

Relevant Unit Objectives

Module 2: Resistance and Self-Determination

This lesson addresses the following Essential Questions:

- What constituted an act of resistance of African Americans against the institution of slavery?
- Are some acts of resistance more effective than others?

Objectives of the Lesson

Aim

Can intellectual leaders and the spread of their ideas be considered acts of resistance against slavery?

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

- Connect a person's education to their ability to be independent and to resist oppression.
- Identify James McCune Smith and his views on the responsibility of African Americans to make positive changes in society.

Introduction

Introducing James McCune Smith

The teacher provides background information about James McCune Smith found in MAAP and at <https://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/bios/james-mccune-smith.html>

The teacher has students listen to Danny Glover's portrayal of McCune Smith at <http://nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/T2/G4/G4ReadMore.php> (Click on James McCune Smith in first sentence, then on "click here to see Danny Glover portraying James McCune Smith" in pop-up window). Show first two minutes of video.

- Why was he able to win the debate with the Southern Congressman about the effect of freedom on slaves in America?
- What do you think James McCune Smith thinks is the strongest weapon that African Americans can use to fight for their rights in white America?

Instructional Procedures

Analyzing James McCune Smith's words

Use printable excerpt of "James McCune Smith Calls on All African Americans to Join the Battle for Civil Rights" available from <http://www.nyscss.org/resources/publications/NYandslavery/Chapter E/Documents/1855B.MCC.pdf>

Discussion questions:

Background questions:

- If the title of this speech includes the phrase "calls on **all** (emphasis added) African Americans" what do you think that means about who has and who has not been fighting for African American freedom up until the time of the speech?
- Dr. McCune Smith goes on to mention removing "Slavery and caste." Is freedom the same thing as equality? Why or why not?
- Why does Dr. McCune Smith talk about citizens and colored citizens instead of just saying just plain citizens?

Questions on government's responsibility towards abolitionism:

- Is James McCune Smith talking about the federal government or state governments when measuring the progress towards equal rights?

Questions on the responsibility of African Americans towards abolitionism:

- According to James McCune Smith who must ultimately take responsibility for the freedom and equal rights of "colored citizens"?
- When James McCune Smith says "...And from the mere act of riding in public conveyances, up to the liberation of every slave in the land do our duties extend-embracing a full and equal participation, politically and socially, in all the rights and immunities of American citizens" he means breaking local laws about who can ride in public transportation, black or white): illegally smuggling escaping slaves to freedom (Underground Railroad), and protesting laws that keep African American people in chains. Why do you think some African Americans hadn't been fighting for abolition and civil rights up until 1855?

Conclusion

Do you think it is any less important for people to get a good education today and become involved in politics than it was during James McCune Smith's day? Why or why not?

What advice would James McCune Smith have for all of us today about getting involved in politics?

Materials

New York Divided website:

<http://nydivided.org/VirtualExhibit/T2/G4/G4ReadMore.php>

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