



## Lesson Plan: The History and Legacy of U.S. Slavery

### OVERVIEW

This lesson plan is designed to be used with the film *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, which shows one family's journey to come to terms with its roots as the largest slave-trading family in the history of the United States. Classrooms can use this lesson to explore the history and legacy of U.S. slavery and whether or not reparations should be made to the descendants of slaves.

P.O.V. documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from the initial broadcast. In addition, P.O.V. offers a lending library of DVD's and VHS tapes that you can borrow anytime during the school year — FOR FREE!

Please visit our Film Library at [http://www.amdoc.org/outreach\\_filmlibrary.php](http://www.amdoc.org/outreach_filmlibrary.php) to find other films suitable for classroom use or to make this film a part of your school's permanent collection.

### OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Use viewing skills and note-taking strategies to understand and interpret video clips.
- Label a map to indicate the locations and commodities used in the slave trade.
- Discuss the role the North played in U.S. slavery.
- Develop and defend a written position on the idea of reparations for the descendants of slaves in the United States.

### GRADE LEVELS

6-12

### SUBJECTS

U.S. History, Economics, Geography, Civics, Current Events

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Method (varies by school) of showing the class online video clips
- Computers with access to the Internet
- Map handouts showing Rhode Island, Cuba and the west coast of Africa. You can easily make and print a map at National Geographic's [MapMachine](http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/) (<http://plasma.nationalgeographic.com/mapmachine/>).

### ESTIMATED TIME OF COMPLETION

One 50-minute class

### SUGGESTED CLIPS

Clip 1: Ghana: Process of Entering Slavery (length: 4:57)

The clip begins at 27:55, just after "At the forts we met with ..." The clip ends with a shot of the "door of no return" at 32:52.

Clip 2: Ideas for Reparations and Reconciliation (length 4:08)

The clip begins at 67:18, just after “At this point, I decided we should dive directly into the questions of reparations ...” The clip ends at 71:26, just after “... want to do something about it.”

### **BACKGROUND**

Katrina Browne, who directed the documentary *Traces of the Trade*, is a descendant of the DeWolf family of Bristol, Rhode Island. Generations of the family include a U.S. senator, state legislators, philanthropists, writers, professors, and Episcopal priests and bishops. The DeWolfs were one of the wealthiest families in early U.S. history. Their entrepreneurship virtually built Bristol’s economy: Many of the buildings they funded still stand, and the stained glass windows at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church bear DeWolf names to this day.

The DeWolf family fortune was based on buying and selling human beings. For more than 50 years and three generations, from 1769 to 1820, the DeWolfs were America’s leading slave traders. In *Traces of the Trade*, Browne and other family members follow the path of the Triangle Trade as they seek to better understand this dark period of their family history. The film points out that U.S. slavery was not just a Southern industry; the North was an active participant as well. It also raises important questions related to modern-day race relations: Do descendants of slave traders have a special obligation to accept responsibility for the “living consequences” of their ancestors’ crimes? What can or should they do to make amends, if anything? As a nation, how do we deal with what we have all inherited from our country’s history?

### **ACTIVITY**

1. Ask students what they know about slavery in the United States. List responses on the board. Explain to students that although slavery in the United States is more commonly associated with southern states, the North was also actively involved.
2. Give each student a map handout. Have them label Rhode Island, Cuba and the modern-day location of Ghana on Africa’s west coast.
3. Tell students that you are going to show them two clips from a documentary made by a woman whose ancestors, the DeWolfs, were the largest slave traders in U.S. history. She and some members of her family traveled to each of these locations on the map to better understand this part of their family’s past. When they visited Rhode Island, they spoke with historians and looked at family records to learn how their ancestors carried out the trade.

Have students draw a line from Rhode Island to Ghana to Cuba and back to Rhode Island to form a triangle. Explain that ships in Rhode Island were loaded with products like rum, which they traded in Africa for slaves. Africans were then shipped to Cuba to work on plantations or to be sold on the open market. Molasses, derived from sugar cane produced with slave labor on plantations in Cuba, was then shipped to Rhode Island to be used to make rum. Have students label their maps with what was shipped to each port (for example, rum from Rhode Island to Africa). Tell the class that this trading pattern is referred to as the Triangle Trade.

4. Point out that although the DeWolfs and others such as the Brown brothers were directly involved with the slave trade, others in the North also supported slavery – for example, by distilling rum with molasses produced on plantations with slave labor. Businesses such as ship builders, insurance companies, blacksmiths, and others benefited from the slave trade by doing business with those whose wealth was generated by slavery. The practice of slavery was not just a system in place in Southern states, it was one of the foundations of the U.S. economy at that time.

5. Next, explain that when the family shown in the video went to Ghana, on the west coast of Africa, they visited a place where captured Africans were brought and held before being sold as slaves. Then, show students [Clip 1: Ghana: Process of Entering Slavery](#). As students watch, ask them to imagine what it must have been like for the people brought to that place to become slaves.

