

Lesson Plan #11 for Genius of Freedom: Octavius Catto and Streetcar Desegregation by Amy Cohen

Grade Level: Middle or high School

Topics: Civil rights, Fifteenth Amendment

Time period: 1865-1881

Pennsylvania History Standards: 8.2.9 A, 8.2.9 B, 8.3.9 D

Pennsylvania Core Standards: 8.5.6-8 B, 8.5.9-10 B, 8.5.11-12 B, 8.5.6-8 D, 8.5.9-10 D, 8.5.11-12 D

***African American History*, Prentice Hall textbook:** page 440

Overview: Students will watch excerpts of a film about Octavius Catto in order to understand and analyze two primary sources from the *Genius of Freedom* exhibit. One source underscores the importance of the 15th Amendment in shifting the political balance in the North; the other illustrates the appearance of a civil rights hero who, until recently, had faded into obscurity.

Materials:

- *NEGROES TO RIDE IN CITY RAILWAY PASSENGER CARS*
- Octavius Catto portrait
- "The Floodgates Open" available at www.historyofphilly.com
- Floodgates Note-Taking Sheet
- Optional: Primary Source extension activity

Procedure:

1. Say or show the following statement:

A famous civil rights protest was sparked when an African American woman refused to get up from her seat when told to do so by a white driver. Brave leadership by a respected African American community leader eventually led to the desegregation of public transportation their city.

Ask students to guess the era, the individuals, and the city being described. Although students will probably assume that this scenario is describing the actions of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. during the Montgomery Bus Boycott of 1955-56, it is actually meant as a description of events that took place in Philadelphia during the 1860s.

2. Indicate that they will be watching an excerpt of an episode from the *Philadelphia: The Great Experiment* series entitled "*The Floodgates Open: 1865-1876.*" Distribute the Note-Taking Sheet and begin the film at 12 minutes, 15 seconds; end it at 23 minutes. You may want to explain that William McMullen, aka the Squire, was a ruthless leader of the Irish Catholic community.

3. After showing the film and reviewing the Note-Taking Sheet if needed, project the image “Negroes to Ride Streetcars”. Ask students to predict who Morton McMichael and Daniel M. Fox were. As a hint, you can indicate that both men held the same position but at different times. Once they determine that both men were mayors of the City of Philadelphia, ask who the writer of the handbill supported.

4. Explain that Morton McMichael was a Republican (the party credited with emancipating slaves and thus favored by black people; wealthy white businessmen also tended to vote Republican) and Daniel M. Fox was a Democrat (a party that got much of its support from Irish immigrants, many of whom competed for low-skill jobs with African Americans). In 1866, the year this was published, Morton McMichael narrowly won the election and served until 1869 when he was defeated, again in a close vote, by Daniel M. Fox. Fox, however, lost his mayoral seat to William Stokely, a Republican in 1871—the election in which Catto was assassinated. Stokely went on to serve three successive terms. Ask students if they can explain why the results in 1871 were different than the results in 1869. Emphasize that part of the reason Fox lost was that many African American men, in spite of extreme voter intimidation, voted and supported the Republican candidate. They were able to do so because the Fifteenth Amendment went into effect in 1870. You may want to recreate this table on the board:

Name	Party	Years Served	Terms Served
Morton McMichael	Republican	1866-1869	1
Daniel M. Fox	Democrat	1869-1871	1
William Stokely	Republican	1872-1881	3

Ask how this table reflects the importance of the Fifteenth Amendment. (*Black votes likely enabled a Republican to serve three consecutive terms.*)

5. Next, show the image of Octavius Catto. Ask students to list adjectives describing Catto’s appearance in the drawing. Explain that the drawing was based on a photograph, the only one known to exist of Octavius Catto. Then, ask students to list adjectives describing Catto’s actions and character that they learned about in the film clip.

6. Tell students that after years of nearly being forgotten in the city in which he lost his life, there has been a lot of recent interest in Octavius Catto. There are even plans to erect a statue next to City Hall. Ask

students to write a speech that they could give to explain to an audience at the statue's unveiling why Catto is worthy of such a significant tribute.

