NEWS

- TPS-MTSU is excited to be partnering with the Tennessee State Library and Archives again for a summer institute "Reconstruction in Tennessee." This special two-day event will focus on content from the Tennessee social studies curriculum standards in grades 5, 8, and high school U.S. History. For more information and to register, click here.

- New educator resources from TPS-MTSU: We have a new primary source set for the Jim Crow Era. This will be a featured resource in our upcoming institute in Brownsville. We also have a new lesson plan exploring the three different plans for Reconstruction and the significance of the Fourteenth Amendment. This will be a featured resource at the Reconstruction in Tennessee institute.

“AWESOME” SOURCE OF THE MONTH:

Drawing in two colors / Winold Reiss
[between 1915 and 1920]

What do you think the message of this poster is? Do you think the person who created it was black or white? Does it matter? (Look up Winold Reiss and find out!)

THEME: THE JIM CROW ERA

The Jim Crow era was not only an era of violence, racism, and prejudice, but also of artistic flourishing and community building. Historians estimate this period to have lasted from around the end of Reconstruction (ca. 1877) to the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Of course, violence, racism, and prejudice existed much earlier in the history of the U.S. The institution of slavery created a system of race-based oppression that the U.S. is still reeling from, 150 years after the emancipation of the slaves during the Civil War. The technical beginning of the Jim Crow period, however, refers to when states began to pass Jim Crow laws during the 1870s and 1880s, largely having to do with access to public facilities.

One of the first Jim Crow laws was in fact passed by Tennessee in 1875, which allowed for race-based segregation and the denial of services in many forms of public accommodations, such as train travel.

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Lesson Idea—Harlem Rent Parties

The Harlem Renaissance was an especially fruitful and creative time for African American culture in the U.S., with new forms of music, dance, literature, and art that had an impact on broader American culture as well. This flourishing of the arts grew out of the unique historical context that created this neighborhood, which is recounted in this story from the Federal Writers’ Project.

First, show students this short video clip (1 min 6 sec). What do they think is going on? How would they describe what they see/hear? Tell students this is an example of what a Harlem rent party looked like in the 1920s and 1930s. Have them guess what they think “rent party” means.

Split the class into nine groups and give each group one of the nine numbered text excerpts. Students in each group should read the passage together, work out what it means, and answer the thought questions at the bottom. Then groups will report out (in order), summarizing in their own words what their passage says. (After group 6, you may want to show the students examples of party invitations here.) The class will then, as a whole, summarize the entire story of Harlem rent parties. Ask them what were some of the negative and positive influences on the development of these parties. How did they help create an atmosphere for the Harlem Renaissance to flourish?

Lastly, show students this illustrated map of Harlem nightclubs. How do the pictures and words on this map reflect the descriptions in the text excerpts? For more on the Harlem Renaissance, go to this Web Guide.

This lesson idea meets state standards for 5th grade Social Studies (5.47) and English Language Arts (Reading: Informational Text).

Lesson Idea—The Importance of Black Journalists

Journalists offer their readers a glimpse into the lives of others and help to give a voice to issues that are going on in the communities they report on. In the New South and Jim Crow eras, black journalists and black newspapers spoke out about the atrocities of white supremacist violence, such as lynchings, and discriminatory laws, like segregated public accommodations and poll taxes. Their newspapers provided a place where ideas for advancing their communities could be discussed and strategies for organizing shared.

Their work was vital to sustaining the long fight for civil rights in the nation.

In Tennessee, Randolph Miller and Ida B. Wells spoke to the issues plaguing their respective communities. To help your students understand the important role these two played, begin by watching The Early Black Press: Tennessee Voices Lifted. You may choose to watch just the segment on Miller and Wells which runs from the 17- to 27-minute mark in the film. As students are watching the clip, have them take notes to provide a biographical summary of each. How are their backgrounds similar/different? What issues did they cover in their writings? How were they received by their communities? What did their work contribute to the long struggle for civil rights?

Then have your students research a sampling of the writings of each: Miller and Wells. You may choose to assign each student one of the two to research. There is limited primary source material available for Miller. If you are in the Chattanooga area, you may wish to contact the Chattanooga Public Library for additional materials or arrange a time to take your students to explore their archive for additional source material for him. As students are researching each, have them construct an exhibit, either digital or poster board, that speaks to the contributions of each in the long struggle for civil rights. What makes them unique in their work as journalists?

