text from Angelina Grimke as an example). Social and economic arguments also played significant roles in this debate.
- Angelina Grimke was a Christian and the daughter of a South Carolina plantation owner, enslaver, and judge. Her father helped write the SC slave codes/laws. She disagreed with her father about slavery and religion, and later in life became a Quaker. She and her sister, Sarah, both became vocal and renowned abolitionist activists.
 - Consider playing [this video](#) about the cotton economy of the South and its reliance on slave labor. Explain that many people feared that a sudden end to the slave economy would have a profound and killing economic impact on the South.
 - Explain social fears that the abolition and dismantling of the system of slavery would lead to changed social dynamics, violence, and uprisings.
- 7) For homework, offer students two options (both require an in-class presentation).

Option 1: instruct students to read through the stages and patterns of migration on "[The African American Migration Story](#)." They should choose 1 event/date from the PBS resource and conduct additional research to describe the push and pull factors of migration, making sure to consider both involuntary and voluntary forms of movement. Students should prepare a 2-5 minute presentation for tomorrow's class about their moment in the history of African American migration (in the forms of a PowerPoint, speech, or creative project).

Option 2: Instruct students to pick one primary source from "[The Abolition Seminar](#)." Tell them to prepare three discussion questions for the class inspired by their primary source, as well as to answer the following questions. They should be prepared to present their questions and findings to the class.

- What kind of source is it?
- Who is the author?
- When was it created?
- Who is the audience?
- What does it argue, explain, or showcase?

Day 2 - Jim Crow

- 1) Introduce the lesson by providing students the essential questions: Was a system of racial hierarchy redrawn after Emancipation? Did Jim Crow laws function as a mechanism of social control?
- 2) Invite students to present their homework assignments from Day 1 - this will require a

significant portion of class-time. Students should take notes and write their questions down as they listen to classmates' presentations. If time permits, encourage them to ask each other questions

- 3) Describe the history of the Emancipation Proclamation. Tell students it was issued by Abraham Lincoln in the third year of the Civil War (1863), but that it ended slavery only in the Confederate states and did not apply to slave states in the Union. It also allowed for African Americans to join the Union Army but provided no real provisions for formerly enslaved people fleeing the South. Emphasize that Lincoln's goal was to weaken the Confederacy and hurt their war effort. Substantiate this claim with Lincoln's letter to the *New York Tribune*.
- 4) Have students close-read the [Emancipation Proclamation](#) independently, and then lead a discuss.
- 5) Introduce the American Anti-Slavery Society and famous abolitionist activists. Emphasize that the actors relied upon each other to uplift the movement for immediate emancipation and dissolution of the system of US slavery. Make clear that Lincoln's proclamation did not "appear out of thin air," rather people had been organizing, speaking and lobbying for years to bring about the end to slavery.
- 6) Show the timeline of Emancipation, 1861-65, and explain how the passing of the 13th Amendment in 1865 officially abolished slavery in the US – that Congress needed to approve the amendment and the decision was not entirely in the Executive Branch (president's) control.
- 7) Explain to students that post-abolition, new laws arose to maintain a race-based social order in the US called Jim Crow law. Post-abolition, new laws arose to maintain a race-based social order across the US, and significantly in the South. In 1896, the Supreme Court ruled that facilities could be "separate, but equal" in the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*. The impact of this decision by the Court led to the segregation of the South and the enactment of Jim Crow laws in many areas of daily life. These laws violated the civil rights of African Americans. From the 1880s into the 1960s, most American states enforced segregation through "Jim Crow" laws (so called after a black character in minstrel shows). From Delaware to California, and from North Dakota to Texas, many states (and cities, too) could impose legal punishments on people for mingling with members of another race. The most common types of laws forbade intermarriage and ordered business owners and public institutions to keep blacks and whites separated.
- 8) Show students the [Louisiana literacy test](#) required to vote as a Black person in that state to showcase how laws and customs existed to prevent the real achievement of equality. Emphasize the Jim Crow was a race-based system supported by both violence and custom.
- 9) Provide details of Nina Simone's biography and explain how violence against African Americans inspired her to use her musical platform to speak out about inequality. Distribute the written lyrics of Simone's song, "Mississippi Goddam" to students; they should follow along as the [video](#) of her singing the song is shown. Students should prepare answer for the following questions as they listen/follow along.
 - What is the overall mood of the song?
 - Do you think the title is justified? Why or why not?