7. Extension: Have students complete the primary source activity that follows below. Give half the students Primary Source 1 and the other half Primary Source 2 along with the appropriate worksheet. Notice that questions 4 and 5 are the same for both sources. Remind them that **William Still** was a leader and recorder of the Underground Railroad and, like Catto, an activist on behalf of black freedom and equality. Once completed, have students share what they learned aloud or assign this as homework.

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NEGROES TO RIDE

IN CITY RAILWAY

PASSENGER CARS!

MORTON McMICHAEL

Declines to say whether he is in favor of, or against, Negroes riding in the City Passenger Railway Cars.

DANIEL M. FOX

Declares himself in OPPOSITION to all such privileges. See his manly, direct Letter, in which he declares against all social and political equality with the Negro Race, and in favor of cars exclusively for themselves. Read the Letter in the "Ledger" and "Inquirer" of to-day.

1865

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OCTAVIUS V. CATTO.—[PHOTOGRAPHED BY MESSRS. BROADBENT & PHILLIPS, PHILADELPHIA.]

The Floodgates Open: 1865-1876

Fill this in as you watch. Sentences in italics are direct quotations from the episode.

1. The Institute for Colored Youth provided a _____ education for the children of the _____.
2. White streetcar riders vote not to allow _____ riders by a _____ to 1 margin. A black woman stays on a streetcar for _____ in protest.
3. Caroline LeCount and Octavius Catto were both _____ at the Institute for Colored Youth.
4. *Catto wanted to break the color line in baseball, education... and, most immediately _____*
5. After _____ months of lobbying, a law to integrate the streetcars, written by Catto and William _____ is passed.
6. When Caroline LeCount proves that a streetcar operator violated the law by refusing to let her ride, he is fined _____ dollars.

Primary Source 1: "Colored People and the Cars," August 31, 1859
To the Editor of the North American and United States Gazette:

Sir :

As a colored man, and constant reader of your paper, allow me a brief corner in your columns to make a few remarks on the sore grievance of genteel (*refined, respectable*) colored people in being excluded from the city passenger railroad cars, except they choose to " stand on the front platform with the driver."

However long the distance they may have to go, or great their hurry—however unwell or aged, genteel or neatly attired—however hot, cold or stormy the weather—however few in the cars, as the masses of the colored people now understand it, they are unceremoniously excluded.

Of course my own humble opinion will weigh but little with yourself and readers (being, as I am, of the proscribed (*restricted*) class) as to whether it is reasonable or unreasonable, just or unjust—as to whether it is a loss or a gain to railroad companies, thus to exclude colored people. Nevertheless, pardon me for saying that this severe proscription, for some unaccountable reason, is carried to an extent in Philadelphia unparalleled in any of the leading cities of this Union. This is not imagination or an exaggerated assertion.

In New Orleans, colored people—slaves as well as free—ride in all the city cars and omnibuses. In Cincinnati, colored women are accommodated in the city omnibuses, but colored men are proscribed to a certain extent. In Chicago it may be safely said that not the slightest proscription exists in the public conveyances (*transportation*) of that flourishing city. In New York, Brooklyn, &c, (except on one or two of the New York city passenger lines,) there is not the slightest barrier to any persons riding, on account of complexion. There is no obstruction in the way of colored persons riding in any of the Boston cars or omnibuses.

I need not allude (*refer*) to the cities of minor importance, whether favorable or unfavorable, North or South. Sufficient are the facts in the examples of the cities already alluded to, to make it a very painfully serious inquiry with intelligent colored people, why it is so in Philadelphia, the city of "Brotherly Love," so noted as the bulwark (*wall of defense*) of the "Religious Society of Friends, commonly called Quakers," so noted as one of the leading cities in the Union, in great religious and benevolent (*charitable*) enterprises, so pre-eminently favorable to elevating the heathen in Africa, while forgetful of those in their very precincts—those who are taxed to

support the very highways that they are rejected from.

But, doubtless, on a hurried consideration of the claims of the colored people, serious objections would be found by railroad boards and others, under the erroneous (*false*) impression that the vicinity of St. Mary, Bedford, Seventh and Lombard streets, &c, furnishes a sample of the great body of colored people residing in Philadelphia.

