

INTRODUCTION

CENTRALIZING THE HISTORY OF SLAVERY, RACISM, AND RESISTANCE

Why Race Still Matters

IN THE PREFACE TO *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK* (1903/2007, 9), W. E. B. DUBOIS DESCRIBED the “problem of the Twentieth Century” as the “problem of the color-line.” The more research and reading I did for this book and the more discussion and teaching I engaged in on the legacy of slavery, race, and racism in the United States, it became clearer that if DuBois were alive today he would amend this statement. It has become increasingly apparent that the “problem of the color-line” in the United States was not just the “problem of the Twentieth Century,” but is also the “problem” of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twenty-first centuries. This book, written just before and after the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States, builds on DuBois’s claim to place slavery, racism, and resistance to oppression at the center of American history.

During the last three decades, sociologist William Julius Wilson, who is African American, has been one of the principle researchers and writers about race in the United States. In *The Declining Significance of Race* (1978), he argued that race played a diminished role in determining opportunity in American society and that problems faced by African Americans were increasingly related to economic issues and social class. This was a controversial position at the time, lauded by conservatives, and some liberals, who saw it as a justification for abandoning, or at least retreating on, federal Great Society and civil rights initiatives from the 1960s. President Ronald Reagan invited Wilson to a White House–sponsored meeting of black conservatives, a meeting that Wilson declined to attend (Ondaatje 2011, 161).

Wilson continually argued that his position on race was misrepresented. In *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987), *When Work Disappears* (1996), and *More than Just Race* (2009), he responded to both critics and misguided supporters arguing that the impact of race and racism on the African American community had never ended. For Wilson, while economic opportunity was the major factor in determining life possibilities for

individuals and groups, government action, institutional bias, and private behavior had created the historic racial impediments that trapped many African Americans in poverty, unemployment, and declining ghetto neighborhoods as industry, urban areas, and American society as a whole underwent enormous demographic, economic, and structural change at the end of the twentieth century. In a very real sense, the willingness of powerful whites, conservatives and liberals, to endorse what they thought of as the main thesis of *The Declining Significance of Race* represents the continuing significance of race in American society.

There were a number of occasions in the past when it appeared that the United States might resolve the racial hostilities rooted in the enslavement of Africans, but in each case it failed to happen. The Declaration of Independence declared that “all men are created equal,” but after some initial movement toward emancipation in the North and West, the invention of the cotton gin, new demand for cotton from the industrializing North and Europe, in combination with the expansion of slavery west into Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, led to the growth of a Cotton Kingdom dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans (Beckert 1915).

Historian Carl Degler (1983) argued that the racism that accompanied the enslavement of Africans was so deeply rooted in American society, both in the North and the South, that post-Civil War Reconstruction, which initially appeared to promise steps toward change and equality, can best be described as a “Dawn Without Noon.” For Dubois (1903), the failure to address racism and resolve racial inequality at the end of the Civil War, along with the subsequent emergence of Jim Crow segregation and the reemergence of white rule in the South, were what made the problem of the twentieth century “the problem of the color-line.”

The Great Migration of the 1920s, the New Deal of the 1930s, the African American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, and Great Society legislation in the 1960s, again promised to transform race relations in the United States. But as historian Ira Katznelson (2005) demonstrates, Franklin Roosevelt was able to secure Southern Democratic Congressional support for New Deal legislation by allowing local administration of federal programs, which meant support was denied to Southern blacks. The Pentagon, which opened in 1943, had racially separate bathrooms, and American army units remained segregated during World War II (Staples 2014).

In the 1960s, Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society finally outlawed many Jim Crow practices, but it clearly failed to create a Great Society. From 1970 to 2011, the income of the lowest 20 percent of black households declined in real dollars from \$6,465 to \$6,379 as large portions of America’s black community remained impoverished. In 2009, four decades after the Johnson presidency, the net worth of white families was nineteen times the net worth of black families (MacEwan 2013, 26). United States history can perhaps be best read as a series of dawns without noons.

In a 1967 speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. commented on the failures of Lyndon Johnson's legislative program (Pohlmann 2003, 87). According to King:

When the Constitution was written, a strange formula to determine taxes and representation declared that the Negro was sixty percent of a person. Today another curious formula seems to declare that he is fifty percent of a person. Of the good things in life, the Negro has approximately one half those of whites. Of the bad things of life, he has twice those of whites. Thus half of all Negroes live in substandard housing. And Negroes have half the income of whites. When we view the negative experiences of life, the Negro has a double share. There are twice as many unemployed. The rate of infant mortality among Negroes is double that of whites and there are twice as many Negroes dying in Vietnam as whites in proportion to their size in the population.

Race, myth, and politics in the United States are an explosive mix. They were in the past; they are in the present. In 2005, *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert reported on a 1981 interview with Lee Atwater, Republican Party consultant and confidant of presidents Reagan and Bush in which Lee Atwater discussed politics in the American South and the United States as a whole. According to Atwater, "You start out in 1954 by saying, 'Nigger, nigger, nigger.' By 1968 you can't say 'nigger'—that hurts you. Backfires. So you say stuff like forced busing, states' rights and all that stuff. You're getting so abstract now [that] you're talking about cutting taxes, and all these things you're talking about are totally economic things and a byproduct of them is [that] blacks get hurt worse than whites. And subconsciously maybe that is part of it. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that if it is getting that abstract, and that coded, that we are doing away with the racial problem one way or the other. You follow me—because obviously sitting around saying, 'We want to cut this,' is much more abstract than even the busing thing, and a hell of a lot more abstract than 'Nigger, nigger'" (Herbert 2005, 37).

