

UNIT 3 – The Free Black Community in Princeton, NJ

Enduring Understanding: Throughout the history of the United States, racial prejudices have led to the creation of racial hierarchies between white and black communities in both the North and South.

Lenses: Race, Economics, Politics, Religion, and Social Class/Hierarchy

Objectives: Students will describe how racial hierarchy emerged and was maintained in a northern town, understand the character of a free Black community, research the conditions of slaves in the South and contrast them to those of free blacks in the North

Essential questions:

- How are our ideas about social hierarchy shaped by race and class in the United States of America?
- What are some of the 19th and 20th century perceptions of Southerners about freed people in the North vis-à-vis slaves in the South?

Primary Materials

- Ann Maria Davison’s “Visit to the Colored People of Princeton” (Document #1)

Teaching and learning strategies:

- Daily Challenge
- KWL
- Annotation
- Debate
- DBQ
- Jigsaw
- Socratic Seminar
- Text-Dependent Questions
- Be a historian

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness...”

– The Declaration of Independence

Unalienable rights vs. Inalienable rights

Daily Challenge:

1. What is the difference between Unalienable Rights and Inalienable Rights?

Turn to your partner and talk

2. Reread the statement in bold above and compose a brief argument regarding the

phrase "...all men are created equal." Is this a promise, or a negotiable assertion?

Document 1: A Visit to the Colored People of Princeton

Vocabulary exercise – Define the following words in the context of the document:

- Improvident
- Congregated
- Deportment
- Civil
- Miserable
- Degraded
- Sallied
- Sepulchre

Text-based questions: Be certain to cite evidence from the document to support your discussion

- What was the purpose of Ann Maria Davison's manuscript?
- Who is the audience?
- Does Ms. Davison have anything in particular to gain from writing about her visit to Princeton? Explain
- From whom do you suppose Ms. Davison "inquired about the manner of [black people's] living in Princeton?" What can you deduce from the answers that she received back?
- Reread the second paragraph of the document. What conclusions can you draw about the living conditions of "... the black people who seemed to cluster round the college?"
- From the document, could you guess the location of the "Negro Town" in Princeton?
- What strikes you most about Ms. Davison's observation that "...some five or six colored children, as if Just out of school, dressed well, deporting themselves as well as white children...?"
- What perceptions/stereotypes did white people have about black people in this document?
- -Explain what "...the slavery questions" were.
- After reading this document, what conclusions can you draw about the state of race relations then, and now? Between the stereotypical views about slavery by Southerners and Northerners? Use examples from your reading, observation, and, or experience.
- Cite two reasons why Ms. Davison was "...astonished at the opinions expressed by these northern people (that there was no wrong in slavery)."
- Have you read Mrs. Stowe's book? What are the main points of Harriet Beecher Stowe's argument on slavery?
- Why did the "...gentleman from Pennsylvania" and others in this document insist that "...the slaves were far better off, than the poor white people?" Explain your

answer

- The role of religion (in particular, Christianity) in slavery has been severely overlooked. Discuss the religious arguments for slavery in this document. Are they justified? If so, explain why. If not, explain why not.
- Was a "...foolish fuss [indeed] made about slavery?" Were slaves indeed, happy about their condition?
- Construct a Venn Diagram/Graphic Organizer/ T Table that compares the living conditions of slaves, according to Ms. Davison, in the South, on Plantations and her visit to the fourteen homes of colored people of Princeton.

DBQ (Document Based Question – Essay)

- Ms. Davison says "My object was to compare the comforts of the free blacks of the free states, with the slaves of the Slave States-" After carefully reviewing this document, and analyzing the last paragraph (on page 8) explain whether you agree with her conclusions.

Interviewing Ms. Davison

Your assignment is to work with a partner to come up with six to ten questions that you would like to ask Ms. Davison should you have the opportunity to meet her. Your questions should be based on your reading of this document.

