Slavery, Abolition, Emancipation, & Freedom Unit

A Black Studies unit guide for the usage of digitized primary source materials relating to the Haughton Library’s Slavery, Abolition, Emancipation, & Freedom initiative.

Grade Levels: 6-12

Vocabulary:
libraries, archives, primary source, secondary source, genealogy, ethnography, hegemony, restorative justice, anthropology, African diaspora, Slavery, Emancipation, manumission, abolition, The Abolition Movement, Transatlantic Slave Trade, Black, race, ethnicity, nationality,

Introduction & Rationale

The concept of the African Diaspora is one that is foundational to Black history and in a maximal sense; World history. Approaching such a vast historical complex with students who are still building early literacy and comprehension skills is a large undertaking. In Boston’s school district the vast majority of students are from the African diaspora even though their data is statistically misrepresented with the demographic term Hispanic. Due to our inertia around addressing the inefficient language of Ethnonational identity; we have a compounded bureaucracy as well as an older colonial predicament of members of the African diaspora having contentious relationships with the acquisition/connection of Blackness and Africa to their lives.

This is forged from centuries of colonial maneuvering and white supremacist violence; it will not be easily undone in one singular session, one school year, or even one generation. What does this have to do with archival material and how is this related to Black studies? In the context of the lives of youth in Boston, they live in a metropolitan city that is the home of many ethnic groups within the continental African and Black diaspora. These groups include but are not limited to: Caribbean, Central Africans, South Africans, West Africans, East Africans specifically from the Horn of Africa, and the American southeastern Great Migration and native Southern ethnicities. The average classroom then functions as a vital chance for building a type of historical, global, and personal literacy around the vastness of the African diaspora. In addition to using archives to articulate the expansive nature of the Black diaspora, the classroom and archives converge at a critical place that offers students the ability to understand and embed themselves into the rich history of resistance and liberation that connects all of us from our respective diasporic positions.

These learning tools and activities make it possible to build the capacity and stamina within our student populations to be able to build those critical thinking foundations. These foundations allow them to analyze structures of hegemony, use historical materials to make clear connections to their material realities, use history as a building block for their own ongoing political education, use restorative justice circle practice to share their own family genealogies...
and build greater classroom community, **study the archival materials of abolition to connect and organize around various abolition struggles** within their lives, and many other possibilities.

Below is a table that lays out the main ethno racial categories and their considerations for the unit and it’s accessibility within Cambridge Public Schools as well as Boston Public Schools. This table contains demographic breakdowns and possible connections these demographics present to the subject matter of the project.

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<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Race*</th>
<th>Demographic Percentage</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CPS</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>*(This demographic includes both Black/Afro-Descended students, Indigenous Central Americans, Indigenous South Americans, and White Students from Latin America.) In the context of CPS this group’s demographic re: connection to the archival primary source documents are Brazilians, Caribbeans, and Central Americans from El Salvador.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White</td>
<td>38.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hispanic*</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>*(This demographic includes both Black/Afro-Descended students, Indigenous Central Americans, Indigenous South Americans, and White Students from Latin America.) In the context of BPS this</td>
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demographic’s connection to the archival primary source documents are Caribbeans: mainly Dominicans & Puerto Ricans, Garifuna Central Americans from Honduras, Cape Verdean and Brazilians

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>White*</td>
<td>14%</td>
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*Within BPS, it's common for Afro-descended Students from former Portuguese colonies like Brazil and Cape Verde are marked as White in the school demographic system. So this category also contains many Black students.

**Project | Family Autoethnography Using Primary Source documents**

Duration: 5-10 days

**Materials**
- Scanner
- Projector
- Access to computer room/chrome books
- Paper
- Circle Talking Piece

This is a larger scale multi day project that involves using an archival source material to do a personal project around their own family’s genealogy. The first day will be an activity that's an introduction to the material and a discussion circle with multiple rounds that could include questions like

1. What do we think family might mean to emancipated Black Americans in this time?
2. What do we think freedom within this family means? What do these documents give us insight to the lives of these people?
3. What is a family story you want to preserve?

