

The Black Press and the *Philadelphia Tribune*

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Overview

I am a social studies teacher employed by the School District of Philadelphia. I teach twelfth grade social science, eleventh grade Advanced Placement United States History, and African American History. This curriculum unit is suitable for all three classes and reinforces the role of the media in our society.

The unit is designed to give background historical information on the development of the Black press in the United States and its significance to the Black community. *The Philadelphia Tribune* will serve as the local focus. The unit can be covered in a two-week period and is prepared for students in senior high school United States history or social science classes. The lessons are also in line with Pennsylvania state standards.

Rationale

Why is studying the media important to students? The Philadelphia social studies curriculum and the state of Pennsylvania both recognize the role of the media in society and require that students spend time examining the topic. The media's awesome ability in helping to shape the political thoughts, views, and attitudes of American citizens has been valued since the *Federalist Papers* promoted support for the ratification of the United States Constitution. The media's strong influence is still affecting the public today in more ways than ever. It helps us to determine what clothes to wear, what beverages to drink, where we choose to live, and even how we vote.

The importance of the press to educate, inspire, encourage, and inform is critical to the development of a democracy. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees that the citizens of our country shall benefit through a free press.

This project will allow students to analyze why a free press is a valuable characteristic of a democratic society. The right to express opinions and disseminate information on any topic without undue governmental influence is a great privilege that constitutionally should be extended to every American citizen.

Before radio, before television, and before the Internet, the press was the conduit through which we learned much of what was happening in the world, and especially in our little corner of the world—the local community in which we lived.

Newspapers and other publications allow members of ethnic, religious, and racial communities to transmit in written form neighborhood news and business information that is particularly pertinent to special groups. Social movements relevant to different groups may also be espoused and promoted. Anything from international affairs, national politics, and obituaries might be included in the local publications.

One segment of America's population, Black people, long deprived of citizenship and the opportunity for literacy, was not always able to take advantage of freedom of the press. But there were some who braved the threats of punishment or death to put their thoughts into words.

Historical Background

The first Black owned and operated newspaper in America, *Freedom's Journal*, was founded in New York City in 1827 with its first edition appearing on March 16th of that year.¹ Samuel Cornish and James Russwurm served as its first editors. In a front-page editorial, which still seems to emphasize the spirit of the Black press they wrote, "We wish to plead our cause. Too long have others spoken for us."² At this time there were more than 300,000 Blacks in the North. The courage had been found by these two writers to take a stand. *Freedom's Journal* listed six priorities of a Black press:

- Defending the Black image from attacks
- Economic development of the Black community
- Black America's self-assertion
- Attaining civil and political rights
- Access to equal education
- The creation of an "African renaissance"³

Freedom's Journal advocated abolition and the colonization of Africa by American Blacks bringing to its readership valuable points of view on these major topics. It also provided local news such as births, marriages, and other social activities.

As the clamor rose to end slavery and grant civil rights to African Americans, the Black press continued to reinforce the goals and ambitions of the Black community. Mary Ann Shadd Cary began *Provincial Freeman* in 1852 to urge Black Americans to move to Canada following passage of the Fugitive Slave Law. More Black newspapers followed in the next few years, including the *North Star* established by Frederick Douglass and the *New Orleans Tribune*, which began publishing in 1862. Frederick Douglass' *Monthly* (1863) began urging Black men in the North to join the Union army.⁴ Ida B. Wells' *A Red Record*, published in 1895, investigated the lynching of Blacks, as did W.E.B. DuBois' *The Crisis Magazine*, established in 1909. Many other Black publications followed, but most were short-lived.⁵

In post-Civil War America, Philadelphia's growing Black population also generated a newspaper to relay ideas and vocalize opinions on local and national issues. Christopher J. Perry, an experienced Black journalist, founded *The Philadelphia Tribune* on November 22, 1884.⁶ Its first edition appeared on the streets in January 1885. Its mission was to "inform, educate and express the needs of the community."⁷

The main branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia located at 1901 Vine Street, houses microfilm copies of *The Philadelphia Tribune* dating from January 6, 1912 to the present. Viewing these earliest copies of the newspaper reveals that it is a social document more than a "news" paper. It served the Black residents of Philadelphia by providing information on crime in the Black neighborhoods, deaths of prominent individuals, social events such as minstrel shows or dances, and the latest happenings among the various fraternal organizations. Advertisements for jobs, mainly as domestics, rooms to let, and houses for sale are noted. Items relating to cosmetics, clothes, beauty and barbershop offerings, and medicines are included as well. The early *Tribune* also contained an editorial section, sports columns, and church news. There is very little coverage in these pages on world events or national concerns.