Atwater successfully employed this racial electoral strategy during the 1988 presidential campaign when a television attack advertisement was used to identify the Democratic candidate Michael Dukakis, the governor of Massachusetts, with a black prisoner from Massachusetts who escaped while on a weekend furlough for good behavior and then raped a white woman in Maryland (Simon 1915). In the lead-up to the 2016 presidential race the Republican strategy seemed to be to mobilize disaffected white male voters (and ignore the rest) with attacks on immigrants, Muslims, and affirmative action, a code word for blacks (Nesbit 2015).

In 1993, activist and scholar Cornel West could still argue, "Race is the most explosive issue in American life precisely because it forces us to confront the tragic facts

of poverty and paranoia, despair and distrust. In short, a candid examination of race matters takes us to the core of the crisis of American democracy” (West 1993, 155–56). West warned, “We simply cannot enter the twenty-first century at each other’s throats, even as we acknowledge the weighty forces of racism, patriarchy, economic inequality, homophobia, and ecological abuse on our necks. We are at a crucial crossroad in the history of this nation—and we either hang together by combating these forces that divide and degrade us or we hang separately” (ibid., 159).

There was some hope that the election of Barack Obama, a biracial man who identifies as African American, as president in 2008, signaled a new era in race relations in the United States, but that remains unclear. Direct and open expressions of racism appear to no longer be acceptable to most Americans; racist statements cost Donald Sterling ownership of the Los Angeles Clippers basketball team, although he was rewarded with a billion dollar buyout. More subtle forms of racism clearly continue. Ta-Nehisi Coates describes the persistence of an “elegant racism” that avoids more incendiary language and crude stereotypes (Coates 2014). A study by the Public Religion Research Institute revealed deep anxiety among non-Hispanic white Americans about the possibility that the nonwhite population of the country would soon be in a majority (Jones et al. 2014, 14–15). This anxiety definitely contributed to the election of Donald Trump in 2016.

After his election, President Obama rarely spoke in public about racial division in the United States, perhaps because he did not want to be seen as the black president. However, he was deeply moved by the killing of a black Florida teenager in 2012 and the acquittal of his assailant. In an impromptu speech in the White House briefing room in July 2013 he told reporters, “Trayvon Martin could have been me 35 years ago” (Landler and Shear 2013, A1). Obama wanted Americans to recognize that the African American community looks at this issue through a “set of experiences and a history that doesn’t go away.” He explained that “very few African American men in this country,” including the president himself, had not experienced “being followed when they were shopping in a department store,” having women clutch their bags when they walk by, or drivers lock their doors. He emphasized “those sets of experiences inform how the African American community interprets what happened one night in Florida.” He felt the situation grows even worse, adding to the frustration of the black community, when the lingering effect of racism goes unacknowledged.

While the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his assailant unleashed deeply felt personal reactions and a series of major political demonstrations, and helped launch the Black Lives Matter movement, United States Supreme Court majority decisions will probably have a more lasting impact on American society. In 2007, the Supreme Court narrowly overturned public school choice plans in Louisville, Kentucky and Seattle, Washington, because race was one of the factors used in the assignment of students. In a majority opinion destructive of efforts to promote racial equality, Chief Justice John

Roberts declared that school integration plans perpetuated racism in the United States. According to Roberts, “The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race” (Roberts 2007, 91). Roberts argued, “Before *Brown*, schoolchildren were told where they could and could not go to school based on color of their skin. The school districts in these cases have not carried the heavy burden of demonstrating that we should allow this once again—even for very different reasons” (ibid., 47). With this decision, acknowledging the impact of race was made tantamount to promoting racism.

Continuing this trend, in *Schuette v. Bamn* (2014), the Supreme Court majority endorsed a Michigan ban on affirmative action. In a powerful and openly angry dissent, Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, a Latina who grew up in tenements and public housing projects in the South Bronx neighborhood of New York City, argued that “race matters” (Sotomayor 2014, 45) and “to know the history of our Nation is to understand its long and lamentable record of stymieing the right of racial minorities to participate in the political process” (ibid., 51).

Sotomayor continued:

Race matters in part because of the long history of racial minorities being denied access to the political process. . . . Race also matters because of persistent racial inequality in society—inequality that cannot be ignored and that has produced stark socioeconomic disparities. . . . Race matters because of the slights, the snickers, the silent judgments that reinforce that most crippling of thoughts: “I do not belong here” (ibid., 45).

In an unusual direct rebuttal to the majority opinion issued by Chief Justice John Roberts, Sotomayor wrote:

In my colleagues’ view, examining the racial impact of legislation only perpetuates racial discrimination. This refusal to accept the stark reality that race matters is regrettable. The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to speak openly and candidly on the subject of race, and to apply the Constitution with eyes open to the unfortunate effects of centuries of racial discrimination. . . . It is this view that works harm, by perpetuating the facile notion that what makes race matter is acknowledging the simple truth that race does matter (ibid., 46).