I beg, Mr. Editor, to respectfully add, that the inhabitants of this ill-fated region are by no means a fair sample of the twenty thousand colored people of Philadelphia. The gulf between this degraded class and the great mass of industrious colored people, is well nigh as marked as was the gulf between Dives and Lazarus*, in the parable; as I shall attempt to demonstrate here, besides volunteering further to prove, by ocular (*by eye*) testimony, if any of your readers choose to condescend to accompany me to parts and places where the decent portions of colored people reside; to the eighteen or twenty colored churches, with their Sabbath schools ; to at least twenty day schools, of a public and private character; to the dozens of beneficial societies, united for the mutual support of their sick and disabled members; to the neat and genteely furnished three-story brick houses, owned, occupied, and paid taxes for, almost entirely by colored people—on Rodman street, Ronaldson street and Washington street; to observe the extent of valuable property owned on South and Lombard streets (in the most respectable part of those streets;) to examine some of the stores (they may not be large) kept by colored men; (of which more will be said presently) to pass those living in respectable houses, elegantly furnished, houses alone worth from five to ten thousand dollars; likewise leaving out the many in various other parts of the city, where industrious, sober and decent people live and own considerable real estate. I think abundant evidence may be found in the directions alluded to, to convince the most prejudiced against the colored man, that he is by no mean so sadly degraded and miserably poor as the public have generally been led to suppose, from all that has been said of him in connection with the degraded localities alluded to before. -*Wm. Still*

* *In a biblical story, Dives is a rich man who refuses to give food to a beggar named Lazarus*

Primary Source 1: "Colored People and the Cars," August 31, 1859

1. What are two specific examples William Still gives to support his assertion that black riders are better treated in other American cities?

2. In what way does Still find it hypocritical that black riders are so severely restricted in Philadelphia?

3. Still argues that Philadelphians should not generalize about blacks based on the people who live in "the vicinity of St. Mary, Bedford, Seventh and Lombard streets". Give three specific examples of what can be found in black communities outside of this "ill-fated region".

4. William Still seems to be arguing for the rights of elite blacks to ride on the streetcars rather than all black people. Why might he have pursued this strategy, and what is your opinion of Still's approach?

5. *See document on reverse side.* In 1955, prior to the famous bus boycott, the black community of Montgomery, Alabama presented a list of "Negroes' Most Urgent Needs" to the Montgomery City Council. Why do you think that access to public transportation was seen as such a crucial issue in both the 1850s and 1950s?

Birmingham - do please call all names

NEGROES' MOST URGENT NEEDS

FOLLOWING ARE A FEW OF THE MOST URGENT NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE. IMMEDIATE ATTENTION SHOULD BE GIVEN EACH OF THESE. WHAT IS YOUR STAND TOWARD THEM?

1. The present bus situation. Negroes have to stand over empty seats of city buses, because the first ten seats are reserved for whites who sometime never ride. We wish to fill the bus from the back toward the front until all the seats are taken. This is done in Atlanta, Georgia, Mobile, Alabama and in most of our larger southern cities.

2. Negro Representation on the Parks and Recreation Board. Our parks are in a deplorable condition. We have protested, yet nothing has been toward improving them. Juvenile delinquency continues to increase. In many instances these children are not responsible. The city is. Nobody knows better than Negroes what their needs are. *Mrs. Jean Robinson quest.* *Sam Bell* *Sept.*

3. Sub-division for housing. Just recently a project for a sub-division for Negroes was presented before the City Commission for approval. Protests from whites and other objections prevented the development. There is no section wherein Negroes can expand to build decent homes. What of Lincoln Heights?

4. Jobs for qualified Negroes. Certain civil service jobs are not open to Negroes, yet Many are qualified. Negroes need jobs commensurate with their training. Everybody can not teach.

5. Negro representation on all boards affecting Negroes. Negroes are taxpayers; they are property owners or renters. They constitute about fifty percent of the city's population. Many boards determine their destinies without any kind of representation whatsoever. Only Negroes are qualified to represent themselves adequately and properly.

6. Congested areas, with inadequate or no fireplugs. Fire hazards are inviting.

7. Lack of sewage disposals makes it necessary to resort to out-door privies, which is a health hazard. *H. Kelly*

8. Narrow streets, lack of curbing, unpaved streets in some sections. Immediate action should be taken on this traffic hazard.

