

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 3: Building New York

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- How did free African Americans contribute to the building of New York?
- How did the unique social and economic fabric of New York contribute to the building of African American social and economic institutions?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

Through examining an archaeological website, students will understand opposing viewpoints concerning the Five Points region of NYC in the 19th century.

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Explain how and why the Five Points neighborhood was seen as a different place to people living inside the neighborhood and those living outside the neighborhood, especially African Americans.

Introduction

Students respond to the follow question as a warm-up activity: Have you ever been part of a group that seemed good but was seen in the opposite way by someone outside the group?

- Why did this seem good to you? What did you fail to see?
- Why did the outsider feel the way they did? What did they fail to see?
- Did these different views cause conflict? If so, describe?
- Who was “right” in this situation? Why?

Instructional Procedures

Step One: Discovering the “Real” Five Points

Using the website listed below, students will take a “tour” of the Five Points and answer the following questions: The Five Points Archaeological Dig: <http://r2.gsa.gov/fivept/>

- list all the different names of people living in the Five Points
- list all the different jobs of people living in the Five Points
- list all the different places from which people living in the Five Points came.

Step Two: Examining the Evidence

- Referring to the two quotes in Handout 1, have students determine which quote more accurately reflects the information they learned about the Five Points from the archaeological evidence in the website.

Conclusion

Look at the quote you thought was less accurate based on the archaeological evidence.

- What reasons might that person have for publishing his point of view?
- What effect do you think his story might have on the people who read his account in the newspaper?
- Who do you think can write a more accurate history of a group – an insider or an outsider? Why?

Materials

Handout 1: Contemporary Descriptions of the Five Points

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- A. George Foster, a reporter for the New York Tribune in the 1840s and 50s, described Baxter (then Orange) street as lined with " 'fences' or shops for the reception and purchase of stolen goods...One who has never seen the squalid undercrust of a fine city would be at a loss to derive any adequate idea, even from the most graphic description, of the sort of building in which the great business of living and trafficking can be carried on. If the reader is a farmer, however, we shall succeed tolerably well in conveying some notion of what we mean. Let him imagine forty or fifty cow-sheds got together in line, furnished with dismal-looking windows, half broken in and patched up with old newspapers--let him imagine half a hundred of these establishments, we say, standing in a row, with a dark paved street and an uneven narrow brick sidewalk in front, and he will not be far behind the reality of the place where we now stand."
- B. Walt Whitman described in 1842 as "...not paupers and criminals, but the Republic's most needed asset, the wealth of stout poor men [and we will add women] who will work" (the Aurora).