This lesson idea meets state standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US. 36) and African American History (AAH.20).
Lesson Idea—Marcus Garvey and the Back to Africa Movement

Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican native, led the second wave of the Back to Africa Movement during the 1920s. He is remembered as an influential and controversial civil rights leader. The Back to Africa Movement centered on the idea that blacks and whites would never coexist in America and black people could not prosper under Jim Crow. The movement called for emigration to Africa and for the black population to come together under one form of African government. Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). The UNIA set out to instill pride in and educate African Americans about their heritage and culture.

Some civil rights leaders, such as W.E.B. Dubois and A. Phillip Randolph, criticized Garvey’s platform. Dubois and Randolph believed the success of blacks depended on their integration into American society and that emigration to Africa would prove impossible. Have students start by watching a video about why Garvey was able to obtain supporters. Discuss the experiences of African Americans under Jim Crow. Have students discuss why they think some supported the Back to Africa Movement.

Divide the students into four groups, two affirmative and two negative. The affirmative will be in support of the Movement and the negative will be opposed. Divide the newspaper clipping amongst the four groups. Have the students fill out the debate worksheet and present their findings in class. At the end of the activity bring the class back together for discussion. What is the issue that both sides agree upon? How do different civil rights organizations approach the issue of racial discrimination differently? What benefits are presented for African Americans by choosing either emigration or integration? What criticisms does Garvey have of Dubois and Randolph, and vice versa?

This lesson plan idea meets state standards for high school U.S. History & Geography (US.3, US.36) and African American history (AAH.17, AAH.19, AAH.20).

Featured Feature—Trials, Triumphs, and Transformations

Trials, Triumphs, and Transformations: Tennesseans’ Search for Citizenship, Community, and Opportunity is a digital collection of items to help tell the story of the state’s African American community from 1865 to 1964. This story is framed through the lens of citizenship. What does it mean to be a citizen? How have African Americans in our state put that citizenship into action even in the face of inequality, violence, and intimidation? The items selected help tell this history through the lens of different themes: embracing citizenship, transforming the economy, claiming space, finding community, achieving recognition, performing identity. With each of these themes, you will find essays written by scholars to provide context for the sources within that section. These make wonderful secondary source readings for you and for high school students.

TPS-MTSU had the privilege of working with our colleagues at the Center for Historic Preservation to develop a series of lesson plans to go along with each theme. Each lesson plan uses sources featured in this collection along with primary sources from the Library of Congress digital collections. These lesson plans include: African American Medical Recognition, Jim Crow and the American Road Trip, African American in Military Service, Historically Black Colleges and Universities in Tennessee, Depictions of the William Blount Mansion, and TVA Opportunities for African Americans. We invite you to explore this wonderful Web site and think about how you might use it with your students to flesh out this often overlooked period.
KNOXVILLE COLLEGE

Knoxville College is one of Tennessee’s historical black colleges. Founded in 1875 as part of a missionary effort by the Presbyterian Church to educate former slaves, the institution originally served first grade through college-level courses. In the early years, the college offered courses such as teacher training and theology. By 1931 Knoxville College expanded to be a liberal arts college. (Click here for lesson plan and links.)

EDUCATOR AND ACTIVIST

Mary Church Terrell’s life centered around the advancement of African Americans with a focus on women, voting, and education. She helped found the National Association of Colored Women in 1896. Terrell and the organization advocated for the right to vote. With support from W.E.B. Dubois, Terrell became a charter member of the NAACP. Later she would become the first African American woman to serve as a member of a school board. Have students read the Progress of Colored Women. What are the aims of this document? What challenges were unique to African American women?

1936 OLYMPICS

Unsent, typed letter, concerning participation by black athletes in the 1936 Olympic Games. [December 4, 1935]

Walter White wrote a letter in December 1935 to Jesse Owens urging him not to participate in the 1936 Olympics as a form of protest against America’s supposed democracy. The letter never reached Owens and he went on to win four gold medals at the Berlin Games, breaking racial stereotypes regarding inherent inferiority. (For more on Jesse Owens, click here.) Have students read White’s letter to Owens. Why does White want Owens to boycott the Olympics? What is he referring to when he discusses American hypocrisy and compares America to Germany?

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

The color lithograph, Afro-American Monument created in 1897, showcases thirteen significant events in African American history and the fight for citizenship, including prominent leaders such as Booker T. Washington. The earliest event depicted dates back to the beginning of the seventeenth century. Use the lithograph as a pre-assessment tool for students or for review. See what images they can identify and explain. (Click for more during this time period.)