

## Curriculum Unit Introduction:

**Title of Unit:** The Effects of the Issue of Slavery and the Civil War on Churches

**Vital Theme of the Unit:** The purpose of this unit of instruction is to help students in AP US History better understand the effect that the issue of slavery and the Civil War had on clergymen and the churches.

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**Grade Level:** Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement US History Students

**Number of lessons in the unit:** Two      **Time needed to complete:** Two days

**Curriculum standards addressed:** Course Description Outline for AP US History

**Technology used:** N/A

### Unit Introduction and overview of instructional plan:

The students taking AP US History will begin studying the gradual breakdown of the social and political systems that occurred in the mid 1800s during the second six-weeks grading period. After several class lectures and reading assignments about the breakdown of the Union over the issue of slavery, the teacher should introduce the problems this caused for the various religious denominations that spanned throughout the North and South. These two lesson plans use primary sources to illustrate several aspects of these problems. By analyzing Mrs. Mary Jones journal, the students will glean knowledge about what it was like for southerners to experience the take-over of northerners at the end of the War, to observe how seemingly devoutly religious people could still justify the use of slaves, and also to understand the complex relationship that existed between slave owners and their slaves. Also, by examining two editions of the *Methodist Discipline*, one recorded before the War, the other after, students can see how the southern members of that denomination modified their position regarding Blacks, whether by choice or coercion. Both of these assignments will allow students to analyze, interpret, and infer knowledge they have previously acquired. This activity also provides an opportunity for the students to use their language art skills as they write essays.

This unit of instruction can be introduced and completed in two class periods. Students will be assessed on the quality of their essays.

## **The Effects of the Issue of Slavery and the Civil War on Churches**

As with most wars, there were many causes and dimensions to America's Civil War during the 1860s. The political conflict which evolved between the northern and southern sections of the country had deep roots in several seemingly irreconcilable factors based on the geographical, economical, and social differences that existed in those regions. Probably the most contentious issue which separated the government and the people of those sections was that of slavery. This "peculiar institution" had been practiced in the southern section of the nation since the introduction of tobacco into the English colonies late in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The controversial practice eventually spread deeper into the south, and then further west, with the introduction of cotton as a staple crop and the development of the plantation system by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Justifications offered by slave owners, southern politicians, and even clergymen, for this "necessary evil," though passionate and plentiful, were never really understood or accepted by many people living in the North. As the movement to abolish slavery gained strength among the citizens in the northern states, heated debate over the institution of slavery finally made its way into the national government by 1860. As a result, many wealthy, land owning southerners and southern politicians felt the time had come to renounce their association with the United States and form another union, later named the "Confederate States of America." Hence, the Civil War.

As the North struggled to reunite a nation that was divided by political, social, and economic ideology, the South fought to acquire their independence and preserve their "traditional" way of life. The chasm was deep, and it had some far-reaching effects on families, political parties, and even churches. In fact, one of the most perplexing facets of the system of slavery in the South was that involving the religious clergymen and their opinions and ideas

about human bondage. Equally bewildering is the effect that the break-up of the Union and the consequential Civil War had on the existing denominations and associations of churches which spanned throughout the North and South. Examining only two of the Christian denominations that were prevalent during this time, the Presbyterians and the Methodists, provides a good indication of the struggle that the churches and their ministers had in trying to reconcile the teachings of the Bible with the controversy surrounding the institution of slavery as a fixture in southern society and the resulting Civil War.

