



HANDS ON HISTORY

THE CENTRAL OHIO HISTORY PROJECT

Hands on History Seminar
February 10, 2007
ESC of Franklin County

Free Blacks in Antebellum America

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Following the American Revolution, the Northern states began the slow and complex process of abolishing slavery in their region of the United States. As a result, in a time when chattel slavery still dominated most of American society, Black people in the North were struggling to establish themselves as a free people. Yet the transition from slavery to emancipation proved to be complicated and treacherous, as newly emancipated African Americans struggled to obtain equality and citizenship. Excluded from mainstream American society, free Blacks responded to their continuing oppression by considering various (and sometimes contradictory) strategies including moral improvement, institution building, and emigration. Often these differences regarding political strategy threatened the unity of the Black community, however they remained committed to fight for full abolition, protect fugitive slaves, and gain the unrestricted right to vote.

This seminar explores the development of free Black communities in the North in the era before the Civil War. In particular, we will examine the legacy of Northern slavery, methods of Northern emancipation, strategic debates among the Black leadership over race uplift agendas, and Black political agitation on the issues of abolition, colonization and suffrage.



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Teachers will be able to explain the process of Northern emancipation.
2. Participants will understand the internal debates within the Black community over moral uplift and emigration.
3. Teachers will be able to identify the main political issues that free Blacks fought for during the antebellum era.

LEAD FACULTY BIO

Dr. Leslie Alexander is an assistant professor in the Department of History at Ohio State University. She received her B.A. from Stanford University, her M.A. from Cornell University, and her Ph.D. from Cornell University. She is a specialist in African American and American history, focusing specifically on the early national and antebellum eras, and is particularly interested in culture, nationalism, the creation of community, and the development of political organizations among African Americans

A recipient of several prestigious fellowships, including the Ford Foundation Post Doctoral Fellowship and the Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, Dr. Alexander's current research project entitled, "African or American?: Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861," explores Black culture and political activism during the antebellum era and will be published in the fall of 2007. Dr. Alexander has also won a teaching award from the Mortar Board and Sphinx Honor Societies, and is an executive board member of the African Heritage Studies Association.

READING ASSIGNMENT

James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860 (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 55-76, 125-236

REFLECTIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT

The following questions are meant to help **HANDS ON HISTORY** participants prepare for the seminar content. The questions will help you to begin thinking about the primary themes detailed in the readings and that will be discussed in the seminar.

Please bring a typed copy of your response to the questions to the February 10 seminar. Limit your response to two double-spaces pages using 1 inch margins and 12 point font.

1. How did the American Revolution influence the growth of anti-slavery thought?
2. In 1787, American patriot Benjamin Rush wrote: "The American war is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution." What meaning did this have for Black people in the North?
3. Why did the majority of free Black leaders begin to oppose emigration in the 1830s?