

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Mission 2: "Flight to Freedom"

Timeline of Events Before, During, and After the Mission

Note: This is a curated timeline of national events. We encourage teachers to include state and local events.

1501—The transatlantic slave trade from Europe to the Americas begins.

1619—The first documented enslaved Africans ("20 and odd" in number) arrive in the North American colonies at Jamestown, Virginia.

1672—The English Royal African Company, the world's largest single slave-trading business, is founded. The arrival of enslaved Africans regularly increases into all of the northern and southern English colonies.

1680—The enslaved population is about 7% of the colonial population of America, and will increase to over 40% by the middle of the 18th century.

July 4, 1776—Members of the Continental Congress adopt the Declaration of Independence, declaring the thirteen colonies separate from Great Britain. Portions of the Declaration, such as "all men are created equal" and the mention of inalienable rights, will form the backbone of the argument against slavery in the new nation.

1783—The end of the American Revolutionary War brings a resurgence in the slave trade. Between 1783 and 1808 over 100,000 Africans are imported into the southern United States.

May 14-September 17, 1787—The United States Constitutional Convention occurs, with members debating and deciding on a new government for the nation. As a part of the new Constitution, the delegation will decide to count three-fifths of the enslaved African American population for congressional representation, and to allow the Atlantic slave trade to continue for a period of twenty years.

1790—The first U.S. Census records 3.89 million people in the nation, with 694,280 enslaved African Americans.

February 12, 1793—The Congress passes, and George Washington signs, the nation's first Fugitive Slave Law, allowing slave owners and hired slave catchers to cross state lines to capture runaway enslaved African Americans. This law also makes it a federal offense to harbor, aid or abet runaway enslaved African Americans.



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August 31, 1800—Virginia enslaved African American Gabriel Prosser's plan against local slave owners is foiled when two enslaved African Americans in different locations tell their masters about the plot. The trials of the plotters last two months and end with juries condemning 26 enslaved African Americans to death by hanging.

March 3, 1807—Thomas Jefferson signs a law banning the Atlantic slave trade, but slave ships will continue to illegally transport Africans into the United States for the next fifty years. The law goes into effect on January 1, 1808.

1809—Following the national prohibition of the importation of enslaved Africans, the key to growth in the enslaved population is family reproduction, or intentional breeding by slave owners. In the next half-century the enslaved African American population triples, from about 1.2 million to nearly 4 million in 1860.

March 3, 1820—After bitter debate over the admission of Missouri as a slave state, the Missouri Compromise is agreed upon. The compromise admits Missouri as a slave state and Maine as a free state. The latitude of 36°30' is also set as an important guide for the future admittance of states carved from the Louisiana Purchase, with states north of the line being free states and states south of the line permitting slavery.

December 16, 1821—The first meeting of the American Colonization Society occurs. The Society, which includes such prominent members of Congress as Henry Clay, will have the purpose of purchasing freedom for enslaved African Americans and shipping them to Africa.

July 2, 1822—Denmark Vesey and five other enslaved African Americans are executed for a plotted insurrection in South Carolina. Enslaved African Americans from Charleston and plantations surrounding the city were planning to seize arsenals, burn the city, and kill the governor and every white man they saw. Their plot was disrupted when nervous enslaved African Americans informed their masters about the plan.

1826—Levi Coffin, an avid abolitionist and "conductor" of the Underground Railroad, welcomes his first runaway enslaved African American into his home in Newport, Indiana. By the end of the Civil War, Coffin is purported to have assisted 2,000 enslaved African Americans on their flight to freedom.

September 1829—David Walker publishes *An Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* in Boston, Massachusetts.



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Circa 1831—The Underground Railroad, the loose connection of hideaways and safe havens for enslaved African Americans seeking freedom, is given its name. By the 1850s, the Underground Railroad will be a well-known name for the shuttling of freedom seekers from the South to the North and Canada.

January 1, 1831—William Lloyd Garrison publishes the first edition of the *Liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, declaring, "I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. . . . I am in earnest -- I will not equivocate -- I will not excuse -- I will not retreat a single inch -- AND I WILL BE HEARD."