In the early 1800s, both of these denominations took anti-slavery positions, claiming it was “contrary to the laws of God and harmful to society” (Norton, 57). In fact, most of the members of these established churches were actually non-slaveholding whites that evangelized among the blacks and allowed them to participate, albeit segregated, in their worship services. However, after Nat Turner, who was ironically a preacher himself, staged his rebellion in Virginia, many of the preachers in the southern branches of these churches responded out of a fear of more insurrections, and began to change their message from that of a moral objection to slavery to more of a justification for it. They even used verses from the Bible to convince the slaves that it was their religious duty to obey their masters. This was a direct contradiction to the anti-slavery messages being delivered from the pulpits in the North. Over time, southerners became increasingly concerned that northerners were not only passing judgment on their way of life, but they were also “meddling in their affairs” with their “militant abolitionists” (Norton, 58). From that point on, the conflict over this controversial issue took precedence over any denominational loyalties, and both denominations experienced a division between their northern and southern churches.

The Presbyterian church split into northern and southern branches. This occurred after several strong resolutions condemning slavery were passed by that church's General Assembly. Then, after the southern states seceded, any chance for the restoration of the denomination was gone. In the words of Rev. Charles Colcock Jones, a retired Presbyterian minister who also owned one of the largest plantations in Georgia, "The church must be divided... We are two people distinctly and politically now—what we have been in fact for the last ten or fifteen years. To continue the union of the church after we are divided nationally is contrary to the usage of the Church of Christ in all ages" (Myers, 55). Reverend Jones was actually a devoutly religious man and was quite compassionate towards the many slaves he owned himself, as he carefully attended to their physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. He even wrote a handbook for other slave owners, called "The Religious Instruction of Negroes," which encouraged them to indoctrinate their slaves with Christian religion because "the plantation which enjoys religious instruction will do better for the interests of its owner, than it did before it enjoyed such instruction" (Boorstin, 195). Still, Rev. Jones strongly believed in the superiority of the white race and in the righteousness of the southern way of life. He was apparently able to substantiate his political beliefs along with his spirituality, for he wrote in a letter to his son, "The conduct of the old United States government and of the North is a disgrace to the civilization and Christianity of the age, and an outrage on the great principles of political and civil liberty upon which our former government was laid and upon which it has stood for eighty years. We can do no more than humbly commit our cause to God and meet the issue forced upon us unjustly, iniquitously" (Myers, 56). Rev. Jones was not the only Presbyterian minister to rail against the northerners and their objections to the southern way of life. Rev. William Harrison, minister of a First Presbyterian Church in East Tennessee, declared that "he would sooner have a Bible printed

and bound in Hell, than one printed and bound north of the Mason and Dixon's line" (Norton, 63).

Eventually the southern Presbyterians had to come to terms with the loss of the war and a change in their own status in the reconstructed south. The unfortunate split in the organized Presbyterian Church was not completely reconciled until nearly twenty years following the Civil War. In those ensuing years, southern Presbyterian ministers and their congregations experienced several instances of retribution from their northern counterparts over property ownership. In many cases, the southern members were forced out of the structures they had worshipped in for many years to make way for the northern members. Many of the conflicts over who should claim existing church buildings took years to settle, and in some instances had to be resolved by the courts (Akins, 124). However, in most cases, the southern Presbyterian congregations were eventually restored to their buildings and continued to worship there until the two groups were reunited.

The Methodist denomination was also divided over the issue of slavery. As early as the 1830s, there was a noticeable distinction between some ministers in the north, who were strong abolitionists, and the many proslavery ministers in the south. The breaking point came when a Methodist bishop from Georgia, James Andrew, was ordered by the General Conference to relinquish his official duties because he refused to free a couple of slaves he had inherited by marriage (Norton, 61-2). The ultimate result of that disagreement was the formation of two separate Methodist organizations: the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. In fact, listed in the *Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church, South, 1850*, there were some specific instructions for slave-owning church members in regards to the treatment of their slaves (197-8). However, the break-up of this particular denomination was

somewhat more ambiguous than with other denominations, and many southern ministers and their congregants had to decide to which organization they would officially belong once the south seceded and the Civil War began. For instance, in the state of Tennessee, the situation was particularly rankling because there were actually pockets of pro-Union and Confederate sympathizers scattered throughout the state, and each branch of that denomination had its supporters. One such example was the notorious William G. Brownlow, ordained Methodist minister and passionate Unionist. He claimed that it was actually the agitation of Protestant ministers that had triggered the secession of the southern states and declared, “I bring the charge of political preaching and praying against...clergymen...irrespective of sects; and I have no hesitance in saying...that the worst class of men who make tracks upon Southern soil are Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Episcopal clergymen, and the head of these for their mischief are the Southern Methodists” (Norton, 64-65).

