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Experimenting with neighborhood history walks in the Lower East Side

NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Carmen Fariña

Deputy Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, New York City Department of Education

The Department of Education is proud to be part of a school/community consortium to sponsor professional development in American history. This partnership, *New York City & the Nation*, is made possible by two Teaching American History grants from the U.S. Department of Education awarded to the New York City Department of Education for "American Journey" and "Framing History." All around the city individual schools and regions are engaged in a similar endeavor thanks to these Teaching American History grants.

Our first round of programs is now coming to a close. We began with a week-long institute in the summer of 2004 for teachers in grades 4-8. Historian Mike Wallace, Pulitzer prize-winning co-author of *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, delivered morning presentations that covered 400 years of city and national history. In the afternoon, consortium staff led interactive workshops in classroom applications. Teachers developed applications based on the historical content and strategies they studied, and each took home several armfuls of books and resource materials. We followed the summer institute with the Gotham Fellows Program. These are Saturday sessions during the current school year that focus on twentieth-century history for teachers in grades 7-8. Participants are working collaboratively to develop units of study for future citywide dissemination.

With this periodic newsletter, the partners in *New York City & the Nation* look forward to sharing our discoveries and letting you know about upcoming opportunities. We invite you to register for the exciting programs still to come, and urge you to inquire into additional Teaching American History opportunities in your regions.

GET READY TO REGISTER:

To register for the *New York City & the Nation* programs, look for New York City Department of Education job postings in your school or on the New York City Department of Education's web site. For more information for course offerings, please email gothamed@gc.cuny.edu.

New York City & the Nation draws its teaching team from the NYC Dept. of Education and other project partners: Gotham Center for New York City History (CUNY), City Lore, the Historic House Trust, Henry Street Settlement, The Brooklyn Historical Society and The New-York Historical Society.

Summer Institute 2005 for Grades 4 to 8:

New York City & the Nation: "From Seaport City to Metropolis, 1790-1898" is a 30-hour Summer Institute, from July 25 to 29, 2005, 9-4 pm, to be held at the Graduate Center/CUNY in Manhattan. The Institute will investigate our history from 1790 to 1898, followed by hands-on history workshops. *New York City & the Nation* will teach basic concepts, content and chronologies of American history, using local examples. This institute seeks to examine the effects on the City and the Nation of the opening of the Erie Canal and Westward expansion, the extension and restrictions of democracy during this period as well as the advent of industrialization and immigration. Workshops will demonstrate how history can be brought into the classroom through informed teaching and engaging methodologies using the New York City and New York State Learning Standards. Methods include neighborhood walks, drama, using artifacts and museum collections, primary documents, architecture, and field trips, to name a few. The teaching team includes historians, staff developers, folklorists, drama artists and museum educators. Check job posting or email gothamed@gc.cuny.edu for eligibility and more information.

Gotham Fellows Program 2005-2006 for Middle School Social Studies Teachers:

30 spaces are now available for 7th and 8th grade social studies teachers to participate in the Gotham Fellows program. Following July's Summer Institute (see above) for 30 hours, the Fellows will participate in monthly seminars (50 hours total) focusing on *New York City and the Nation*: "Seaport City to Metropolis, 1790-1898". Topics will build upon those covered in the Summer Institute. Seminars with well-known historians will teach basic concepts, content and chronologies of American history, using local examples. Hands-on workshops will demonstrate how history can be brought into the classroom through informed teaching and engaging methodologies linked to New York City and New York State Learning Standards. Teaching methods and team are similar to the Summer Institute described above. Check job posting or email gothamed@gc.cuny.edu for eligibility and more information.

More Fall 2005 courses:

More courses on *New York City & the Nation* will be offered next school year for 50 social studies teachers, grades 4-8. If you are interested in putting your name on a mailing list, please email gothamed@gc.cuny.edu or check the New York City Department of Education's web site.

WHY PAIR NEW YORK CITY & THE NATION?

by Mike Wallace, Director, Gotham Center for New York City History

In the 1920s, relations between New York and the nation, never easy, were at a rancorous boil. The "New York trend of mind and thought," an Iowa editor charged, was "alien per se and alien to the beliefs of the rest of the country." Unlike other world metropolises, Mark Sullivan wrote in "Why the West Dislikes New York" (1926), the city was "more than three fourths alien to that of the nation upon which it lives." The Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan concurred: Gotham was "the most un-American city of the American continent."