This book draws on and extends the work of recent histories of slavery and the struggle for emancipation by Ira Berlin (2015), Eric Foner (2006 and 2015), and Manisha Sinha (2106). These historians highlight the role African Americans played in the campaign to end slavery. Berlin favorably quotes Major Martin Delany, the highest-ranking black officer in the United States Army during the Civil War. In a speech to approximately

five hundred formerly enslaved men and women on South Carolina's St. Helena Island during Summer 1865, Delany told his audience "We would not have become free, had we not armed ourselves and fought out our independence" (Berlin 2015, 3–4).

According to both Berlin and Foner, enslaved Southern blacks who sought freedom via the Underground Railroad made personal choices that directly challenged the legitimacy of the slavery regime and the right that people could be held as property. In addition, free Northern black abolitionists who were engaged in a political struggle for both emancipation and equal rights as full citizens and human beings were central to the campaign that brought about the ultimate destruction of slavery in the United States. Both groups, by standing against slavery, placing their lives and freedom at risk, and openly resisting slavecatchers and pro-Southern legal officials and laws, created hysteria in the South that helped propel the nation toward a Civil War and the end of chattel slavery. Through their actions, African Americans, many of them working out of New York State, polarized an already divided nation that Abraham Lincoln believed could not "endure, permanently half slave and half free" (Davis and Wilson 2014, 232). Sinha argues that slave resistance, rather than bourgeois liberalism or white abolitionists, was at the core of the antislavery struggle (Sinha 2016, 2–8). While I do not agree with all of her conclusions, the encyclopedic nature of her study creates a new starting point for any discussion of slavery and emancipation in the United States.

Race mattered at the very beginning of the nation. According to the initial census in 1790 (United States Census Bureau), there were approximately seven hundred thousand enslaved Africans in the United States distributed across every state except Massachusetts. However, the founding documents of the United States, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, ignored race and racism and did not mention the words *slave* or *slavery*. The founders were so careful to avoid the term and the issue that charges that the King of England had "waged cruel war against human nature itself" by imposing slavery and the slave trade on Britain's North American colonies were removed from an early draft of the Declaration (Franklin 1974, 88). Article 1 Section 2 of the Constitution, which established the notorious Three-Fifths Compromise, determined representation and direct taxation by adding to the "whole Number of free Persons . . . three fifths of all other Persons." It did not mention slaves or slavery. Article 1 Section 9, which prohibited Congress from acting to ban the slave trade until 1808, discussed the "Importation of such Persons," not slaves or slavery. The ban on "cruel and unusual punishment" in the Bill of Rights clearly did not include a ban on the enslavement of Africans.

In *Federalist Papers* no. 54, James Madison, who himself owned more than one hundred enslaved Africans, discussed the logic behind including "our slaves" as people when calculating representation and as property when calculating taxes. He concluded that "[t]he true state of the case is that they partake of both of these qualities: being considered by our laws, in some respects, as persons, and in other respects as property" (Rossiter 1961,

337). In *Federalist Papers* no. 8 and 29 Alexander Hamilton discussed fear of enslavement by either a foreign power or a domestic army. Hamilton and Madison continued the discussion jointly in *Federalist Papers* no. 18, but in each case they were concerned about the possible enslavement of the white population, not enslaved Africans. Only in *Federalist Papers* no. 42 was there any hint that the institution of slavery was a problem for the new country. In this essay Madison argued that the ability of Congress to end the slave trade after 1808 was a “great point gained in favor of humanity” (ibid., 266).

Letters written by Madison, who was secretary of the Constitutional Convention in 1787 and president of the United States from 1809 to 1817, show clear unease with the institution of slavery, particularly toward the end of his life, but he was unable to support abolition because of his own racism and that of his countrymen. In 1825, Madison wrote Francis Wright, an ardent opponent of slavery, that “[t]he magnitude of this evil among us is so deeply felt, and so universally acknowledged: that no merit could be greater than that of devising a satisfactory remedy for it. Unfortunately the task, not easy under other circumstances, is vastly augmented by the physical peculiarities of those held in bondage, which preclude their incorporation with the white population” (Root 2008, 69). In an 1826 letter to the Marquis de Lafayette, Madison argued, “The two races cannot co-exist, both being free & equal. The great sine qua non therefore is some external asylum for the colored race” (Taylor 2012, 222–23).

The general population more than shared Madison’s antipathies toward enslaved Africans. Alexis De Tocqueville, a French commentator who visited the United States from 1831 to 1833 and published his observations on the emerging democracy, believed that the young country’s democratic institutions worked against the development of racial equality. He wrote, “I do not believe that the white and black races will ever live in any country upon an equal footing. . . . A despot who should subject the Americans and their former slaves to the same yoke might perhaps succeed in commingling their races; but as long as the American democracy remains at the head of affairs, no one will undertake so difficult a task; and it may be foreseen that the freer the white population of the United States becomes, the more isolated will it remain” (de Tocqueville 1839, 354).

This hostility toward the humanity and potential political and social equality of African Americans continued, even escalated, during the 1850s and 1860s. In March 1857, in the case of *Dred Scott v. Sanford*, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney used the terms *slave*, *slavery*, and *enslaved* repeatedly as he concluded for the majority of the Supreme Court that people of African ancestry were “not included, and were not intended to be included, under the word ‘citizens’ in the Constitution, and can therefore claim none of the rights and privileges which that instrument provides for and secures to citizens of the United States. On the contrary, they were at that time considered as a subordinate and inferior class of beings, who had been subjugated by the dominant race, and, whether emancipated or not, yet remained subject to their authority, and had no rights or privileges but such as

those who held the power and the Government might choose to grant them” (Kommers *et al.* 2008, 908).

