

Using Digitized Newspapers in Teaching Nineteenth Century African American Writers

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March 19, 2021

FREEDOM'S JOURNAL.

"RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTETH A NATION"

CORNISH & RUSSELL,
Editors & Proprietors.

NEW-YORK, FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 1827.

VOL. I. NO. 1.

THE COLORED AMERICAN.

VOL. III.—NO. 33

CHARLES E. RAY & CO., PROPRIETORS.

WHOLE NO. 106.

TWO DOLLARS

NEW-YORK SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 1839.

PER ANNUM.

Provincial Freeman.

DEVOTED TO ANTI-SLAVERY, TEMPERANCE, AND GENERAL LITERATURE.

Published by G. B. Forster & Son.

VOLUME I.

TORONTO, CANADA WEST, SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 1854.

SHEET 20.

THE CLEVELAND GAZETTE.

VOL. I.

CLEVELAND, OHIO, SATURDAY, AUGUST 23, 1853.

NO. 1.

THE COLORED TENNESSEAN.

STRIVE YE SHALL SOON STRETCH OUT HER HANDS UNTO GOD.—PSALM LXXXV. 21.

VOL. I.

NASHVILLE, TENN., SATURDAY, OCT. 14, 1865.

NO. 20.

THE WASHINGTON BEE.

Price, \$7.00 per year.

Our Liberties we Prize and our Rights we will Maintain.

5 cents per copy.

VOL. IV.

WASHINGTON, D. C. SATURDAY, JULY 11, 1865.

NO. 6.

THE CHRISTIAN RECORDER.

Published by the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, for the Dissemination of Religion, Morality, Literature, and Science.

Rev. Elisha Weaver, Editor.

PHILADELPHIA, FEBRUARY 25, 1865.

Vol. V.—No. 8.—New Series. Whole No. 217

THE ELEVATOR.

A Weekly Journal of Progress.

"EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW."

VOL. 9.—NO. 40.

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL., SATURDAY, JANUARY 19, 1874.

WHOLE NO. 456

New Orleans Tribune,

Conti Street.

Published Daily, Mondays Excepted.

21 Conti Street.

NEW ORLEANS, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1, 1867.

VOL. 7.—No. 167.

THE NORTH STAR.

RIGHT IS OF NO RELIEF TO US OF NO COLOR—GOD IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, AND ALL WE ARE BROTHERS.

VOL. I. NO. VII.

ROCHESTER, N. Y. FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1848.

WHOLE NO.—VII

Guiding questions

- How can reading nineteenth century African American literature through the lens of Black newspapers expand narrow ideas of who nineteenth century Black writers were?
- How can reading nineteenth century Black newspapers expand narrow ideas of who nineteenth century Black *readers* were?
- And practically—how on earth can we get students more invested in the time period?

Three activities

- Finding the author (or, not finding the author, as the case may be!)
 - Can be done in class or as a more extended assignment
- Reading a serialized novel in its original context
 - Can be done in class or on the students' own time
- Archival expert
 - A more involved presentation assignment in which each student in the class gets a turn to focus on a single author and a single newspaper issue

Archival Expert assignment

- This term, you will be in charge of leading one class as the “archival expert.” Using three of the library’s electronic databases—*America’s Historical Newspapers*, *African American Newspapers*, and/or *Accessible Archives*—you will make use of digital archives to provide historical context for the day’s readings. Here’s what to do for prep work, step by step:
- On the date you’re signed up to be the archival expert, look at when the writer published the work we’re reading. (So, for example: Paul Laurence Dunbar published *Lyrics of Lowly Life* in 1896.) Determine a location that is relevant to the writer, if possible. For Dunbar, this could be Dayton (where he grew up), Ohio, or other cities in Ohio.
- Now choose a newspaper that is relevant to the date and, if possible, the location of the poet. If you can find one, you can also choose a newspaper where the writer published.
- Select an issue of the newspaper and **read the whole thing**: news, editorials, poetry, advertisements. **As you read, make note of anything at all—newspaper poems, news items, even weather—that you feel gives interesting context to the work the class will be discussing.**
- During class, be prepared to give us around 20 minutes of historical context, drawn from what you read. Feel free to read us excerpts from articles or poems. Don’t feel like you have to cover everything in the newspaper—two or three things will be enough. **Give us your reading of both the culture that produced this writer (particularly how the writer fits, or doesn’t fit, into the historical context) and anything you notice about how historical context informs the writer’s work.**

Outcomes

- De-centers the idea of a nineteenth century Black “canon” and invites more writers (professional and nonprofessional) to the party
- Allows students to investigate important contexts for the works we are reading and to discover the larger print networks to which these authors belong
- Empowers students to investigate what they are interested in about an author, rather than be told what is interesting about an author; allows students to get a more complex (not to mention unmediated) picture of authors and of nineteenth century Black life in general
- Students are hands-down more invested in the time period!