In their discussion circle, there is also the possibility for a virtual/in person component for librarians to be able to field questions, possibly participate in a circle, and give historical background around the source materials.
The second day, the educator will give background around the framework of autoethnography. Autoethnography is defined as an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience [x]. This sets up the personal family archival project that the students will do. The preliminary concept for the project will be to find existing family photos (or if that is not possible or not desirable, Students can take their own photos) that are representative of the following things:

- A place that makes them feel safe
- A family memory that represents freedom or the possibility of freedom (that meaning is up to them)
- A photo that represents family or the concept of family
- A photo that represents their legacy
- A photo that shows us something they would like to be free from.
- What does community look like to them
- What does everyday life look like?
- What is a fun activity that you enjoy?
- What is the most mundane part of your day

The following days for the rest of the week will be around the completion of the photo project. To find these photos or take these photos, they will be able to scan in school (or possibly with the help of librarians within the project, use of the reading room to do on site project work) their photos and print them to create a collection of their own family history.

To finish this project, students will write reflective essays about

- the archival materials
- their connections they made to their own work and family history
- what they learned about their family in the process
- what they learned about the uses of doing autoethnographic research to connect themselves within a larger Black Atlantic cultural context.

***bonus essay consideration***: Educators can employ their own discretion around the possibility for a deeper racial class analysis component. For advanced students, there is a great opportunity on the following files [x] [x] [x] to discuss a bit around the contexts of class variations amongst emancipated Black people. From slavery to abolition, there has been a plurality of economic experiences due to region, individual planter dynamic and relations, as well as the possibilities of paid work outside of the plantation/estate/factory obligations in which some enslaved people could buy their freedom and work for pay. There are lots of reasons that can create a unique
scenario in which a family like the Carter family can have the luxury to eat out, donate to charity, or even pay property taxes during a time when most Black people didn’t have such economic privileges. For students or even implementation of these materials that are more in depth; there is an opportunity for further research around the historical and material dynamics that create the conditions of privilege that the Carters live within. If the educator sees fit to incorporate class analysis into the unit; the concluding reflective essay can also have a criteria around analyzing class in the role of the lives of free, freed, and enslaved Black people.

Considerations For Engaging SAEF Archival Documents & Latin America
As noted earlier in the BPS/CPS demographic breakdown table; the category of latino is not a racial descriptor. In the context of both school districts, the Latino category contains racial overlap within both the Black and White demographic categories. On paper, the average BPS/CPS classroom might be considered latino while the students populating said classrooms will mostly be from countries within the African Diaspora like The Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, Colombia, Brasil as well as Cape Verde. For educators looking for a wider scope of historical materials around the slave trade in Latin America, there is the Houghton Library collection of Cuban slavery documents. This collection “consists of documents related to the institution of slavery and emancipation in Cuba over the course of the island’s long process of gaining independence from Spain. With the exception of 3 items from the 16th century, the documents date from the mid to late 19th century and represent a variety of both official and personal records. Since enslaved people were considered "property" of their enslavers, civil authorities did little to administer the lives of the former as legal entities, e.g., issuing them birth certificates, establishing official forms of their names, etc. The Catholic Church, however, in its role as self-appointed guardian of the souls of both free and enslaved, did in many cases record names, dates, and places as they related to ecclesiastical sacraments—here, chiefly baptism and marriage. The collection thus contains a large proportion of letters and reports reflecting formerly enslaved individuals' efforts to confirm their legal identities, intra and post emancipation, with the aid of church records. There are also a large number of fatality reports, along with a variety of censuses and statistics, including commercial summaries of slave sales. Finally, the collection documents the Cuban system of patronato, or patronage, whereby capitalists, called patronos, would
sponsor formerly enslaved individuals (patronados) in paid employment, often at the same sugar mills or plantations where they had previously worked in bondage. “(x)"

This collection is useful for the educator who has a classroom space that can benefit from more historical plurality around understanding The Slave Trade beyond the shores of the United States. These documents show a very marked difference in record keeping that troubles our dominant narrative of record keeping and archival materials on enslaved Black people as they are tied to Estate records by British and American planters. In former Spanish colonies, the Church also plays an institutional role in record keeping of enslaved Black people. For example we can use the Birth registration for Candida Cano Cárdenas, pardal. And clearly see quickly inscribed under the documentos heading the word Negros (meaning Black people).

This is useful for drawing more historically relevant ties to the inner workings of the Slave Trade relating to the former Spanish colonies that also happen to be ones that most of Boston and Cambridges Black diaspora population encapsulated in the latino category are descended from. Often times, we teach and engage slavery from the perspective of the United States. This isn't insufficient per say, but for classrooms or even for a deeper analysis of the internationalist reach of global imperialism; we must also consider the role and the particularities of enslavement across the hemisphere.