On January 27, 2012, *The New York Times* (Rothstein 2012, C27) published a review of two new museum exhibitions on the history of slavery in the United States. Both of the exhibitions focused on Thomas Jefferson, principal author of the Declaration of Independence, an influential member of George Washington’s initial cabinet, and the third president of the United States, who was a Virginia planter and slaveholder. One exhibit was temporarily housed at the Smithsonian National Museum of American History in Washington, D.C. The other is a permanent exhibit at the Jefferson homestead in Monticello, Virginia.

Lonnie Bunch III, director of the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in Washington, D.C., on the National Mall in 2016, emphasized that the Smithsonian’s new exhibit was part of an effort by museum staff to figure out exactly how to present the history of slavery in the United States to the public. In another interview, Bunch told *The Washington Post* that the Smithsonian exhibit “allows us to centralize slavery” in American history (Trescott 2012, CO8).

Because this book presents an individual historian and teacher’s point of view and does not represent an effort to define a national consensus on the history of slavery in the United States, I do not operate under the same political constraints as Lonnie Bunch and other people involved in creating the Smithsonian’s new African American Museum. While I deeply respect what they are doing, I can use my position as an “outsider” to press for a broader and I think sharper understanding of the role slavery played in shaping the United States in the past and present, but also on the crucial role African American resistance to slavery played in precipitating the American Civil War and redefining the nation. My independence also allows me to respond directly to individuals and institutions I believe are misrepresenting the history of slavery in the United States and of African American resistance because of their own political agendas.

Because of the continuing significance of race in the United States and racism that I believe had its roots in the enslavement of Africans in the Americas, I want to state that I am white and consider myself an American historian, rather than a historian of the African American experience. I study and write about the history of slavery in the United States because I agree with Lonnie Bunch on its centrality to the shaping of this country.

Each chapter in this book addresses a different theme in the history of slavery in the United States, with a focus on events and debates in New York. Interspaced throughout the book are Teaching Notes that generally explore primary source documents; however, these sections are not restricted to teachers.

Chapter 1 discusses how, while most of the “founders” of the United States were not abolitionists, influential figures from New York State were. The chapter also examines

TEACHING NOTES

The Language We Use to Describe Slavery

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How important is the language used in classrooms, textbooks, and discussions?
2. How should we address language used in the past that is no longer acceptable today?
3. Is choice of language a matter of “political correctness” or social and historical sensitivity?

In 2015 an African American high school student in Texas noticed in his McGraw-Hill geography textbook a map caption that referred to the enslaved Africans in the American South as “workers.” The ensuing uproar led to apologies from the publisher and the promise to revise future editions of the book (Fernandez and Hauser 2015, A10).

The language teachers and textbooks use to describe something shapes the way students think about and understand it. Should unfree Africans in the American South and the Caribbean be described as “slaves” or as “enslaved Africans” or “enslaved people”? Enslavement was something done to them and I think it is important in our language to reject the idea that enslaved Africans, although legally chattel, were less than fully human. I also use *freedom seekers* to describe people escaping from bondage on the Underground Railroad rather than the more traditional terms *fugitives* or *runaway slaves*. In a September 2015

essay posted on the *History News Network*, historian Michael Todd Landis made a persuasive case for the importance of language when describing slavery and the American Civil War. Landis argues that the Civil War should not be described as a battle between the North and the South or the Union and the Confederacy, which grants legitimacy to Confederate claims of a war between equal sovereign powers, but between the United States and rebel forces. In recent work, other historians have made similar points. Edward Baptist (2014) argues that using the term *slaveowners* supports their claim that they were somehow entitled to own other human beings and he wants them called *enslavers*. Paul Finkelman (2012) argues that what teachers and historians refer to as the Compromise of 1850 is better described as the Appeasement of 1850 because Northern politicians made all the compromises. In this book I try to always be cognizant of the impact of language on readers.

the political nature of current debates about the nature of the national founders and their views on slavery and explores the debate among abolitionists about how to understand the Constitution and whether it was a pro-slavery document. It concludes with a Teaching Notes section on the Congressional “Gag Rule” restricting debate over slavery in the House of Representatives.

Chapter 2, “Resistance! Resistance! Resistance! New York State’s Radical Black Abolitionists and the Coming of the Civil War,” explains how New York State was a hotbed of radical and influential black abolitionism from the American Revolution to the American Civil War. It focuses on resistance to enslavement in New York City, Buffalo, Syracuse, and Troy. The Teaching Notes section focuses on teaching about slavery on Long Island using primary source documents.

