

Notes from the Author:

This lesson was used as an introduction to using primary source documents such as the census to learn about local African-Americans. It can also be used as an introduction to various concepts about 19th-century African-American life. While the 1870 Census document used in the lesson is from Catasauqua, Pennsylvania, the concepts could be extrapolated to most Northern communities at the time. Alternatively, teachers or students might visit their local library or historical society to locate census figures from their own communities. In that case, the teacher will want to seek out census entries showing both prosperous African-American households engaged in trade as well as black servants living in white households. The questions in the lesson could then easily be adapted by the teacher to suit the census data from his or her community.

Objectives

- Students will become familiar with the information provided in the population census.
- Students will draw conclusions from the census about African-American work, home, and community life in a small Pennsylvania town in 1870.

Materials

- Census for the Borough of Catasauqua (copies for each student)

Procedures and Strategies

- 1) Inform students that we will be using the census to learn about African-American life in 1870.
 - a) Distribute copies of the Census for the Borough of Catasauqua.
 - b) Discuss what the census is.
 - c) Is the census a primary or a secondary source? Why?

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- 2) Ask students to look over the census. What kinds of information can be learned from it?
 - 3) Discuss jobs open to African-Americans at this time as shown by the census:
 - a) What jobs are listed as being held by blacks living in Catasauqua in 1870?
 - b) Based on the value of William Welch's real estate and personal estate, do you think being a barber was a good career choice?
 - c) Do you think his business was large or small? Why?
 - d) Why did George Gibson, Charles Robeson, and Andrew Kempton live in the household?
 - e) Do you think William Welch's barber business served only blacks in Catasauqua, or do you think whites also visited his shop?

In the course of your discussion, you will want to emphasize the following points:

- *Blacks often found limited job opportunities.*
- *Many were limited to work as servants. Working with horses was very common.*
- *For those who wanted to start a small business, becoming a barber was a good choice.*
- *Black barbers served both the black and the white communities.*
- *William Welch clearly had a good business employing several helpers and allowing him to earn significant revenue to support a growing family.*

4. Discuss Home & Community life for African-Americans as shown by the census:
 - a) Where were the blacks living in Catasauqua born?
 - b) Flora Grandstaff's place of birth is listed as "Virginia Contraband." What might this mean?
 - c) Why might the blacks born outside Pennsylvania have come here?
 - d) What would it have been like to be the only black in a white household, like Henry Charles? How might life the household experiences of the Welch family been different?

- e) How did blacks help each other?
- f) What can we learn about the education of blacks?

In the course of your discussion, you will want to emphasize the following points:

- *While most of the blacks living in Catasauqua were born and raised in Pennsylvania, a few came from other places, presumably seeking better opportunities. This might have been especially true for those who came from the South. While there was significant prejudice in the North, conditions were even worse in the South.*
- *In the year 1870, it is entirely possible that the two blacks born in the South had been enslaved earlier in their lives.*
- *Flora Grandstaff, listed as “Virginia Contraband,” may even have been an escaped slave. The Welch family had apparently helped her by adopting her.*
- *The Welches also employed and trained other blacks to work in the trade of barbering.*
- *The Welch household may well have provided a sense of community for the blacks living there.*
- *Blacks like Henry Charles who lived in a white-dominated household may have experienced a more lonely home life.*
- *Interestingly, the Welches sent their children to school, presumably with the local white children.*
- *In contrast, Flora Grandstaff could not read or write, probably because she was a former slave and it was illegal to teach slaves to read and write.*

Closing

Some sort of writing assignment could be assigned here or completed as a homework assignment.