- How effective do you think this song is in expressing the frustrations of African Americans during the Civil Rights movement?
 - What does Simone mean by, “They keep on saying ‘Go slow!’”? Who is “they”? Who is supposed to slow down? What are they supposed to ‘Go slow’ about?
 - What does “everybody know” about Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee?
- 10) For homework, tell students to choose one image from the Jim Crow Museum image collection [here](#). Encourage them, in their writing, to think creatively, historically, politically, and thematically. They should write and submit a 2-4 page story inspired by the primary source they chose.

Day 3 - The Great Migration & The Harlem Renaissance

- 1) Introduce the day’s activities by sharing the guiding questions: What historical circumstances led to the Great Migration? What was the Harlem Renaissance and how did it result from movement and migration?
- 2) Lecture about the Great Migration using the visual map (Included on PowerPoint). Explain that the Great Migration was one of the largest migrations ever of the African American population. Many scholars consider it as two waves, between 1916 and 1930, and from 1940 to 1970. The Great Migration saw a total of six million African Americans leave the South.
- 3) Play the two videos linked on the PowerPoint: “[Migrations](#)” and “[Revisiting the Great Migration Through Paintings and Poetry](#).” While watching both videos, have students jot down all “push” and “pull” factors that they hear.
- 4) Display Langston Hughes’ “One-Way Ticket” on the board. Ask one student to read aloud for the class. Ask your class to share their immediate reactions and thoughts to the poem. How does it relate to or describe the Great Migration?
- 5) Play the PBS video, “[The Harlem Renaissance’s cultural explosion](#).” Have students answer the following questions.
 - What was the Great Migration, and what influenced African-Americans to move from the South to places like Harlem?
 - What were some of the unusual circumstances African-Americans faced in New York City at the time of the Great Migration?
 - Why do you think this migration contributed to an explosion of art and culture in Harlem?
- 6) In partners, have students read and annotate, “[Harlem: A Poem](#)” answer the questions at the end of the PDF. *If time permits*, allow for a class-wide discussion following partner activity.
- 7) Instruct students to read “[The Great Migration](#)” poem by Minnie Bruce Pratt silently and independently. They should identify words, images, and phrases that jump out in the poem, as well as the unusual placement of words on the page and keep a running list of the words you read and hear, but do not entirely understand.
- 8) As a class, listen to Pratt [recite](#) her poem. Tell students, as they listen to the audio, to record what they notice, pay close attention to the way she reads the different stanzas, and answer: what do you hear differently now that the poem is being read out loud?

9) Separate students into small groups. They should create a list combining what all of the group members noticed about the poem's content and structure. Tell them to talk about the spacing of the stanzas on the page and what you think it might mean. They should also answer:

- How many speakers are there in the poem? Who are they? How does the spacing of the stanzas help them understand this?
- What was the Great Migration?
- How does the Great Migration relate to the first migration mentioned in the poem? Why is it cited later on?
- What other migrations are mentioned? How are they similar to, or different from, the Great Migration?
- Why does Beatrice give onions to the person she met in Spanish class? What is Minnie Bruce Pratt trying to tell us by including this action in her poem?

Have students return class for class-wide discussion. They should be prepared to present what their groups discussed.

10) For homework, students should work individually to define each of the words and terms they compiled for their lists in class. Then, students will read Walt Whitman's "[I Hear America Singing](#)" and Langston Hughes' "[Let America be America Again](#)." They should watch these two videos to learn their biographies: [Whitman](#) & [Hughes](#). As well, read "[An Independence Day Double-Header](#)" and then compare the poems/poets and answer the following questions.

- How did the poets experience American liberty differently?
- What makes a poem democratic?
- How did early photography enhance the poetic style and messaging of Hughes and Whitman?
- How did each poet personalize his written work?