

(A) Main Ideas: Understanding Slavery in the Americas

(adapted from Alan Singer, *Social Studies for Secondary Schools*. Mahwah, NJ: LEA , 1997, pp. 169-170)

These are the main ideas about slavery in the Americas that informed my own teaching as a high school social studies teacher. Which of these main ideas and understandings do you consider important to include in a high school curriculum? Which ones would you leave out? What ideas would you add?

1. West Africans were experienced agricultural workers whose labor was used to exploit the resources of the American continents. Profits generated by African slavery and the African slave trade made possible the commercial and industrial revolutions in Europe and the United States.
2. European societies accepted hierarchy, injustice, and exploitation as a normal condition of human life. Color and religious differences made it easier to enslave Africans. Europeans justified this slavery by denying the humanity of the African.
3. Africans had slaves and participated in the slave trade. But although slavery existed in many times and cultures throughout human history, slavery in the Americas, including the United States, was a fundamentally different institution. There was no reciprocal obligation by the elite to the enslaved. Enslavement was a permanent hereditary status; there was an impassable racial barrier.
4. Democracy and community among white, male, Christian property holders in the early American republic rested on the exploitation of other groups, especially the enslavement of the African. The founders of the United States were aware of the hypocrisy of owning slaves. Slavery was intentionally not addressed in the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution.
5. Africans in the Americas resisted slavery in many different ways. They built families, communities, and religious institutions that asserted their humanity. In the United States, enslaved Africans developed an emancipatory Christianity based on the story of Exodus and laced it with African symbols. In Haiti and Brazil, there were major successful slave rebellions. With 180,000 African Americans in the union army, the American Civil War can be seen as an African-American Liberation struggle.
6. White and African-American abolitionists struggled for decades against slavery. Most white abolitionists based their beliefs on their Protestant religion. Uncle Tom's Cabin was the "Common Sense" of the antislavery crusade because it presented the humanity of the enslaved African.
7. While Christian religious beliefs were used to challenge slavery, they were also used to justify it. Defenders of slavery, particularly in the south, used Biblical citations to defend the "peculiar institution."
8. Slavery was a national, rather than a southern, institution. There was limited slavery in the north until 1840 and prosperity in the north rested on the slave trade and the processing of slave produced raw materials.
9. The Civil War was not fought by the north to free Africans; it was fought to save the union. It ended legal bondage, but not the racist ideas that supported the system.

Electronic New Jersey: A Digital Archive of New Jersey History (scc01.rutgers.edu/njh)

This site is designed for the in-depth study of New Jersey history. The six topical modules currently available were chosen after careful review of a range of sources available in the Special Collections and University Archives of the Rutgers University Libraries, Rutgers University-New Brunswick. Jersey Homesteads and the Great Depression and Social Change in the 1960s and 1970s were piloted by students and faculty at Hunterdon Central Regional HS and Spotswood HS in 1997. Recent additions to the site are the Civil War and NJ, Paul Robeson and Rutgers, New Jersey and the American Revolution, and World War II in NJ. Instructional activities accompany the digital sources located in each topical module. Bridgewater-Raritan High School and East Brunswick High School joined the project in 1998 and Northern Burlington Regional Schools and North Brunswick Township Schools were added to the consortium in 2000. Two new modules, History of Science and Technology and Mass Culture and Consumerism, are currently under development. Recipient of the NJ Historical Commission Award of Recognition for Study of NJ History in 1998. Recipient of a 1999 Award of Commendation from the American Association for State and Local History for Excellence in the Study of NJ History.