Gentlemen, what is your stand on these issues? What will you do to improve these undemocratic practices? Your stand on these issues will enable us to better decide on whom we shall cast our ballot in the March election.

Very truly yours,
Montgomery Negroes

3 items require no money

"Negroes' Most Urgent Needs," Inez Jessie Baskin Papers, Alabama Department of Archives and History, Montgomery, Alabama.

Primary Source 1: "Colored People and the Cars," August 31, 1859

Answer Key

1. What are two specific examples William Still gives to support his assertion that black riders are better treated in other American cities?

Possible answers include:

- **In New Orleans, both enslaved and free blacks can ride streetcars and buses**
- **In Cincinnati, black women can ride buses**
- **In Chicago/New York/Brooklyn/Boston there are no restrictions**

2. In what way does Still find it hypocritical that black riders are so severely restricted in Philadelphia?

Philadelphia is known as "the city of Brotherly Love". Under the influence of Quakers, Philadelphia is a leading city in terms of religious and charitable organizations, even those that try to help people in Africa.

3. Still argues that Philadelphians should not generalize about blacks based on the people who live in "the vicinity of St. Mary, Bedford, Seventh and Lombard streets". Give three specific examples of what can be found in black communities outside of this "ill-fated region".

Possible answers include:

- **18-20 churches/Sunday schools**
- **Dozens of beneficial societies**
- **Nice houses (well furnished, valuable) owned by blacks**
- **Stores owned by blacks**
- **"Industrious, sober, and decent people" who "own considerable real estate"**

4. William Still seems to be arguing for the rights of elite blacks to ride on the streetcars rather than all black people. Why might he have pursued this strategy, and what is your opinion of Still's approach?

Answers will vary.

5. *See document on reverse side.* In 1955, prior to the famous bus boycott, the black community of Montgomery, Alabama presented a list of "Negroes' Most Urgent Needs" to the Montgomery City Council. Why do you think that access to public transportation was seen as such a crucial issue in both the 1850s and 1950s?

Answers will vary.

Primary Source 2: To the Editor of *The Press*, December 15, 1863;

Sir:

Please permit me to state through the columns of your liberal journal a matter of very serious public grievance, which colored people generally are daily subjected to, and which, as an individual, I experienced to-day to a degree that I shall not attempt to fully describe, although I feel I shall never forget it.

Briefly, the circumstances were these: Being under the necessity of going out to Camp William Penn (*a Union training camp for black soldiers*), to-day, on business, I took the North Pennsylvania Railroad, and reached the ground about 11 o'clock. Remembering that pressing duties required my presence at my store by a certain hour in the early part of the afternoon, I promptly attended to my business at the camp, but as I could not return by the way I came without waiting two and a half hours for the down train, I concluded that I would walk over to Germantown, and come to the city by the 1 o'clock steam cars.

Accordingly, I reached Germantown, but too late for the train by about five minutes, as the cars had just gone. To wait another hour I felt was out of the question; hence, I decided to take the city passenger cars. Soon one came along with but few passengers in it, and into it I walked with a man who had been to the camp with me (but fortunately he happened to be of the approved complexion), and took a seat. Quickly the conductor approached me and I tendered (*gave*) him the fare for us both...The conductor very cordially received the money, but before he took time to hand me the change that was due to me, invited me to "step out on the platform." "Why is this?" I remarked. "It is against the rules," he added. "Who objects?" I inquired. "It is the aristocracy," he again added...Of course, the conductor declared that he had no objections himself, but continued to insist that it was "the rules."

I told him that I paid taxes, etc., but of course it was of no avail (*use*).

Riding on the platform of a bitter cold day like this I need not say is almost intolerable, but to compel (*force*) persons to pay the same as those who enjoy comfortable seats inside by a good fire, seems quite atrocious. Yet I felt, under the circumstances, compelled to submit to the wrong, for the sake of arriving at my place of business in due time. But before I arrived at my destination it began to snow, which, as I was already thoroughly chilled with the cold, made the platform utterly intolerable; hence, I concluded to walk the rest of the distance, and accordingly got off, feeling satisfied that no where in

Christendom could be found a better illustration of Judge Taney's decision in the Dred Scott case*, in which he declared that "black men have no rights which white men are bound to respect," than are demonstrated by the "rules " of the passenger cars of the City of Brotherly Love.