Today the *Tribune* remains an active part of the Black community. Its current offices are located at 520 South 16th Street in Philadelphia. It is the oldest continually published non-church newspaper in the Philadelphia area and is the largest daily newspaper serving the Black community. The *Tribune* readership is over 500,000.⁸ Its coverage includes not only Philadelphia, but southern New Jersey as well. The current President and Chief Executive Officer is Robert W. Bogle. In addition to the newspaper, the company has grown and expanded its publications. These now include special interest publications, *Tribune Magazine*, *Sojourner*, *Tribune Metro*, *Tribune Entertainment*, *Tribune TV*, the *Learning Key*, and monthly supplements. The 2006 *Tribune* is published on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday. It contains local and international news, commentary, business, health, lifestyles, sports, arts and entertainment, classifieds, obituaries, religion, circulars, comics, horoscopes, and crosswords.

The *Tribune* and its publications reach an audience of readers who have the wealth, stability, and discretionary income to be consumers who can respond to the product advertisements that appear in the newspaper. The *Tribune* reaches more than 75 percent of the African-American households in Philadelphia on a weekly basis.⁹

The Philadelphia Tribune is a member of the National Newspaper Publishers Association also known as the Black Press of America. The NNPA, established sixty-five years ago, is an organization of more than 200 Black community papers across the United States with a readership of over 15 million. Its target audience represents a buying power of \$572.1 billion. This financial clout of the African American public has helped to keep the *Tribune* and other Black publications alive and functioning. New publications such as *O Magazine* are seeing their share of this Black market.

Objectives

1. Students will become familiar with the parts (sections) of a newspaper.

2. Students will learn to use a microfilm reader as a research tool.
3. Students will gain knowledge of the many occupational opportunities available in the print media industry.
4. Students will be able to assess the role of the media in educating and informing the public.
5. Students will learn the history of the development of the Black press in the United States.
6. Students will become familiar with several community newspapers and their roles in fostering a sense of community.
7. Students will improve their ability to interpret political cartoons.
8. Students will further develop their ability to work cooperatively in small groups.
9. Student listening and questioning skills will be enhanced through the interview process.
10. Students will be able to read and create bar graphs and line graphs.
11. Students will strengthen questioning and listening skills as they interview a journalist employed by a Black publication.

Strategies

The curriculum allows the teacher to provide lessons that are varied in scope and enables students of different learning styles and ability levels to achieve some success. The first lesson is designed to make certain that the students have an understanding of the parts of a newspaper. This is important as they explore influences that the media can exert through its various types of printed articles.

Student skills to be reinforced in the curriculum include reading, writing, listening, discussion, and small and large group presentations. Students will be able to interview a professional journalist. The classroom visitation will provide personal experiences and first-hand accounts that will bring the media to life on a personal basis.

Two trips are planned and play an important part in the learning about newspapers. The visit to the library enables students the chance to explore the several departments and research resources available for their use. Utilizing the microfilm equipment will enable them to read editions of *The Philadelphia Tribune* from the past ninety-four years. Having acquired the skills using these documents, students will be better prepared for the independent research project. The second trip is to a printing plant to see first-hand how the newspaper is actually produced. This visit also reinforces the occupations lesson that is included in the curriculum.

Cooperative learning opportunities are encouraged by the school district and have been integrated into several of the lessons. Students will work in small groups to compare and contrast printed articles and in creating projects such as the graph assignment.

Students will be provided with issues of several community newspapers such as *The Germantown Courier*, *Mt. Airy Express*, *South Philly Review*, *Philadelphia Gay News*, *Jewish Exponent*, and the *Catholic Standard and Times*. Students will be able to

read the papers and cite the commonalities and differences among them. How does each publication add to a sense of community for the readership?