6. Allow students to react to what they saw in the clip. Tell the class that the DeWolf family alone owned an abundant number of ships and brought 10,000 slaves from Africa to the New World. Today, there may be as many as half a million descendants of these people.

7. Ask the class to think about this question: Do the descendants of those who benefited from slavery need to help repair the injustices and inequality that resulted from slavery? Then, show students [Clip 2: Ideas for Reparations and Reconciliation](#). Focus student viewing by having them take notes on some of the proposals for making repairs shown in the video (for example, formal apologies, engaging in dialogue, litigation, financial compensation to descendants of slaves, investment in communities). Broaden the debate to include a discussion about the idea of the nation's collective responsibility for slavery.

8. Have students, possibly for homework, read additional information on the P.O.V. website about the debate surrounding [reparations legislation](#) around the country. Each student should then write a position paper that states and defends his or her viewpoint on the concept of reparations.

### **ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS**

Students can be assessed on:

- Labeling their maps completely and accurately.
- Participation in class discussion.
- Quality of position paper, including grammar, organization, use of arguments and so on.

### **EXTENSIONS & ADAPTATIONS**

- Read the [excerpt](#) on the P.O.V. website from the book, "Inheriting the Trade" by Thomas Norman DeWolf, one of the family members in the film. Ask students what the legacy of slavery is in the United States. Have each student bring in a news article or an object that symbolizes this legacy in their minds. Break into groups for show and tell and then have a reporter from each group summarize what was discussed. Ask students whether or not white privilege still exists in the United States and have them defend their responses. As part of this discussion, you may also wish to read and analyze the article, "White Privilege: Swimming in Racial Preference." ([http://www.tolerance.org/news/article\\_tol.jsp?id=722](http://www.tolerance.org/news/article_tol.jsp?id=722))

- Watch the film *Traces of the Trade* in its entirety. How do the emotions and overall perspectives of family members change during the course of their journey? Imagine you are a member of the group and write a journal entry after visiting each place in the film.
- Delve deeper into race issues with other P.O.V. films. *Two Towns of Jasper* documents a town's reaction to a black man's murder at the hand of white supremacists. A related lesson plan examines white privilege. Another film, *Family Name*, tells about a white man's search for the slaves and slave owners who lived on the plantations once owned by his family. Use it to kick off an essay assignment about how your students' ideas about race have evolved over time.
- Learn about the horrors of slaves packed aboard ships by reading the account, "Aboard a Slave Ship, 1829" (<http://www.eyewitnesstohistory.com/slaveship.htm>). See also the information and images at *Africans in America* (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p277.html>). Ask students why they think Africans were transported in this way. Discuss who was dehumanized in these circumstances. Blacks? Whites? Both?
- Debate whether or not businesses in the North who indirectly profited from slavery (e.g., textile mills that used cotton produced by slave labor, tradesmen who did business with slave traders, towns in which major buildings and infrastructure are built with profits from the slave trade) are just as responsible for slavery as those who engaged in the practice directly.
- Have students conduct research to learn more about their family history. Review the difference between "primary" and "secondary" sources of information, and talk about the types of documents and artifacts that can give clues about one's ancestors. Encourage students to tap into whatever research may already exist in their families and then expand on it. A free source of online genealogy records, including those for African-American families, is available at [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org). Students can then organize their family histories into presentations or displays and share them with the class. Have students also describe what was happening in United States and world history when one or two of their ancestors were alive.
- Research modern-day slavery, including how and where it takes place, who the perpetrators and victims are, and what is being done to stop it. Ask students to identify how they could help abolish the practice and invite them to participate in the effort.

## RESOURCES

### Religion and Ethics Newsweekly: Slave Reparations

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week419/feature.html>

This feature gives a summary of arguments both for and against slave reparations.

### Slave North

<http://www.slavenorth.com>

This website provides a state-by-state overview of slavery in the North.

## **STANDARDS**

These standards are drawn from "Content Knowledge," a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning) at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>.

### **Behavioral Studies**

Standard 4: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups and institutions.

### **Civics**

Standard 13: Understands the character of American political and social conflict and factors that tend to prevent or lower its intensity.

### **Economics**

Standard 2: Understands characteristics of different economic systems, economic institutions and economic incentives.

### **Geography**

Standard 11: Understands the patterns and networks of interdependence on Earth's surface.

### **Language Arts**

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

### **U.S. History**

Standard 3: Understands why the Americas attracted Europeans, why they brought enslaved Africans to their colonies, and how Europeans struggled for control of North America and the Caribbean.

Standard 5: Understands how the values and institutions of European economic life took root in the colonies and how slavery reshaped European and African life in the Americas.

Standard 31: Understands economic, social and cultural developments in the contemporary United States.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in broadcast journalism, secondary education, and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's Director of Education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.

### **Background Sources:**

Jay Coughtry, *The Notorious Triangle: Rhode Island and the African Slave Trade, 1700-1807* (Philadelphia: Temple Press, 1981); David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge, 1999); George Howe, *Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle* (New York: Viking Press, 1959); M.A. DeWolfe Howe, *Bristol, Rhode Island: A Town Biography* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1930).