The Judge's decision and the "rules" have harassed me every moment since. I try to think of cannibals in heathen lands and traitors in the South, and wrongs generally, but it is all to no purpose—this car inhumanity sticks to me.

"But this is only an individual case, hence but a trifling matter," you may think, Mr. Editor. Far from it, sir. Every colored man, woman, and child of the 25,000 inhabitants of this city, many of whom are tax payers, and as upright as any other class of citizens, are daily liable to this treatment. The truth is, so far as my case is concerned, I fared well, compared with the treatment some have received. A long catalogue of injuries and outrages could be recounted, but suffice it to remind your readers of only one or two instances:

A venerable (*respected*) old minister of the Gospel, in going from here to his home at Frankford, one dark, cold, and rainy night last winter, while occupying the only place on the platform assigned for colored people, was killed. Who has forgotten this fact?

One more instance, and I will relieve you. One evening, in going home from a lecture, two elegantly-dressed young women stepped into a car, and took seats. The conductor courageously brought the rules forward, and one of them instantly stepped out, while the other remained. The car was stopped, and the conductor seized her, and actually, by physical force, thrust her out of the car. The father of this young woman pays several hundred dollars taxes annually; keeps his horse and carriage, and lives as nicely as most respectable citizens. But the God-given hue of the skin of his daughter rendered her obnoxious to the rules of the railway company, and she had to meekly submit to the outrage.

Respectfully, Wm. Still.

** In an 1857 Supreme Court decision, Chief Justice Roger Taney declared that blacks, whether free or enslaved, were not American citizens.*

Primary Source 2: The Passenger Cars and Colored Citizens, December 15, 1863

1. Why did Still decide to take a streetcar back to Philadelphia from Camp William Penn?
2. Why did Still end up walking part of the way to his destination?
3. Why does Still mention the Dred Scott decision?
4. William Still seems to be arguing for the rights of elite blacks to ride on the streetcars rather than all black people. Why might he have pursued this strategy, and what is your opinion of Still's approach?
5. *See document on the reverse side.* Prior to the famous bus boycott, the black community of Montgomery put the bus situation first in a list of "Negroes' Most Urgent Needs". Why do you think that access to public transportation was seen as such a crucial issue in both the 1850s and 1950s?

Birmingham - so far as all small things

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- 3. Sub-division for housing. Just recently a project for a sub-division for Negroes was presented before the City Commission for approval. Protests from whites and other objections prevented the development. There is no section wherein Negroes can expand to build decent homes. What of Lincoln Heights?
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- 8. Narrow streets, lack of curbing, unpaved streets in some sections. Immediate action should be taken on this traffic hazard.

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Very truly yours,
Montgomery Negroes

3 items require no money

Primary Source 2: The Passenger Cars and Colored Citizens, December 15, 1863
Answer Key

1. Why did Still decide to take a streetcar back to Philadelphia from Camp William Penn?

He did not want to wait two and a half hours to return by train, the way he had come. He missed a Germantown Avenue train by 5 minutes. He didn't want to wait another hour for the Germantown Avenue train because he had "pressing duties" at his store.

2. Why did Still end up walking part of the way to his destination?

He had to stand on the platform of the passenger car. When it started to snow, it became "intolerable" to stand outside, so he decided to walk.

3. Why does Still mention the Dred Scott decision?

The barring of blacks from Philadelphia streetcars is evidence that they are not treated as citizens.

4. In the final segment of his letter, William Still seems to be arguing for the rights of elite blacks to ride on the streetcars rather than all black people. Why might he have pursued this strategy, and what is your opinion of Still's approach?

Answers will vary.

5. *See document on the reverse side.* Prior to the famous bus boycott, the black community of Montgomery put the bus situation first in a list of "Negroes' Most Urgent Needs". Why do you think that access to public transportation was seen as such a crucial issue in both the 1850s and 1950s?

Answers will vary.