On the contrary, there was John Robertson, former Confederate soldier, who had experienced a religious “conversion” and had “resolved to commence preparation for the [Methodist] Ministry” (Ash, 59). As Robertson prepared for his future as a preacher in Tennessee, he remained ever hopeful of a Confederate victory; however, he knew better than to express that sentiment around the “Yankees.” Even more baffling was Robertson’s racist stance against blacks, considering he was a ‘man of God.’ He admitted to hating blacks with a “visceral passion that would have puzzled many whites” (Ash, 55), and had very strong opinions about the Emancipation Proclamation. Still, Robertson understood the precarious position that the “rebel Methodists” were in as they faced an uncertain future at the end of the Civil War. In regards to the dominance of the northern Methodists, Roberts stated that he would be forced to “reckon with this turmoil in his church” (Ash, 174). This “turmoil” was especially intense once the

Reverend William Brownlow became the governor of the reconstructed Tennessee, whom Robertson referred to as “the basest of all wretches” (Ash, 173). Brownlow took advantage of his opportunity to punish those who had supported the Confederacy, chiefly those southern ministers and their churches. In an editorial published in Brownlow’s own newspaper, the *Whig and Rebel Ventilator*, he vowed to bring “to a violent death any one or more of the God-forsaken and hell-deserving persecutors of Union families in East Tennessee, [and if successful,] we thank God most devoutly....Shoot them down like dogs, is our advice” (Ash, 55.) Consequently, many southern Methodist preachers were captured and “beaten into insensibility” as a form of punishment. In one particular incident, the Reverends Carroll Long and J. G. Swisher were “seized by a mob as they traveled near Athens and were forced to carry a pole on their shoulders amid the taunts and jeers of the crowd” (Norton, 68).

Governor Brownlow also used his power to reorganize the Methodist governing body in East Tennessee, called the Holston Conference, in order to make it a thoroughly Unionist body aligned with the Northern Methodist Church. He promptly expelled all ‘rebel’ ministers and seized all of the property claimed by the Southern Methodist Churches (Ash, 174). Out of this situation came a similar problem with that of the Presbyterians, the problem of who should claim ownership of church properties. Once again, the courts were called in to decide, and in most cases, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was eventually restored to their church properties (Akins, 123-4). By 1868, according to the *Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, the two bodies were once again convening as one, and agreed to “seek its [slavery] extirpation by all lawful and Christian means (*Doctrine*, 1868, 34).

As with all wars, there were countless tragedies associated with America’s Civil War: human suffering and death, economic devastation, physical ruin, and political upheaval. No less

significant was the effect that it had on the people of faith and their churches. However, with the passage of time and some changes in attitudes and mind-set, most of the spiritual wounds were eventually healed, and the denominations reunited. Ironically, the next major problem for the churches was a fierce competition *between* the different denominations for new converts and increased membership, which included the battle to organize as many independent black congregations to add to their affiliations as was possible (Norton, 77).

## Bibliography

### **Primary Sources:**

The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1850. Richmond: Publisher: John Early, 1850.

The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1868. New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1868.

Myers, Robert M. The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1884.

### **Secondary Sources:**

Akins, Bill and Kenneth Langley. Torn Apart: McMinn County, Tennessee, During The Civil War. Etowah: Choate Printing Company.

Ash, Stephen V. A Year in the South, 1885: The True Story of Four Ordinary People Who Lived Through the Most Tumultuous Twelve Months in American History. New York: Harper Collins Publisher, 2001.