What made such neat dichotomies vexingly difficult to sustain was that the countryside was buying in -- literally -- to city tastes. Farm girls in Wyoming wore the same skirts and lipsticks as their sisters in New York. Rural folk tuned in to urban broadcasts. Old American tunes and dances, Henry Ford noted bitterly, were being "rapidly swamped into oblivion by the commercially promoted jazz music emanating from New York." It seemed almost impossible, Sullivan fretted, for the country "to resist the influences that flow from the metropolis." Indeed it was precisely this mingled sense of complicity and helplessness that underlay much of the furious insistence on New York's un-Americanness -- an attempt to reestablish the swiftly eroding line between us and them.

In the twenties, as before and since, there were real differences between New York and the nation. But treating them as independent entities, then or now, misses precisely the interplay between them that has been central to their respective stories. Since its 17th century inception, Gotham has been increasingly crucial to the country's economy, society, politics and culture, whether in its paradigmatic (often anticipatory) experiencing of common trends -- democratization, immigration, industrialization, social movements, consumerism, corporatization, globalization -- or in its serving as critical portal to the planet, funneling capital, labor, commodities, and ideas from the wider world to the developing continent.

It is these interlinks that make New York City such a superb vantage point from which to examine the American experience. There is not a single major chapter in U.S. history -- Revolution, Civil War, westward expansion, civil rights movement -- that cannot profitably be illuminated by exploring how it unfolded in Gotham, and how its outcome here shaped the contours of the larger national experience. And that's what we'll be doing over the next few years: demonstrating how the study of New York City's history can help students make sense of the history of America.

FEATURE UNIT

Our summer institute session on Civil Rights with historian Brian Purnell and drama educators from Henry St. Settlement was so popular that we held it again this spring. After starting the session with a warm-up exercise, we spent the morning discussing civil rights in New York City with Brian and examining the collection of newspaper articles, images, and oral history excerpts he brought with him. In the afternoon we explored the topic further and practiced strategies for dramatic interpretation in the classroom. We designed this strategy for grades 7 & 8, and recommend it for adaptation in grades 4-6 and 9-12.

I. "Civil Rights in NYC during the early 1960s" by Brian Purnell, Fordham University

The Civil Rights movement was not merely a social movement to end racial discrimination in the South. Some very important and dramatic grassroots activism that challenged practices of racial discrimination took place in New York City during the 1960s. One of the most significant activist groups was the Brooklyn, New York chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), an interracial coalition of women and men who used non-violent direct action protest to fight for equal rights and fair treatment of New York City's African American and Puerto Rican citizens. Brooklyn CORE led campaigns against racial discrimination in housing, employment, and education, and fought to improve environmental conditions in predominantly Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods.

Brian Purnell is getting a Ph.D. in History at New York University. His field of research is the Civil Rights and Black power movements in Brooklyn and NYC politics in the 1960s and 70s. He currently is an instructor in African American Studies at Fordham University and research director of the Bronx African American History Project (BAAHP). To document and promote the history of people of African descent in the Bronx, BAAHP is leading an oral history project with African American women and men who have lived, learned, worked, and worshiped in the Bronx during the 20th Century. Copies of the taped interviews and transcriptions, as well as other primary source materials are becoming available at the Bronx County Historical Society through the BAAHP's work.

Brooklyn CORE gained local and national recognition for their demonstrations against employment discrimination at the Ebinger bakery and Sealtest Dairy Companies, biased treatment of Bedford-Stuyvesant on the part of New York City's Sanitation Commission, racial discrimination in the City's construction unions working at the Downstate Medical Center and the World's Fair, and inequality in the New York City public school system. Although rarely discussed in the context of the national Civil Rights movement, the movement that grew in Brooklyn during the 1960s left an important legacy. It shows how everyday women and men worked together to improve their city, nation, and society, and highlights the arenas in which they were successful and the work that still needs to be done.

I recommend two useful reference books for teachers on Civil Rights in New York: Clarence Taylor, *Knocking at our own Door* (1997) and Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (2003).



Working at The Gotham Center for NYC History

II. "Incorporating Drama as a Teaching and Learning Strategy" by AnaMaria Correa Arts & Education Coordinator, Henry St. Settlement

Teaching artist Joyce Griffen and I adapted two of our drama-based strategies -- "The World in the Classroom" and the "Talk Show" -- to incorporate Brian's Civil Rights discussion. These are fun tools that teachers can use to reinforce lessons by helping students put themselves into the shoes of historical actors. Our staff development workshop condensed into one day what teachers might spend several days or weeks doing in the classroom.

We conducted a warm-up strategy first thing in the morning, before the historian's talk, to set the stage for the period under study. When teachers walked in that morning they heard popular protest songs of the civil rights period playing on the sound system and found their pre-assigned seats at tables arranged around the room. We designed the warm-up to simulate the atmosphere of Jim Crow by having teachers experience discrimination first hand. The sharing that occurred afterward elicited diverse responses, everything from 'I felt bad that the person had to stand' to 'I didn't want to comply with the command.' It provided a nice segue into Brian's lecture.