Chapter 3 takes a more theoretical approach to understanding social movements, seeking to explain how the national abolitionist movement moved from the margins in American society to ultimate success in ending slavery. This topic is explored again in chapter 8. In the 1830s and 1840s, the abolitionist movement was ignored, seemed doomed, and slavery appeared impregnable and racism was pervasive. The chapter explores the reasons for sudden change after seemingly endless disappointment, marginalization, and sectarian internal conflict and why some movements are successful. The Teaching Notes section examines demands for black suffrage and the demand for full citizenship rights in New York State.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss two of the more significant New Yorkers in the struggle to end slavery in the United States, Solomon Northup and Harriet Tubman. The absence of work and community and the focus on religious salvation in most runaway slave narratives, as well as the fact that the events recounted took place in the Border States rather than on Deep South cotton and sugar plantations, is what makes Solomon Northup’s account of his twelve years of enslavement in Louisiana so important as an exposé of the slave regime and as a historical document. Frederick Douglass recognized the special nature of Northup’s account in reviews published in *The Liberator* and *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*. The Teaching Notes section for chapter 4 includes excerpts from Northup’s memoir. Harriet Tubman was a New Yorker by choice, a self-liberated former slave, a religious evangelical, an Underground Railroad conductor, and a Civil War scout and nurse. However, her life has been so mythologized it is difficult to sort out who the real Harriet Tubman actually was. In keeping with the question of mythologizing, the Teaching Notes section for chapter 5 examines the history of slavery as told in children’s books.

New York City and Brooklyn were locations for major celebrations of the Emancipation Proclamation by abolitionists and black communities. A major focus of chapter 6 is on the concerns and response of Frederick Douglass. Teaching Notes discusses debate over the renaming of public places and institutions where names have connections with slavery and racist traditions.

TEACHING NOTES

New York State Curriculum

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How much of a focus should there be on slavery, the slave trade, and the abolitionist movement in the elementary, middle-level, and high school curricula?
2. Should State Education Departments and school districts develop a specific curriculum package that focuses on the history of slavery and the struggle to end it in the United States?

In October 1996, the New York State legislature passed legislation calling for the development of a human rights–based social studies curriculum that included the Great Irish Famine and the right of people to food, the European Holocaust and the right of people to life, and slavery and the transatlantic slave trade and the right of people to freedom (Singer 2008, 30). While an official “slavery curriculum” was never adopted, the history of slavery, the slave trade, the abolitionist movement, and the Underground Railroad are prominent in the updated 2016 New York State Social Studies Framework, which offers school districts a guide for instruction with “key ideas, conceptual understandings, and content specifications” (engageNY 2016). These topics are first introduced in fourth grade and their role in the development of British North America and the United States are major themes in middle school (grades 7 and 8). On both levels, students are introduced to prominent opponents of slavery in the United States and connections between New York State and the slave system, although the focus is more heavily on the Underground Railroad. In

high school ninth grade, students learn about slavery in the ancient world and the role played by slavery and the transatlantic slave trade in the development of the Americas in the centuries after the Columbian Exchange. The Haitian Revolution led by enslaved Africans and European campaigns to abolish the transatlantic slave trade are part of the tenth grade curriculum and slavery and abolition in the United States are a major focus in the eleventh grade during early units on United States history.

Students also learn about slavery and abolition in English/Language Arts classes. The engageNY recommended reading list for seventh grade includes an edited version of *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1968) and Virginia Hamilton’s book of African American folktales *The People Could Fly* (Hamilton 1985; engageNY 2013). In high school ELA classes, students do close reading of major United States documents including the Emancipation Proclamation. A weakness with the ELA readings is that they do not always align with what students are studying in social studies curriculum. (*continues on page 12*)

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A more serious problem for social studies and history education in general is the shift in focus in schools to skills-based instruction in response to Common Core and Common Core aligned high-stakes testing. Without a mandated curriculum and the allocation of specific time, an exploration of slavery and its impact on the United States and the world, as well as other important content area topics, are in danger of being marginalized as teachers and schools feel pressured to prepare students for standardized exams (Singer 2014).

Chapter 7 explores Abraham Lincoln's views on slavery, racial equality, the U.S. Constitution, and the postwar era and responses to Lincoln by the New York press. It argues that Lincoln's limitations were partly responsible for the emergence of segregation and Jim Crow in the postwar South. Teaching Topics examines the career and ideas of New York State governor and senator and federal secretary of state, the puzzling William Seward.

Chapter 8 looks at the role New York played in the election of 1864. New York City and New York State, their political leaders and their press, were central to national debates over slavery, racial equality, and the reelection of Abraham

Lincoln in 1864. These debates helped establish the next one hundred years of race relations in the United States. The Teaching Notes section focuses on one specific controversy, the miscegenation hoax.

Chapter 9 extends a discussion introduced in chapter 3 on abolition as a social movement and seeks to explain its relatively sudden shift from the political margins and factionalism toward success in pressing for emancipation. The Teaching Notes section focuses on local history, specifically the history of Brooklyn.

Chapter 10 uses minutes from Congressional debates published in the *Congressional Globe* to examine the negative role New York Democratic Party politicians played in debates over a Constitutional Amendment to formally and finally abolish slavery and efforts on their part to obstruct Congressional Reconstruction of the South. While they do not bear total responsibility, their actions contributed to failures to root out racist practices in the South and to establish state governments with at least some commitment to racial justice. The Teaching Notes section reviews the depiction of slavery and abolition in recent fictional books, documentaries, and movies.

Chapter 11 considers the politics of historical memory and reviews efforts by historical societies and historians to define slavery in New York and the United States, and the political nature of historical memory. The final Teaching Notes section examines selections from the speeches and writing of Frederick Douglass, New York State's and the nation's most prominent abolitionist and one of the great writers and thinkers of the nineteenth century.