Boorstin, Daniel J. The Americans: The National Experience. New York: Random House, 1965.

Norton, Herman A. Religion in Tennessee, 1775-1945. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1981.

## Lesson Plan Outline

**Unit:** The Effects of the Issue of Slavery and the Civil War on Churches

**Lesson Title:** Mrs. Mary Jones Journal

**Grade Level:** Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement US History Students

**Essential Question related to Vital Theme:** How does Mrs. Mary Jones journal support the stereotype of a wealthy southern plantation owner, and how does it dispute those stereotypes?

**Lesson Time:** One fifty-five minute class period

**Curriculum Standards:** Course Description Outline for AP US History

**Technology used and how:** N/A

**Materials:** copies of excerpts from *The Children of Pride* containing Mrs. Jones journal entries for each student.

### Activity description and overview of instructional strategies:

Students will receive primary source documents written by Mrs. Mary Jones during a two-week period as the Union military invaded and raided her home. They will be asked to read and analyze these documents and find evidence to answer the following questions:

- How did Mrs. Jones' treatment of her slaves differ from the way the Union soldiers treated them?
- How did Mrs. Jones describe the behavior of the 'people' on the plantation?
- What reasons did Mrs. Jones give for "entering into the feelings of Job" (Myers, 928)
- How did Mrs. Jones indicate her resignation of a Confederate defeat?
- How did Mrs. Jones feel about a free black population?
- Why did Mrs. Jones desire "a separate and distinct nationality?"(Myers, 529)
- Summarize Mrs. Jones' faith as evident in her journal.

After interpreting these documents, the students will write essays describing how Mrs. Jones' journal both supports and disputes the stereotype of a wealthy southern plantation owner. They should provide details and examples taken from her journal to support their thesis, as well as reflecting on their previously acquired knowledge. This activity may require additional time to complete, therefore students may finish their essays as homework.

**Assessment:** The students will be assessed on the quality of their essays, based on their use of the primary source, interpretation, and inference of prior knowledge.

### Works Cited:

Myers, Robert Manson. *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972.

## Lesson Plan Outline

**Unit:** The Effects of the Issue of Slavery and the Civil War on Churches

**Lesson Title:** Documentation of Change in Methodist Doctrine, 1850 – 1868

**Grade Level:** Eleventh Grade Advanced Placement US History Students

**Essential Question related to the Vital Theme:** How can primary source documents from the Methodist Assemblies held in 1850 and 1868 explain a change in doctrine on the issue of slavery?

**Lesson Time:** One fifty-five minute class period

**Curriculum Standards:** Course Description Outline for AP US History

**Technology Used and how:** N/A

**Materials:** Copies of applicable sections from two *Methodist Disciplines*, 1850 and 1868, for each student.

### Activity description and overview of instructional strategies:

After studying the Civil War and Reconstruction, including the effects that these events had on the South and its people, the teacher should re-visit the problems that this caused for the religious denominations. Each student will be given copies of two primary source documents from the Methodist Discipline, one from 1850, and the other from 1868. The students should analyze the documents and answer the following questions:

- What makes these documents ‘primary sources?’
- What is it about the ‘title’ of the books that reflects a change over time?
- Summarize the church’s position on slavery in each document and describe the differences.
- How does the 1850 document actually acknowledge the issue of slavery?
- What does the 1850 document plan to provide for ‘colored’ preachers?

After analyzing the documents, the students will be required to use their previously acquired knowledge about the Civil War and Reconstruction to write essays explaining which historical factors could have been instrumental in garnering this change of doctrine for the Methodist church. The students should indicate in their essays if they believe southern Methodists chose to make this change in doctrine, or were coerced into making it. They should be reminded to use historical facts to support their essays.

**Assessment:** Grades for the essays will be assigned based on the use of facts, interpretation, and inference of knowledge.

### Works Cited:

*The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.* Richmond: Published by John Early, 1850.

*The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1868.* New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1868.