Project-Based Learning - Being a Historian: Investigating the Human Experience

- How does Ms. Davison's document compare to other reports, lessons, and or teachings on slavery? What might account for the similarities or differences? Is Ms. Davison's information reliable? How do you know? What other sources confirm your assertion?
- Students may use other reliable sources such as Art, Photographs, Oral Histories, Secondary sources, Songs/Hymns for this project.
- Students, working in small groups, will review current and historical maps to locate some of the neighborhoods in Princeton, then, and now.

Document 1

Ann Maria Davison
May 1855

A Visit to the Colored People of Princeton

I have been frequently in Princeton and always remarked the black people that seem'd to cluster around the College; wait in public houses &c- I inquired about the manner of their living— in what way they supported themselves, and what were their character generally? The answers were from Students and such persons as chance through in the way of passing travelers; that they were a poor miserable degraded set of beings, improvident, living from hand to mouth, all congregated together in what they called Negro Town.

I had observed my washerwoman at the Hotel to be respectable in her deportment, neat and clean in her appearance— also the waiter at the Hotel where I was staying, was polite and civil, and altogether a very decent man. I saw a seamstress of much intelligence and propriety of behavior, and in the street one day a group of some five or six colored children, as if just out of school dressed well, deporting themselves as well as white children, with their school bags on their arms, seeming to contain a goodly number of books.

I wondered to myself how all this could be; and they such poor creatures, I formed the wish to see them at their homes, in this Negro town, and determined in my own mind, should an opportunity ever offer, I would do so. I made my intentions known to some southern students whom I knew and asked for direction to this said Negro Town. They told me if I went there I should disgrace myself, as no decent ladies ever went among such filthy low people— but I would go, they would tell me where they lived— I was en route for Philadelphia the 26th of May, 1855 and had the morning from 8 O'clock to 2 O'clock P.M. unoccupied. With the proper directions I sallied forth as soon as I had taken my breakfast, for my visit to the colored people.

I was just prepared for this visit by some conversation with some gentleman a few evenings previous, at the St Nicholas Hotel in New York. I was introduced in a private parlor to an older gentleman from Pennsylvania, and another from Maine. The then recent outrages in Kansas formed the principle topic for conversation, which very naturally ran into the slavery question. I was astonished at the opinions expressed by these northern people (that there was no wrong in slavery), when they have not the apology of interest for such a conclusion. A lady present— from Portland— said “in considering slaves property it was a security for their being cared for; it was the interest of everyone to take care of their property and she believed them well treated. She did not believe a word of Mrs. Stowes book, that said to the contrary”— a person present remarked, that fine horses were sometimes much pampered, and all more, or less, cared for in proportion to their value and as to the truth of Mrs. Stowe's book, she had

only left unsaid much that might be told to make the position of the slave more truthful. The gentleman from Pennsylvania said that the slaves were far better off, than the poor white people. The colored race were not capable of providing for themselves. They were better off than in Africa, and that it would be humane to bring them here and make them slaves. He believed that God had made them black for that purpose. They were inferior to us, and should be kept in subjection to us.

I asked him what he would make of Paul's teaching on Mars Hill to the most enlightened people in the known world—the Athenians—that God "hath made of one blood all the nations of man, to dwell on all the face of the earth" And what, of one of Christ's precepts, that said, "whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye the like unto them"

He said "that saying was perverted— and he did not believe that all were made originally alike. But said he— it is strange, that you, a southern woman, should go against slavery, and I, a northern man, for it."

I asked him, if north, or south, made any difference in determining the question of right, and wrong? And how, he liked the separation of families— the taking away from a man all the fruits of his labor, and depriving him of the privilege of learning to read? He said he did not think such things happened often. I told him such were the attributes of slavery, and occurred every day, and that Mrs. Stowe had told the truth.

These were intelligent people, and yet entirely ignorant on the subject of slavery. Their observations showed this. One of them said, he saw no use in disturbing so happy of people as the slaves were— they would sing and dance and be merry, and yet a foolish fuss was made about slavery— As for their being taught, they had teaching enough for their souls salvation, and that was all that was necessary, for them —

I replied, that as to the first position he advanced— the happiness of the slave we frequently saw pigs in a sty wallowing in filth, and yet by their uncouth gruntings they gave unmistakable signs of perfect enjoyment. And as to their religious instruction there certainly was more attention bestowed on it now, than formerly; but that I could point to facts within my knowledge where the lash had been used, and very severely used, to break up prayer meetings

If these people had lived amidst slavery and seen it in all its operations— with minds impartial in judging of it— they would have thought differently.