Classroom Activities

Lesson One: Introduction to the Newspaper

Objective: Review the parts (sections) of the newspaper

Materials: a class set of a recent edition of *The Philadelphia Tribune*

Procedure:

(1) The teacher will provide each student with a list of the following terms and definitions:

News story – a report of a recent event, usually telling who, what, when, where, and why

Feature story – informative article about a fairly recent event, unusual incident, interesting people, other subjects of interest written in a descriptive and creative style

Editorial – a short essay, usually discussing current events, problems, or people. It is written by the editor(s) and expresses their opinion about the justice or significance or wisdom of a situation with supporting evidence

Review – an article about a current book, movie, play, or other performance, which discusses the subject, method, and quality in the opinion of the critic whose name appears in the byline

Byline– the name of the writer of a particular article will appear beneath the title

(2) Newspaper Group Activity: Students will use the above list and the *Tribune* to locate each of the parts of a newspaper. They will cut out each article and glue it onto a sheet of loose-leaf paper. Students will provide the following information for each article: title, date, page number, and writer, if applicable. The students will then briefly summarize the article.

Time: One day

Lesson Two: The Black Press

Materials: Video, “The Black Press: Soldiers Without Swords,” produced in 1998

Procedure:

1) The teacher will provide the students with background information of Black publications in America. The pioneers would include Samuel Cornish, James Russwurm, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and others as selected by the teacher. The history of *The Philadelphia Tribune* should then be introduced.

(2) Students will view the video or excerpts of the video entitled, “The Black Press: Soldiers Without Sword,” which presents a history of the Black press.

(3) Students will then be asked to write their opinions of how the Black press can be important to the African-American community.

Time: Two days

Lesson Three: Visit to the Main Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia

The students will have the opportunity to visit the various research areas of the library. In the newspaper room located on the second floor, students will be able to learn to use the microfilm reader and the special Xerox machine that enables one to make copies from the microfilm. The available editions of the *Tribune* from 1912 to the present are located here.

Procedure: (1) Students will be led on a tour of the library. The tour can be pre-arranged by the teacher.

(2) In the newspaper room, the students can be shown the proper usage of the microfilm machine and the Xerox machine.

(3) Students may work individually or in pairs to research a particular year of publication. They are asked to look for certain information such as the cost of housing, types of jobs available and the wages paid, the price of consumer items such as shoes, eye glasses, jewelry, or tickets for entertainment events.

(4) At school the following day, students will be able to compare their notes. A chart, bar graph, or line graph can be prepared to show the fluctuation of prices through the decades.

Time: One day

Lesson Four: Visit to a printing plant

Procedure: The teacher will make arrangements for the class to visit a newspaper printing facility. *The Philadelphia Inquirer* has a printing facility in Conshohocken, PA and visits may be arranged by contacting its Broad Street office. Prior to the visit, students should be provided with a list of occupations associated with the industry.

Advertising: account executive, administrative assistant, classified inside sales, sales representative, classified inside sales manager, commercial printing coordinator, legal clerk, retail manager, graphic artist, sales managers

Business office: accounting clerk, accounting manager, credit assistant, credit manager, customer service clerk, and payroll manager

Circulation: sales department manager, truck driver, single copy representative, dock supervisor, district manager, district assistant, single copy manager, customer service representative, customer service manager, administrative assistant

Human Resources: benefits administrator, employment specialist, personnel assistant

Information Technology: business systems manager, network operations, desktop systems analyst, networking systems analyst, technology support manager

Market development: strategic market manager, research analyst, market development specialist

News: photographer, copywriter, news reporter, librarian, graphic artist, copy editor

Online: online content producer, online news editor, online advertising manager, online production coordinator, online copy editor, online advertising sales representative, online creative coordinator, online reporter

Production: ad messenger, camera operator, color scanner operator, press operator, copy input clerk, distribution center manager, graphic artist, inserter, janitors, markup operator

During the visit to the plant, the students will be able to see employees performing their various tasks in order for the newspaper to be produced. They may have the opportunity to ask questions of some of these workers during the tour. It may be important to note that in the production process every person has a specific and necessary part to play in the final production of the paper and its distribution to the reading public.