MOST OF THE “FOUNDERS” WERE NOT ABOLITIONISTS, BUT SOME FROM NEW YORK WERE

CRISES AND CONTROVERSIES INVITE HISTORICAL ANALOGIES. THE CONTEMPORARY Tea Party movement fancies itself operating in the tradition of antitax protesters who dumped tea into Boston Harbor in 1773 in defiance of British authority. In an interview with George Stephanopoulos for ABC News, congressional Representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN), a Tea Party movement stalwart and a candidate for the 2012 Republican nomination for president, claimed that the founders of the nation “worked tirelessly” to end slavery. She explained what was “marvelous is that in this country and under our constitution, we have the ability when we recognize that something is wrong to change it. And that’s what we did in our country. We changed it. We no longer have slavery” (Stephanopoulos 2011; Singer 2011b).

David Barton, a conservative Texas Republican aligned with the Christian Right made similar points. In “The Founding Fathers and Slavery” (2011), Barton argued that “the historical fact is that slavery was not the product of, nor was it an evil introduced by, the Founding Fathers,” and that “[t]he Revolution was the turning point in the national attitude [toward slavery]—and it was the Founding Fathers who contributed greatly to that change.” He quoted Henry Laurens, president of the Continental Congress, John Jay, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson to support his case. However, he did not mention that at some point in their lives, each of them was a slaveholder. Laurens, president of the Second Continental Congress from 1777 to 1778, was a partner in the largest slave-trading company in the British colonies and personally “owned” three hundred enslaved Africans who worked on his rice plantation on the Cooper River near Charleston, South Carolina (SCNHC 2014). Historian Paul Finkelman (1994, 193–228) dismissed similar claims about the nation’s “founders” and their antislavery stance in an article, “Thomas Jefferson and Antislavery: The Myth Goes On,” in the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*.

The “founders” were a curious and inconsistent bunch, who like Jefferson, sometimes bemoaned an institution, slavery, that was the basis for their wealth and authority. Patrick Henry, for example, argued for independence from Britain because of British violation of

the colonists' personal liberties, yet he enslaved between seventy and eighty Africans on his plantation. In one of the best-known speeches in United States history delivered in 1775 in the Virginia House of Burgesses, Henry declared that the issue of independence was "nothing less than a question of freedom or slavery" and warned Virginians that "there is no retreat but in submission and slavery!" This was the same Patrick Henry who wrote, "Would any one believe that I am master of slaves by my own purchase? I am drawn

THE DELETED PASSAGE (1776)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why was this passage deleted?

He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce. And that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished die, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms among us, and to purchase that liberty of which he has deprived them, by murdering the people on whom he has obtruded them: thus paying off former crimes committed against the Liberties of one people, with crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another (Jefferson 2010, 210–11).

along by the general inconvenience of living without them. I will not—I cannot justify it, however culpable my conduct" (Basker 2012, n.p.).

The commitment of patriot-aligned Southern planters, at least philosophically, to liberty, combined with their reliance on an enslaved African workforce, coupled with the profit from slave trading and the trade in slave-produced commodities for Northern merchants and financiers, meant that the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution were left intentionally vague on the future of slavery in the new country, a vagueness that set the stage for later sectional conflict.

During debate over the initial draft of the Declaration of Independence, the "Founders" removed a clause from the document that denounced King George for promoting the transatlantic slave trade.

During the War for Independence, George Washington refused to enlist enslaved Africans who wanted to secure their freedom by joining the Revolutionary army, and at the end of the war he sent a letter to British commanders demanding that they return runaway slaves as wartime contraband. When Thomas

Jefferson, the primary author of the Declaration of Independence, was president, he refused to recognize the newly independent government of Haiti because Africans, who had fought a bloody war to end enslavement, governed the former French colony. In letters, Jefferson described Toussaint Louverture and his followers as “cannibals of the terrible republic” (Blackburn 2011, 242).

On the other hand, Representative Bachmann was not entirely wrong, although when asked, she could not provide evidence to support her position. Many founders from New York State were opponents of slavery and did work to bring it to an end. They included Alexander Hamilton, Washington’s aide-de-camp during the Revolutionary War, a member of the convention that wrote the U.S. Constitution, and later the secretary of the treasury of the United States. During the War for Independence, Hamilton argued that Africans had the same natural abilities as Europeans and they should be recruited as soldiers and given “their freedom with their muskets” (Chernow 2005, 122). While Washington and the Continental Congress were reluctant to offer freedom to enslaved Africans, New York State passed legislation promising emancipation in exchange for three years of military service, however enlistment did require permission from enslavers, who were compensated with public land (McManus 1966, 157–58).

Prominent opponents of slavery included John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States and an early governor of New York State, Aaron Burr, United States senator from New York and vice-president of the United States, and Gouverneur Morris and Thomas Tredwell, members of New York’s Revolutionary Congress who helped draft the state’s first Constitution. Jay, Morris, and Tredwell came from families that owned significant estates and large numbers of enslaved Africans. However, each worked to end slavery in New York State and the United States.