To return to Princeton, and my morning excursion to Negro Town—

The first house I entered was in a little street opposite the College buildings—Witherspoon Street. It was a little confectionery store in a small front room; up from the street a few steps; kept by William Simpson a colored man. I told him that I came from the south, where I had often been told that the free people of color living in

the Northern States could not provide for themselves, and that they lived in great poverty and wretchedness, and were wholly unable to live otherwise—that I had a great desire to see their condition myself, and had therefore called to see him, and intended to go in other houses.

I asked him if he could make out to support his family—for his whole stock of Candy & Cakes did not seem to be worth more than \$10 or 15)—and what he paid for the rent of that shop? He said I own it Ma-m. Do you really? Oh yes! and I own a much better house than this this which brings me rent. Well, I said, then I think you can make a living. Will you give me your name? And some paper, and can you lend me a pencil to put down the names of some others, that I may visit, where I may not find one? (supposing that this proprietor of houses, could not be equaled in the place) While he was looking up a piece of paper for me, and a pencil— a very well looking woman—(probably his wife) presented herself at the door, opening in to the back room with some sewing in her hand and said, I guess Madam you will not go into any of the houses of the colored people that you will not find pen, and ink, or paper and pencil. I took the paper however with Simpsons name on it, and proceeded to Greene St— after taking a leave of my new acquaintances, with renewed belief that the blacks are capable of taking care of themselves

The next house I entered was Evelina Braziers—a widow with a number of children. She was almost white. She said her husband had left her. She looked poor, and unneat. She took in washing. Her house had two rooms—enough for furniture to be comfortable, but everything looks neglected. She rented the rooms.— She too had a pencil

The next house there lived a widow. Rachel Tenyke. She had seven children. It was a snug little house, parlor, and back rooms— the Children looked healthy. The Mother had gone out to clean house, the oldest daughter was taking care of the children— The house had two stories— There was a garden planted— The home and lot they owned, but not wholly paid for— Things here were not in very good order, but plenty of bedding and all kinds of furniture to be comfortable— there was Pencil Pen Ink and Paper

The next house was Flora Vantyne's, an old Maid- Here was a bell; I rang it, and there came to the door a tidy prim looking woman, who invited me to enter most cordially. She seated me in a front parlor, back of which was her dining room, and still back of that, her kitchen. On her parlor centre table lay a handsome Bible— Some of the Psalms,— Owen on the spirit,— Baxters Saints rest, with other books, of that character, together with the [?] and I think the N. York Observer. I will remark, in every house I saw a Bible, sofa, handsome chairs, carpets, with ornamental little things which composed the parlor furniture, and the sideboard and other suitable articles composed of that of the dining room. I told her my object of visiting her, (which I repeated in every house)— She seemed to take great pleasure in showing me her apartments, and her garden. Her kitchen was neatness itself. She owned the house and lot — It was 175 feet deep, 65 feet front, it was well improved & ornamented with shrubbery in such portions as was not converted to more profitable uses—

The next house belonged to James Titus, & Margaret his wife— It was the same sized lot as Flora Vantynes, affording a large garden, which was well improved— parlor furnished well, with the carpet, sofa, mirror, books on centre table, back dining room— everything comfortable and neat— but not equal to Flora's —

The next house belonged to Joseph Striker, & Rachel his wife— The same sized lot, as the other two, All three owned them, and they look alike— All cultivated well. Books were on the center table — always the Bible— Things did not look as neat and orderly here as at the other places— their books where out place but they supplied me with a good pen, and portable inkstand—

The next house was Matthias Vanhome— he had a wife, and three children. He did not own the house— They do not appear to be as well off as the others. Plenty of furniture in two rooms, but more in confusion—always pen, or pencil, and a Bible—

The next home was shut up.

