

Lesson #5 - Immigrants – African Americans Influence on Aquidneck Island

Subject Area: Social Studies

Grade: 4/5

Time Frame: 1-2/45 minute periods

Objectives: By this lesson, the students will be exposed to the reasons for the cultural shift between the North and the South. They will learn the influence of the economic impact of the African Americans on Aquidneck Island.

Standards: IV and VII

Materials:

- *African Americans in Newport*, By: Richard C. Young ken (enclosed)
- *Civil War*, By: Martin W. Sandler (enclosed)
- Xerox copy of the current Newport street map for each child, from *African Americans in Newport*.
- Enlarged Newport street map for whole class (enclosed)

Learner Factors: This activity will benefit the visual and auditory learners by the presentation and participation of using pictures and excerpts read aloud from the books. The kinesthetic learners will benefit from working in groups and making and labeling their own maps of businesses owned by African Americans.

Motivation Activity: Teacher will direct on history of why North and South split ---civil war/slavery. The North did not need slaves, while the South needed slaves for the cotton plantations. In 1866, racial segregation was abolished throughout the state of Rhode Island. For further details, on the Civil War history, refer to *Civil War*, By: Martin

Sandler (Enclosed). Did this have any affect on the location of the where the African Americans' settled in the U.S. and on Aquidneck Island?

Lesson Development: Using the book, *African Americans in Newport*, the teacher will show photographs and explain that from the end of the Civil War through 1880 African Americans prospered in entrepreneurial pursuits on Aquidneck Island. (For background information refer to page 33-48 in *African Americans in Newport*). The teacher will split the class into even groups. Using the categories of businesses from page 42 – 46, the students will plot the businesses owned by African Americans on their current street maps of Newport.

Closure: As a whole group, the class will come together and gather around the enlarged Newport street map. Each group will plot 5-10 businesses on the enlarged street map. The teacher will lead the students in a discussion on the location of the African Americans' businesses in relation to where they lived. Brainstorm thoughts and discuss whether the abolishment of racial segregation affected the African Americans' business location? Refer to students individual maps of immigrants on Aquidneck Island, lesson #3.

Follow –Up: In the next lesson, the students will explore how Irish immigrants influenced life on Aquidneck Island.

Extended Activities:

- Newport Historical Society, Walking Tour of African American in Newport. Call 401-846-0813 for further information and reservations.
- Selection of African American plays, written by Jennie Abbate at St. Philomena School. Available at Salve Regina University Library or contact Jennie Abbate at St. Philomena School. For more information refer to: *A Bibliography of Resources pertaining to the History of Aquidneck Island*, By: Aquidneck Collaborative For Education.

- Invite Keith Stokes, Executive Director of Newport Chamber of Commerce to speak to the class.
- A field trip to the Community Baptist Church in Newport.

Student Assessment: Assess the students in their ability to read and plot information on a map.

Union Congregational Church and Newport's African-American Community

Even in Newport, where so many persecuted religious groups found acceptance, there were many who did *not* find freedom or acceptance in colonial Newport—enslaved Africans and the African-American community. Many of Newport's early residents were involved in the slave trade, as were merchants in every major colonial port city. Many individuals who came to Newport in search of religious freedom saw fit to deprive others of their freedoms. Although there is a great deal of research that still needs to be done about the lives of Newport's early African-American community, several houses of worship within Newport can reveal a central feature of that community. One example is the former Union Congregational Church.