The follow up activities might include having students write about the trip describing what they saw and explaining what job they thought was most interesting.

Lesson Five: Library Research

Procedure: Students will use their library skills to research a specific topic or historical event as written in the *Philadelphia Tribune* and another local newspaper such as the *Philadelphia Inquirer* in order to compare and contrast coverage of the event in the Black and white press. Some examples may include the return of Black soldiers to the United States following World War I or World War II, the inner city riots that took place in 1964, the appointment of Clarence Thomas to the Supreme Court, or the death of Tupac Shakur.

Time: This lesson may be considered a culminating activity because it may involve several days of student research, interpretation, and writing of the final report. Students may be asked to orally discuss their projects with their classmates as well as prepare a written product. The teacher will have to clearly express the expectations such as having the final paper typewritten or including copies of the articles as part of the project.

Lesson Six: Guest Speaker

Procedure:

The teacher will contact the *Philadelphia Tribune* to invite a member of its staff to visit the school. The students will be able to interview the staffer regarding his educational background and professional background. Particular questions of interest may be the person's experiences in working for a Black newspaper and/or a white newspaper. Students and the teacher may want to prepare the questions in advance of the visit.

Time: One day

Lesson Seven: Community

Procedure: Students will be asked to compare and contrast the contents of several community publications. The teacher will obtain copies of the *Philadelphia Tribune*,

Jewish Exponent, Catholic Standard and Times, South Philly Review, Germantown Courier or similar publications. Students may be asked to bring in newspapers printed for their particular neighborhoods for discussion as well.

The students may be divided into small groups. Copies of the community publications will be distributed to each group. It would be great if the papers were of the same date or same week so that headline articles can be included in the discussion. Students may want to look at coverage of world events, sports, and classified sections. What do all of the various publications have in common? What differences, if any, are there? How might these publications help to develop a sense of “community” among the readers?

Student group recorders may then report out on their findings.

Time: One day

Lesson Eight: Political Cartoons

Materials: political cartoons from the *Philadelphia Tribune*, overhead projector

Procedure: The teacher will display a political cartoon via the overhead projector. The teacher will lead the class in discussing the persons/symbols drawn in the cartoon. In selecting the political cartoon, the teacher may want to use those depicting particular historical events from different eras our history. Students can then have the opportunity to guess the historical event and the year of the cartoon’s printing. The class can analyze the artist’s meaning or reason for drawing the cartoon.

Next, the class can be divided into small groups. Each group will be given political cartoons to discuss and interpret. The students may also try to determine how the cartoons may or may not influence readers.

Time: One day

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This volume is a study of Black newspaper publications in the United States.

Appendix

The following Pennsylvania state standards are applicable to this curriculum unit.

1.6.3.A Listen to others.

1.6.3.D Contribute to discussions.

1.6.3.E Participate in small and large group discussions and presentations.

1.6.3.F Use media for learning purposes.

5.3.3.J Identify the role of the media in society.

5.3.6.J Describe the influence of media in reporting issues.

5.3.9.J Analyze the importance of freedom of the press.

5.3.12.J Evaluate the role of the media in political life in the United States and explain the role of the media in setting the public agenda.

6.2.9.K Interpret how media reports can influence perceptions of the cost and benefits of decisions.

6.2.12.K Analyze the impact of the media on decision-making of consumers, producers, and policymakers.

¹ Todd Stevens Burroughs, "Black Press Reflects America's Goals," *New York Amsterdam News*, 14 March 2002, Vol. 93 Issue 11, p. 4.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ "How the Black Press Evolved: Part 1, 1827-1912." *New York Amsterdam News*, 3/14/2002, Vol. 93 Issue 11, p. 4.

⁵ George W. Gore, *Negro Journalism: An Essay on the History and Present Conditions of the Negro Press* (s.n., 1922), p. 12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *The Philadelphia Tribune Media Kit*, 2006. www.phila-tribune.com/pdf/The_PhiladelphiaTribune_MediaKit..pdf

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.