These eight homes were all on one side of green street.- then I crossed over on the other side, and had to omit going in to some houses because time was pressing— Two adjoining that looked very much improved, I entered. They were lots of equal size, and houses about equal. They belonged to Henry Craig and Charles Craig— These two places exceeded all others that I had seen; Margaret, Henry Craigs wife, was a very intelligent woman. She took me in to her parlor, that might be called genteelly furnished for any white people in middling circumstances. On the table between the windows, under a large mirror, were the richest china articles of various tastes, and patterns- handsome chairs, sofa, always carpets, and books —and then in the back room, side Board, and dining room furniture. It was May. Margaret was arranging shrubbery in her front yard. It was laid out with box wood.

I went to the door Charles Charles Craig, but did not go in for want of time. It seemed equal to his brothers —

Then I came out of Green street, and went into John's Alley- Mrs Clay lived on the corner— She was busy, cooking her dinner which looked, very good, and sent forth a fragrance that created a desire for some of it. They looked rather poor, but seemed to have every thing necessary for comfort— They did not own the house.

Directly opposite was a good looking two story house— small— with everything around it, looking in good order. Time would not allow me to go in it, I asked Mrs Clay who occupied it, she said her Aunt Mrs Beekman and that she owned the house and lot—

Next door Mrs Cudges lived- She did not owned the house, but the owner was a colored man.

Next door lived Gilbert Reden – He did not own the house- Both these houses are small, and looked rather poor compared to others-

Next door Samuel Scudder lived. He has a comfortable house, and a garden and owns it– He carries the Mail & Papers- He had a large family—a number of grown girls– They do ornamental work & Knit Tidies- One played the Piano –

There were two other small houses in Johns Alley, into which I could not go- They looked at to be of the poorer order–

In all I entered fourteen dwellings of these colored people, and Pondered within myself how it could, truthfully be said, that they were so wretched and destitute. The only satisfactory explanation I could make to myself, was, the comparison I supposed to the white population must be constantly making, between their own spacious Mansions, and the humble homes of the poor black man— Could they go on the Plantations and see how the slaves live; and then compare them with these homes of the free colored people of Princeton– they would see the difference. It is no criterion to judge of the comforts of slaves—to see them as house servants—though sometimes they are treated bad enough –neither is it a criterion from which to make up a judgment, to go on some few Plantation, where they are comparatively treated well. But in order to know what slavery really is; persons must stay in its midst, for years – observe its operations, in all its different phases; They will then see the comfortless homes of the slaves; The degraded, and crushed condition, of their moral, and natural feelings; They will see the reasons for their lying, and stealing, and cheating, and deceiving in so many ways

They will then see them torn from their dearest relatives, without daring to utter a single murmur, or seek a sympathizing word. They will see that such are the legitimate consequences of slavery– and not the fault of the slave

My object was to compare the comforts of the free blacks of the free states, with the slaves of the slave states–

The poorest house that I saw in Princeton was Evelina Braziers. A Widow with children. It was far superior for comfort then the very best that I ever saw on any Plantation in any slave state. There are some house servants in Cities and plantation that have comfortable places, but the generality of their comforts on plantations consist of a Bunk a Blanket or two some little utensils for cooking– Water Bucket and a stools or stools. ~~With such interior comforts along with regular line of white sepulchres will present a beautiful aspect to the beholder in passing these large plantations~~

The colored people of Princeton have a Church Old school Presbyterian- Dr McLean President of the College sometimes attends it, and administers the Lords supper to them. They have a sunday School of over one hundred scholars. Dr McLean told me that some of them were, very intelligent christians; and that there were among them men worth ten thousand dollars.

I recorded these facts to shew that these poor miserable people (as they were called) live in their own comfortable homes, with no one to control them, or make them afraid, while the generality of Southern slaves are in miserable huts, or cabins, with the bare necessities, but none of the comforts, or luxuries of life— On some plantations we see long rows of cabins, neatly whitewashed— but they are like whited sepulchres.