Next the historian led a discussion. Afterwards, teachers used what they had learned to work in small groups and develop a Talk Show incorporating the facts and images of the presentation.

A. Warm-up Strategy. "The World in the Classroom: Discrimination and Discomfort"

An effective way to warm up and engage students in the world they are about to study is to conduct an exercise that causes them to physically experience a condition, a rule, or a feeling that represents the target historical period. A 10-15 minute exercise that engages students viscerally is a powerful tool in providing students a point of departure and preparing them to learn.

Issue students a number that corresponds to a particular table.

At each table, establish a condition that members of the table must adhere to. We used the following:

- males at this table must sit on the floor;
- people with black tops may not speak;
- people with glasses or contacts may not eat (Hershey's Kisses were on this table);
- married people must sit with their hands under the table;
- if your shoe size is larger than a size 8 please remain standing.

After a few minutes, ask participants to write down what they felt and to share their responses.

B. Workshop: "The Talk Show"

The talk show format provides an opportunity for students to learn and synthesize information about a historical topic, and to construct and articulate reasoned arguments.

To prepare for our Talk Show roles, we asked all the teachers to form a circle for an exercise called 'If I were an expert, what would I be?' We asked participants to close their eyes and imagine they were an expert at something and to assume the position/gesture of that expert.



Conducting the talk show

The group was divided in two and each side had to guess who the other group members were. The exercise was a way to create group trust, dispel discomfort in presenting and provide an equality that is established in a circle.

Next we divided the teachers into groups. Each group was assigned one of the four civil rights issues covered in our history presentation (for example, housing discrimination). We asked the groups to identify who would play the talk show expert, to prepare their expert to take part in the show, and to identify roles for other participants. Joyce and I worked with each group to clarify, encourage and troubleshoot. We then convened for the talk show.

Here are the steps:

- a) Have each group work with a particular packet of information you have given them on one topic, e.g. housing, jobs, equal education, bulk garbage pick-up, sit-ins, and protest organizing.
- b) Groups distill from the information packets a minimum of five facts for their guest expert to discuss on the show. Teams choose photos and other previously presented visual aids as "clips" to augment their talk show appearance.
- c) Groups choose one team member to serve as the guest expert on the talk show and decide on the character the expert will play. Experts might be types of people (e.g. lawyer, community leader, policeman) or they might be specific historical characters who emerge from the resource material. Experts are then primed for the show by their fellow team members.
- d) Define in advance some method for choosing one talk show host, and depending on the scale of your role play, other production roles as well. For example, a production manager can oversee production staff, organize the set (placement of chairs), indicate commercial breaks (...and now a word from our sponsor), introduce news flashes, and control the timing of the show. Other roles might include commercial and news flash announcers, technical crew, etc.
- e) Students can be given a list of Production Rules which might include, for example, no inappropriate language, no physical violence, and no inappropriate subject matter. Other pertinent rules, given the particular exercise, could also be included here.
- f) Convene the talk show. Remaining team members arrange themselves as the talk show audience. The talk show proceeds, with the host moderating expert discussion and inviting questions from the audience.
- g) Following the talk show, conduct a reflection session.

III. Curriculum Connections

by Maggie Martinez DeLuca, New York City & the Nation Staff Developer

New York State Standard 1 - History of the United States and New York has been a focus throughout the grant. The presentation on Civil Rights brought to life Standard 1.3 which invites the students to study major social and political developments in NYS and US history. It also addresses Standard 1.4 which encourages historical analysis and the ability to understand the concept of multiple causation and competing interpretations of historical events.

The opening experiences of exclusion, the presentation, research, discussion, and talk show provide models and strategies that teachers will use in the classroom. Teachers discussed the importance of providing students with opportunities to examine multiple perspectives through the voices of those who were present in the historic period; to read and listen to narratives; gather information about historical events that affected their neighborhoods, communities and regions; and compare and contrast accounts of the same event.

The presentations throughout the year have been designed to support teachers in providing historical experiences and information in a way that engages students actively in inquiry-based history research, use of primary and secondary sources, understanding the missing viewpoint, and connecting people and events across time.

The units of study that the teachers are creating will address the problem finding/solving skills that are essential in communicating their historical understandings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

For more information about *New York City & the Nation*, please contact the grant's Project Directors, Elise Abegg, Director of Social Studies, at NYC Dept. of Education at eabegg@nycboe.net and Julie Maurer, Director of Education, Gotham Center for New York City History at gothamed@gc.cuny.edu

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