

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT – 2009-2012

*Lesson Title – John Fox Slater and the Freedmen
From Karen Cook*

Grade - 11

Length of class period – 45 minutes

Inquiry – (What essential question are students answering, what problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

What motivated Northern Industrialists to focus their philanthropy on the Jim Crow South?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

- Students consider the role of Northern philanthropists after the Civil War.
- Students examine varying perspectives.
- Students select evidence from a primary source to defend a thesis.
- Students develop advanced history research skills.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson?) – (please attach)

John F Slater Fund. “Letter of the Founder” Organization of the Trustees of the Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen 1882. Baltimore: John Murphy and co. John Hopkins University Internet archive [online] Available.
<<http://www.archive.org/details/organizationoftr00john>>, 10 January 2011.

Zoe, Vivian F. “John Fox Slater: An American Legacy.” The Muse. Winter 2009[online] Available
<http://www.norwichfreeacademy.com/fileadmin/user_files/museum/Newsletters/2009%20Winter.pdf>. 10 January 2011.

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

Begin the lesson by asking students when and where they have seen the name ‘Slater’ before. Think about World History lessons, local buildings and schools that bear this name. (Slater Memorial Museum and Slater Library are local landmarks.) Then ask students to explain the terms philanthropy and philanthropist. In this lesson students explore the connection between a local Northern philanthropist and the Jim Crow South. We often emphasize the government’s role in reconstructing the South, but pronounce reconstruction dead with the Hayes/Tilden Compromise of 1877. During this time, referred to as the ‘nadir’ of race relations by modern historians, philanthropists made

significant investments in the education of African Americans in the South. Much of this money funded the historically black schools and colleges such as Spelman, Hampton, Tuskegee and Winston-Salem. Many historians today explore the motivations of these philanthropists.

Post these four theses on the board and review them for comprehension:

Thesis 1-Northern philanthropists, devout to the cause of the union, the Republican Party and their religious faith, sought to fulfill their patriotic duty by providing for the needs of freedmen following the Civil War.

Thesis 2- Northern industrialists, especially textile manufacturers, sought to alleviate their guilt for slavery by contributing to causes that benefited freedmen.

Thesis 3- Northern industrialists were able to maintain the status quo and prevent true economic reforms by controlling philanthropy in the South.

Thesis 4- Northern industrialists possessed a paternalistic view of their role in creating a U.S. that combined capitalism with small town values.

Distribute the reading “Letter of the Founder.” Ask students several prereading questions:

Who is the author of this document?

What is the date of this document? What major events in the U.S. happened in the years leading up to this date?

What is the purpose of the document?

Ask students to read the document and look for evidence that would prove any of the theses. Have them place the number of the thesis next to the evidence in the text. When students complete this task ask them to share their findings with the class. Other possible discussion questions may include:

How does Mr. Slater account for his great wealth?

How would this money be used?

How much of an impact would one million dollars have on the education of freedmen?

What potential problems did Slater mention in his letter?

How could we measure the success of the Slater Fund?

Is it important to know the motivations of Slater and other philanthropists? Is it important to know the motivations of any figures in history?

How does Slater compare with other known philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie or Bill Gates?

Interesting side note- W.E.B. DuBois traveled to Europe on a Slater Fund fellowship. While there he studied economic principles, including democratic socialism. DuBois criticized the accommodationist approach of Booker T. Washington and the Industrial/Normal school model supported by the Slater Fund. He later became a communist.

How will you assess what student learned during this lesson?

In concluding the lesson, discuss the difficulties in proving a thesis with a single source. Have students pick one of the possible thesis statements, or write one of their own and list all the types of sources they would try to find if they were completing a research paper to defend it. Next to each source, explain why it would be an important source.

Connecticut Grade Level Expectations- Grades 9-12

- 1.1 Demonstrate an understanding of significant events and themes in United States History.
 12. Evaluate the role and impact significant individuals have had on historical events
- 1.2 Describe the importance of significant events in local and Connecticut history and their connection to United States history.
 13. Analyze how events and people in Connecticut reflect and have contributed to developments in United States history.
- 2.2 Interpret information from a variety of primary and secondary sources.
 2. Choose valid sources and provide evidence to answer a history/social studies question.
- 2.4 Demonstrate an ability to participate in social studies discourse through informed discussion, debate and effective oral presentation.
 11. Ask relevant questions related to social studies/history to initiate, extend or debate a point of view.
- 3.1 Use evidence to identify, analyze and evaluate historical interpretations.

ORGANIZATION

OF THE TRUSTEES OF THE

JOHN F. SLATER FUND

FOR THE

EDUCATION OF FREEDMEN

1882



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To whom letters may be addressed.

*One of the original incorporators who has asked to be excused from serving because of his prolonged absence from this country.

LETTER
OF
THE FOUNDER.

TO MESSRS. RUTHERFORD B. HAYES, of Ohio; MORRISON R. WAITE, of the District of Columbia; WILLIAM E. DODGE, of New York; PHILLIPS BROOKS, of Massachusetts; DANIEL C. GILMAN, of Maryland; JOHN A. STEWART, of New York; ALFRED H. COLQUITT, of Georgia; MORRIS K. JESUP, of New York; JAMES P. BOYCE, of Kentucky; and WILLIAM A. SLATER, of Connecticut:

GENTLEMEN: It has pleased God to grant me prosperity in my business, and to put it into my power to apply to charitable uses a sum of money so considerable as to require the counsel of wise men for the administration of it.