August 21-22, 1831—Nat Turner, an enslaved African American in Virginia, leads a slave revolt in Virginia. Overall, some 60 whites and over 200 African Americans or Blacks are killed as a result of the insurrection. Turner evades capture for over two months and is then hanged on November 11.

December 1833—Abolitionists meet in Philadelphia to form the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). They will focus their efforts on the immediate and uncompensated emancipation of enslaved African Americans.

April 1835—John Rankin, a prominent conductor on the Underground Railroad and resident of Ripley, Ohio, helps establish the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society. From 1822 to 1865, Rankin and his family will help hundreds of enslaved African American runaways escape slavery.

Summer 1835—The American Antislavery Society launches the "Great Postal Campaign," sending over a million pieces of antislavery pamphlets, etchings, newspapers, handkerchiefs, and more to newspaper editors and elected officials through the mail in an effort to persuade the country's lawmakers to abolish slavery.

May 26, 1836—The Congress institutes the "gag rule," tabling any petition dealing with slavery and thus stifling debate on the contentious issue.

September 3, 1838—Frederick Douglass, the most prominent former enslaved African American, escapes from slavery in Maryland. He will become the most visible African American lecturer and writer during the antebellum era.

May 4, 1839—Theodore Weld's *American Slavery as It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* is published. It uses runaway advertisements and southern descriptions of slavery to attack the peculiar institution, and is instantly an important work for the antislavery movement.



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July 1839—A successful insurrection occurs on the *Amistad*, a Spanish slave ship. On board, the enslaved Africans kill the captain and two other crew members. The enslaved Africans are eventually captured in Long Island Sound, between New York and Connecticut. A U.S. Supreme Court case, in which John Quincy Adams represents the enslaved Africans, declares those who were on board the *Amistad* free in March 1841.

1840—Vermont and New York pass "personal liberty laws" granting fugitives the right to a trial by jury and attorneys. Over the next twenty years, other northern states will pass laws providing similar rights to enslaved African American runaways.

April 1840—The Liberty Party, comprised of committed antislavery men, meets in Albany, New York and nominates James G. Birney as their presidential nominee.

April 1841—Solomon Northup travels from New York to the nation's capital with two white men. He's then drugged and kidnapped by these men, eventually being sold into slavery in the South. He will be released in 1853 and will write *Twelve Years a Slave* to recount his experiences in bondage.

November 7, 1841—A slave revolt occurs on the *Creole*, a ship on route from Hampton, Virginia, to New Orleans, and the enslaved African Americans sail the ship to the Bahamas. The enslaved African Americans are granted asylum and their freedom.

March 1, 1842—The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, rules that it is the responsibility of the federal government to uphold the 1793 Fugitive Slave Law, not the responsibility of each individual state.

April 24, 1846—The Mexican-American War begins as a result of the Mexican army crossing the Rio Grande River, a region that the United States and Mexico both claimed as their own, and attacking American troops. President James K. Polk uses the incident to rally congressmen to pass a war resolution.

August 1848—David Wilmot, a freshman Democratic Representative from Pennsylvania, introduces an amendment aiming to ban slavery from territory gained from the Mexican-American War. Wilmot's actions demonstrate the gulf between Democrats from the North and Democrats from the South over the issue of slavery.

August 1848—Antislavery members of the Whig and Liberty parties meet in Buffalo, New York to form a new political party, the Free Soil Party. Free Soilers will oppose the expansion of slavery into the western territories.



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December 1848—William and Ellen Craft, enslaved African Americans on a Georgia plantation, escape to Philadelphia. The Crafts will be forced to move to Boston and then England because their former owner demanded their extradition back to the South.

1849—Harriet Tubman, the most famous "conductor" of the Underground Railroad, escapes from slavery. Eventually, she will lead more than 300 enslaved African Americans to freedom.

January 29, 1850—Henry Clay presents a series of measures, now known as the Compromise of 1850, to avert civil war between free and slave states. The Congress debates these measures for eight months, passing them with the help of Stephen Douglas, with the most infamous measure being the *Fugitive Slave Act*.

January 20, 1851—Near Ripley, Ohio, an enslaved African American being pursued kills a slave catcher. The runaway is captured and taken back to slavery in the South.