In 1777, Gouverneur Morris proposed a motion, which was defeated, at the state’s Constitutional Convention recommending that the Legislatures of the State of New York “take measures consistent with the public safety for abolishing domestic slavery” (McManus 1966, 161). Morris later relocated to Philadelphia, and he represented Pennsylvania at the Federal Constitutional Convention where he opposed constitutional protection for slavery, the slave trade, and the three-fifths compromise. In 1780, while representing the rebelling colonies in Spain, Jay wrote praising Pennsylvania’s newly enacted gradual manumission law and declared, “Till America comes into this Measure [abolition], her prayers to Heaven for Liberty will be impious. . . . Were I in [the] Legislature I would prepare a bill for the Purpose with great Care, and I would never cease moving it till it became a Law or I ceased to be a member. I believe God governs this world, and I believe it to be a Maxim in his as in our Court that those who ask for Equity ought to do it” (Flanders 1855, 216).

In 1785, the New York State Legislature debated, but ultimately refused to approve, either immediate or gradual emancipation. During debate in the State Assembly, Aaron

Burr, much maligned in the Broadway musical *Hamilton* for never stating or standing on principles, headed the faction demanding the immediate end of slavery in New York (Miranda 2015). Historian Edgar McManus attributes the failure of these bills to opposition from white New Yorkers to the possibility that emancipation would lead to civil and legal equality, especially the right to vote (McManus 1966, 163–64).

After the American Revolution, New York Manumission Society was headed by John Jay and Alexander Hamilton (McManus 1966, 168–72). It purchased the freedom of persons held in bondage and founded the African Free School. Jay and Hamilton also helped win dozens of legal cases in defense of the freedom of black New Yorkers threatened with kidnapping and being sent to the South as slaves. In 1788, in his capacity as president of the Manumission Society, Jay wrote British abolitionists, “That they who know the value of liberty, and are blessed with the enjoyment of it, ought not to subject others to slavery. . . . The

ALEXANDER HAMILTON TO JOHN JAY, PRESIDENT OF THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS (1779)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why was Hamilton’s advice rejected?

I frequently hear it objected to the scheme of embodying negroes that they are too stupid to make soldiers. This is so far from appearing to me a valid objection that I think their want of cultivation (for their natural faculties are probably as good as ours) joined to that habit of subordination which they acquire from a life of servitude, will make them sooner become soldiers than our White inhabitants. I foresee that this project will have to combat much opposition from prejudice and self-interest. The contempt we have been taught to entertain for the blacks, makes us fancy many things that are founded neither in reason nor experience; and an unwillingness to

part with property of so valuable a kind will furnish a thousand arguments to show the impracticability or pernicious tendency of a scheme which requires such a sacrifice. But it should be considered, that if we do not make use of them in this way, the enemy probably will; and that the best way to counteract the temptations they will hold out will be to offer them ourselves. An essential part of the plan is to give them their freedom with their muskets. This will secure their fidelity, animate their courage, and I believe will have a good influence upon those who remain, by opening a door to their emancipation (quoted in Lanning 2005, 68).

United States are far from being irreproachable in this respect. It undoubtedly is very inconsistent with their declarations on the subject of human rights to permit a single slave to be found within their jurisdiction.” Although disappointed that “local interests, and in some measure local prejudices” prevented the new Constitution from addressing the issue of slavery, Jay was hopeful that “a disposition favourable to our views and wishes prevails more and more, and that it has already had an influence on our laws” (Jay 1833, 234).

Between 1799 and 1827 the legal status of blacks in the State of New York changed radically. In 1799, as governor, John Jay signed a gradual emancipation law providing that from July 4 of that year onward, all children born to slave parents in New York State would be free upon reaching adulthood, and in 1801 the law was amended to prevent the export of enslaved

Africans out of the state. In 1809, New York laws permitted marriage between people who were still enslaved, prohibited the separation of spouses, and recognized the right of enslaved people to own and transfer property. An 1813 law ended the prohibition on blacks testifying against whites and ensured enslaved Africans the right to a jury trial when accused of a crime. The final blow to slavery in New York was an 1817 act that declared every enslaved person in the state would be freed on July 4, 1827 (McManus 1966, 178–79).

Thomas Tredwell was an Anti-Federalist who opposed adoption of the United States Constitution by New York State because of its complicity with the slave system. In 1794, Tredwell relocated his family from Suffolk County to the North Country where he emancipated the people his family had enslaved and established them as free farmers on their own land.

The reality is that the founders, when they wrote the Constitution and created the nation, left the issue of slavery unresolved because they could not agree on the future of

REJECTED MOTION AT THE NEW YORK STATE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION(1777)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why was the Morris motion rejected?

And whereas a regard to the rights of human nature and the principles of our holy religion, loudly call upon us to dispense the blessings of freedom to all mankind: and inasmuch as it would at present be productive of great dangers to liberate the slaves within this State: It is, therefore most earnestly recommended to the future Legislatures of the State of New-York, to take the most effectual measures consistent with the public safety, and the private property of individuals, for abolishing domestic slavery within the same, so that in future ages, every human being who breathes the air of this State, shall enjoy the privileges of a freeman (Kirschke 2005, 62).

AN ACT FOR THE GRADUAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY (1799)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why did New York State enact gradual rather than immediate emancipation?

Be it enacted . . . That any child born of a slave within this state after the fourth day of July next shall be deemed and adjudged to be born free: *Provided nevertheless.* That such child shall be the servant of the legal proprietor of his or her mother until such servant, if a male, shall arrive at the age of twenty-eight years, and if a female, at the age of twenty-five years (Gellman and Quigley 2003, 53).