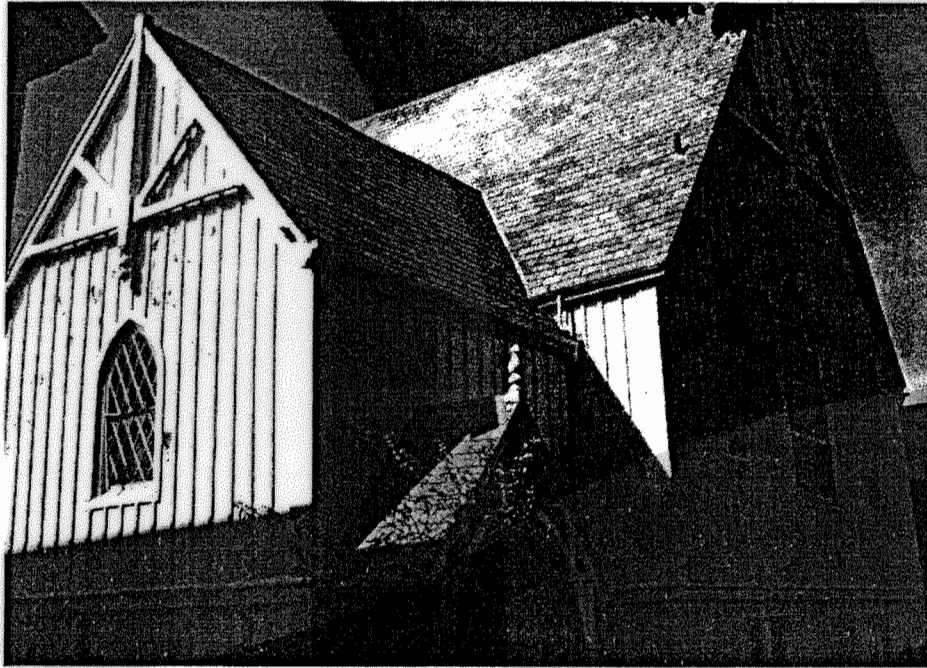
In the mid-1700s, separate religious services and education were offered to members of the black community by a variety of individuals and churches, including the Congregational churches and Trinity Church. African Americans who chose to attend a predominantly white church were permitted to do so, but were generally not allowed to sit in the main body of the church with the white members of the congregation, but instead were seated to the rear or above the majority of the churchgoers.

Quaker women were among the first to pressure others to free their slaves, and the Newport Quaker community abolished slavery among its members in 1772. In the mid-1700s, religious services and education were offered to members of the free black community by a variety of individuals and churches, including the Congregational churches and Trinity Church. Ministers such as Samuel Hopkins of Newport's First Congregational Church—who lived across the street from the Union Congregational Church—and Ezra Stiles of Newport's Second Congregational Church both urged their congregations to support abolition. They also supported efforts by Newport's African community to gain education and to hold their own Christian worship services. Even when African Americans in Newport were given the right to practice a Christian religion of their choice, society was still forcing them to practice a *Christian* religion practiced in Newport. They may have preferred to practice the faith they had known either in Africa or in the West Indies.

After the Rhode Island General Assembly in 1784 ordered that children born to enslaved women would be free, the free African-American community began to grow rapidly. Even before this gradual emancipation order, free African Americans in Newport formed social groups in order to address community issues. One such group was the African Union Society, which was the oldest such organization in the country. Slavery finally was fully abolished in Rhode Island in 1807.

In 1824, Newport Gardner, a freed slave, organized the first free black church in Newport, called the Union Colored Church. It later aligned itself with the Congregational faith, and met in a private home next door to the Fourth Baptist Church, which forbade its members from owning slaves. When the Fourth Baptist Church moved to a new location, the Union Congregational Church purchased the building. The Union Congregational Church had originally called itself as the Union Colored Church, but later aligned itself with the Congregational faith. In 1871, a new building was built in a style that imitated 12th century European church architecture. The building is now a private residence.

The Union Congregational Church lost some of its members when they chose to form African-American congregations to practice other faiths. One of these was the Shiloh Baptist Church, which held its worship services in the Seventh Day Baptist Meeting House from 1864-1869. Religious life has always played a vital role in African-American communities, and this was certainly true in Newport. Paradoxically, many white Newporters professed liberty of conscience while at the same time owning slaves and did not recognize the inconsistency between their beliefs and their actions. It took Newporters several generations to work out those inconsistencies, a problem which many still grapple with today.



Union Congregational Church. Photo Courtesy of Kathy Forrestal, 2002.