February 15, 1851—Shadrach, an enslaved African American in Boston, is arrested. After his court case was adjourned to the following week, a "body of men" force their way into the courtroom and carry Shadrach away. Rumors will surface that Shadrach finds freedom in Canada.

April 4, 1851—Thomas Sims, a freedom seeker, is arrested in Boston. Although Bostonians make a valiant attempt to rescue Sims, the runaway is eventually sold back into slavery.

September 1851—Edward Gorsuch, a slave owner, is killed in Christiana, Pennsylvania while trying to capture his runaway enslaved African Americans. Nearly forty individuals are put on trial for such offenses as treason, although all are eventually discharged.

July 5, 1852—Frederick Douglass delivers a speech entitled "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?" In the speech, Douglass states that the rhetoric of freedom in the Declaration of Independence is meaningless for African Americans.

March 20, 1854—The first credited meeting of the Republican Party, a coalition of Free Soilers, former Whigs and disenchanted Democrats, occurs in Wisconsin. The Republican Party, which will oppose the westward expansion of slavery, will grow over the next few years, nominating its first presidential candidate, John C. Fremont, in 1856.



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May 24, 1854—Charles Suttle captures his "property," runaway enslaved African American Anthony Burns, in Boston, Massachusetts. On June 2, Burns is convicted of being a fugitive slave and 50,000 Bostonians line the streets to watch Burns, in shackles, be shipped back south.

May 30, 1854—The Kansas-Nebraska Act becomes the law of the land. The Act states that the slavery question would be decided by popular sovereignty, thus repealing the Missouri Compromise of 1820.

May 21, 1856—A proslavery mob descends on Lawrence, Kansas, an antislavery stronghold, beats residents, destroys two newspaper offices, and burns much of the town. In response, John Brown, a radical abolitionist, will round up his own posse of men to kill proslavery settlers at Pottawatomie Creek. The violence will rage for several years, earning the moniker "Bleeding Kansas," a term coined by Horace Greeley.

March 5, 1857—The U.S. Supreme Court, under the leadership of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, rules against Dred Scott, an enslaved African American, in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. The justices rule that Scott must remain enslaved, despite the fact that he had lived in the free states of Illinois and Wisconsin. Taney, writing the majority opinion, then declared that blacks could not be citizens of the United States and Congress had no right to restrict or outlaw slavery in any territories.

August 21-October 15, 1858—Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas debate each other across the state of Illinois. Each debate focuses on the issue of slavery. Ultimately, Lincoln loses the election to represent Illinois in the U.S. Senate.

September 13, 1858—Two disguised slave catchers lure John Price, a "fugitive" or escaped enslaved person, out of Oberlin, Ohio with promises of work. Between 200 and 500 members of the local community then storm the hotel where the slave catchers were holding Price, allowing him to escape to safety.

October 16, 1859—John Brown, a radical abolitionist, raids the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia with a group of sixteen white and black men. Their hope was to lead an armed rebellion against slave holders, but Brown's indecision led to their capture. John Brown is hanged on December 2.

1860—The Census documents over 31 million people in the United States. 3,953,760 of those are enslaved African Americans in 15 Southern states, and 488,070 are free African Americans. Over half of free African Americans or Blacks live in the South. The enslaved



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African American population of nearly 4 million is the largest enslaved population ever assembled in the Americas or "New World."

November 1860—Abraham Lincoln is elected the sixteenth president of the United States.

April 12, 1861—The first shots of the Civil War are fired at Fort Sumter off Charleston, South Carolina. The federal troops on Fort Sumter surrender 34 hours after the bombardment begins.

April 16, 1862—Slavery ends in Washington, DC, as Abraham Lincoln signs a law providing compensation for slave owners in the nation's capital.

September 22, 1862—Lincoln issues the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, declaring that if the southern states did not cease fighting, all enslaved African Americans in rebellious territory would be made free on January 1, 1863.

January 1, 1863—Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation. Technically not freeing a single enslaved African American, the Emancipation Proclamation changes the meaning of the war from one of "preserving the Union" to one for emancipation. Large numbers of enslaved African Americans flee plantations to cross into Union lines in hopes of finding freedom.

January 31, 1865—The Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is passed by Congress. The Amendment will be ratified on December 6, thus outlawing the institution of slavery in the United States.