It is my desire at this time to appropriate to such uses the sum of one million of dollars (\$1,000,000.00); and I hereby invite you to procure a charter of incorporation under which a

charitable fund may be held exempt from taxation, and under which you shall organize; and I intend that the corporation, as soon as formed, shall receive this sum in trust to apply the income of it according to the instructions contained in this letter.

The general object which I desire to have exclusively pursued, is the uplifting of the lately emancipated population of the Southern States, and their posterity, by conferring on them the blessings of Christian education. The disabilities formerly suffered by these people, and their singular patience and fidelity in the great crisis of the nation, establish a just claim on the sympathy and good will of humane and patriotic men. I cannot but feel the compassion that is due in view of their prevailing ignorance which exists by no fault of their own.

But it is not only for their own sake, but also for the safety of our common country, in which they have been invested with equal political rights, that I am desirous to aid in providing them with the means of such education as shall tend to make them good men and good citizens—education in which the instruction of the mind in the common branches of secular learning shall be associated with training in just notions of duty toward God and man, in the light of the Holy Scriptures.

The means to be used in the prosecution of the general object above described, I leave to the discretion of the corporation; only indicating, as lines of operation adapted to the present condition of things, the training of teachers from among the people requiring to be taught, if, in the opinion of the corporation, by such limited selection the purposes of the trust can be best accomplished; and the encouragement of such institutions as are most effectually useful in promoting this training of teachers.

I am well aware that the work herein proposed is nothing new or untried. And it is no small part of my satisfaction in taking this share in it, that I hereby associate myself with some of the noblest enterprises of charity and humanity, and may hope to encourage the prayers and toils of faithful men and women who have labored and are still laboring in this cause.

I wish the corporation which you are invited to constitute, to consist at no time of more than twelve members, nor of less than nine members for a longer time than may be required for the convenient filling of vacancies, which I desire to be filled by the corporation, and when found practicable, at its next meeting after the vacancy may occur.

I designate as the first President of the corporation the Honorable RUTHERFORD B. HAYES,

of Ohio. I desire that it may have power to provide from the income of the fund, among other things, for expenses incurred by members in the fulfillment of this trust, and for the expenses of such officers and agents as it may appoint, and generally to do all such acts as may be necessary for carrying out the purposes of this trust. I desire, if it may be, that the corporation may have full liberty to invest its funds according to its own best discretion, without reference to or restriction by, any laws or rules, legal or equitable, of any nature, regulating the mode of investment of trust funds; only I wish that neither principal nor income be expended in land or buildings, for any other purpose than that of safe and productive investment for income. And I hereby discharge the corporation, and its individual members, so far as it is in my power so to do, of all responsibility, except for the faithful administration of this trust, according to their own honest understanding and best judgment. In particular, also, I wish to relieve them of any pretended claim on the part of any person, party, sect, institution or locality, to benefactions from this fund, that may be put forward on any ground whatever; as I wish every expenditure to be determined solely by the convictions of the corporation itself as to the most useful disposition of its gifts.

I desire that the doings of the corporation each year be printed and sent to each of the State Libraries in the United States, and to the Library of Congress.

In case the capital of the Fund should become impaired, I desire that a part of the income, not greater than one-half, be invested, from year to year, until the capital be restored to its original amount.

I purposely leave to the corporation the largest liberty of making such changes in the methods of applying the income of the Fund as shall seem from time to time best adapted to accomplish the general object herein defined. But being warned by the history of such endowments that they sometimes tend to discourage rather than promote effort and self-reliance on the part of beneficiaries; or to inure to the advancement of learning instead of the dissemination of it; or to become a convenience to the rich instead of a help to those who need help; I solemnly charge my Trustees to use their best wisdom in preventing any such defeat of the spirit of this trust; so that my gift may continue to future generations to be a blessing to the poor.

If at any time after the lapse of thirty-three years from the date of this foundation it shall appear to the judgment of three-fourths of the members of this corporation that, by reason of a

change in social conditions, or by reason of adequate and equitable public provision for education, or by any other sufficient reason, there is no further serious need of this Fund in the form in which it is at first instituted, I authorize the corporation to apply the capital of the Fund to the establishment of foundations subsidiary to then already existing institutions of higher education, in such wise as to make the educational advantages of such institutions more freely accessible to poor students of the colored race.

It is my wish that this trust be administered in no partisan, sectional, or sectarian spirit, but in the interest of a generous patriotism and an enlightened Christian faith; and that the corporation about to be formed, may continue to be constituted of men distinguished either by honorable success in business, or by services to literature, education, religion or the state.

I am encouraged to the execution in this charitable foundation of a long cherished purpose, by the eminent wisdom and success that has marked the conduct of the Peabody Education Fund in a field of operation not remote from that contemplated by this trust. I shall commit it to your hands, deeply conscious how insufficient is our best forecast to provide for the future that is known only to God; but humbly hoping that the administration of it may be so guided by

divine wisdom, as to be, in its turn, an encouragement to philanthropic enterprise on the part of others, and an enduring means of good to our beloved country and to our fellow-men.

I have the honor to be, Gentlemen,
your friend and fellow-citizen,

JOHN F. SLATER.

NORWICH, CONN., March 4, 1882.
