THE AMERICAN PSYCHE: BLACK AND WHITE

Author: S. J. Claybon

EDUCATION AS OPPORTUNITY OR SOCIAL CONTROL? | GRADES 6–12

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

CENTRAL HISTORICAL INVESTIGATION

How did educational systems that expanded opportunity for formerly enslaved people also reproduce economic, political, and racial hierarchies through funding, governance, and curriculum?

INTERDISCIPLINARY LENSES

HISTORY AND CIVICS

Reconstruction, the Freedmen’s Bureau, voting rights, segregation law, and the struggle for educational self-determination.

ECONOMICS

Philanthropic capital, labor markets, industrial education, unequal public appropriations, and donor influence.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Distinguishing a historical claim from evidence, analyzing competing perspectives, and constructing a counterargument.

GEOGRAPHY AND DATA

Mapping Southern institutions and examining whether enrollment, funding, and degree pathways differed across states.

THESIS TO INVESTIGATE, NOT ASSUME

The central argument attributed to S. J. Claybon in this project is that some education for Black Americans was structured to maintain a subordinate social position. Students must test this interpretation using primary and secondary evidence, including counterexamples and Black-led educational initiatives.

STANDARDS AND EVIDENCE TARGET

NJSLS Social Studies: 6.1, 6.3 (grade-specific indicators to be selected); NJSLS ELA: RI.6.1, RI.6.8, W.6.1, W.6.9; CCLS Literacy: RH.6–8.1, RH.6–8.9, WHST.6–8.1.

DOL: Use at least three sources to explain opportunity, structural limits, and Black resistance; acknowledge one counterargument.

DAY 1 | FREEDOM, SCHOOLING, AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Objective: Explain why education became a contested form of power after emancipation.
Do Now: Can a school increase freedom while limiting the futures available to its students? Give a reason.

SOURCE A | THE MEANING OF EDUCATIONAL FREEDOM

In 1865, emancipation did not automatically produce equal citizenship, landownership, political representation, or access to advanced schooling. Formerly enslaved people organized classes, supported teachers, founded churches, and sought literacy because reading and writing could help families negotiate wages, understand contracts, participate in government, and protect their rights. Education was not merely a gift from outside benefactors; it was a freedom claim made by Black communities themselves. At the same time, employers and political leaders in the former Confederacy depended on inexpensive agricultural labor. Schooling therefore became a struggle over the future labor force: would students have access to history, science, mathematics, law, and leadership, or be directed mainly toward work considered suitable for them? The answer varied by institution and historical moment. Federal agencies, missionary associations, Black churches, and private philanthropists all played roles in building schools. Their resources sometimes made education possible, but authority over boards, budgets, admissions, and curricula could remain unequal. The critical question is not whether vocational learning was useful. It is whether students were free to pursue the same breadth of knowledge and professional opportunity as white students. This tension connects educational history to economics (who supplied capital and who benefited from labor), civics (who held decision-making power), and geography (where segregation shaped access). A rigorous historical inquiry compares these competing interests rather than assuming that every school or donor acted alike.

INTERDISCIPLINARY EVIDENCE LAB

Economics: Identify two groups whose interests in Black education could differ. Explain the labor or financial interest of each.

Civics: Explain the difference between attending a school and controlling its governing board.

ELA: Underline the source's central claim. Circle one sentence that needs corroboration from a primary source.

QUICK WRITE AND EXIT TICKET

Quick Write: Was educational access sufficient for educational equality? Use two details from Source A.

Exit Ticket: Name one historical record you would seek to test the argument (board minutes, course catalog, funding records, or student testimony).