Africans in the United States. John Jay, who supported adoption of the Constitution, recognized this when he wrote, “When it is considered how many of the legislators in the different States are proprietors of slaves, and what opinions and prejudices they have imbibed on the subject from their infancy, a sudden and total stop to this species of oppression is not to be expected” (Jay 1833, 234).

During the first decades of the nineteenth century, slavery gradually withered away in the northern United States as it lost its economic viability and waves of European immigrants provided for an expanding workforce. New York’s gradual emancipation act, passed in 1799 and amended in 1817, finally went into full effect

in 1827. On July 4, 1827, Emancipation Day, William Hamilton, a founder of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, spoke at the African Zion Church in lower Manhattan. Hamilton declared, “This day we stand redeemed from a bitter thralldom. Of us it may be truly said, ‘the last agony is o’er,’ THE AFRICANS ARE RESTORED! No more shall the accursed name of the slave be attached to us—no more shall *negro* and *slave* be synonymous.” But it was not only Africans who were freed from slavery. “This day has the state of NEW-YORK regenerated herself—this day has she been cleansed of a most foul, poisonous and damnable stain” (Gellman and Quigley 2003, 221–22).

The next day two thousand members of New York’s African American community paraded through the streets celebrating the end of slavery in New York State. Dr. James McCune Smith, an African American physician who studied medicine in Glasgow, attended the parade as a teenager and later described the procession:

A splendid looking black man, mounted on a milk-white steed, then his aids on horseback, dashing up and down the line; then the orator of the day, also mounted, with a handsome scroll, appearing like a baton in his right hand, then in due order, splendidly dressed in scarfs of silk with gold-edgings, and with colored bands of music and their banners

appropriately lettered and painted, followed, the New York African Society for Mutual Relief, the Wilberforce Benevolent Society, and the Clarkson Benevolent Society; then the people five or six abreast from grown men to small boys. The sidewalks were crowded with wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers of the celebrants, representing every state in the Union, and not a few with gay bandanna handkerchiefs, betraying their West Indian birth. Nor was Africa underrepresented. Hundreds who survived the middle passage and a youth in slavery joined in the joyful procession (Hodges 1999, 223–24).

John Jay and New York’s other antislavery founders thought, or at least hoped, that slavery in the South would gradually disappear there as it appeared to be doing in the North. What they could not anticipate was that with the invention of the cotton gin in the 1790s, the Industrial Revolution’s insatiable hunger for cotton, the rapid growth of cotton production in the South during early nineteenth century, and the expansion of the plantation system west into Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the need for enslaved African labor and slavery would also grow at an astronomical pace. At the same time, Northern merchants, bankers, and industrialists became an integral part of the slave system and allies of the Slavocracy. They financed, manufactured, and distributed products made from slave-produced commodities and supplied the new plantations with materials and the planters with luxury goods. After the importation of foreign slave labor was outlawed in 1808, the domestic slave trade transporting enslaved blacks from Virginia deep into the Cotton Belt

AN ACT RELATIVE TO SLAVES AND SERVANTS (1817)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Why did New York State make the “export” of enslaved people out of state a criminal offense in 1817?

[A]ll marriages contracted, or which may hereafter be contracted, wherein one or both of the parties was, were or may be slaves, shall be considered equally valid as though the parties thereto were free, and the child or children of any such marriage shall be deemed legitimate: *Provided*, that nothing in this section contained, shall be deemed or construed to manumit any such slave or slaves . . . if any person shall send to sea, or export, or attempt to export from this state, or send or carry out of, or attempt to send or carry out of this state, except as is by this act provided, any slave or servant . . . shall be deemed guilty of a public offence, and forfeit the sum of five hundred dollars (Gellman and Quigley 2003, 69–70).

states expanded to satisfy the planters' craving for labor. According to federal census data, there were fewer than one million enslaved Africans in the Southern states in 1800 and almost four million in 1860 (Beckert 2015, 99–135; Baptiste 2014, 145–69).

Northern politicians assisted in the spread of slavery by repeatedly acquiescing to Southern demands that the slave system go untouched, even unmentioned. The First Amendment to the United States Constitution promises, "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." Soon after its founding in 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society launched a petition drive demanding an end to slavery in Washington, D.C. The campaign rapidly picked up steam and during the Twenty-Fifth Congress (1837–38), abolitionist groups submitted more than 130,000 petitions. The congressional response, starting with the Twenty-Fourth Congress in 1836, was to try to keep the petitions out of the *Congressional Record* by ignoring both the petitioners and the Constitution.

In May 1836, John C. Calhoun in the Senate and Henry Pinckney in the House of Representatives, both from South Carolina, pressed for resolutions that would prevent other members of the bodies from introducing the petitions (*Congressional Globe* 24/1,

TREDWELL'S ADDRESS TO THE NEW YORK STATE CONSTITUTIONAL RATIFICATION CONVENTION (1788)

QUESTION TO CONSIDER

Was it legitimate for New York State to reject the new
Constitution over the issue of slavery?

There is another clause in this Constitution, which, though there is no prospect of getting it amended, I think ought not to be passed over in silence, lest such a silence should be construed into a tacit approbation of it. I mean the clause which restricts the general government from putting a stop, for a number of years, to a commerce

which is a stain to the commerce of any civilized nation, and has already blackened half the plains of America with a race of wretches made so by our cruel policy and avarice, and which appears to me to be already repugnant to every principle of humanity, morality, religion, and good society (Madison 1901, 402).