
Foreword

It is a little known fact among the general public that Abraham Lincoln was fascinated with inventions. In 1849 Lincoln applied for a patent, having created a device designed to lift river flat boats over shoals. Patent Number 6469 is the only patent on file submitted by an American president. The sixteenth president also understood the power of education. In an 1859 speech before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, Lincoln argued that “every head should be cultivated.” In the same speech Lincoln claimed that humanity’s greatest invention was the creation of words, because he believed words provided a way one could communicate with “the dead, the absent, and the unborn.”

Readers of Yohuru Rashied Williams’ incisive new contribution to the field of history education literature will be very pleased with the book they are holding in their hands. How fitting that Williams, in the year we celebrate the bicentennial of the birth of America’s greatest president, would tap into this element of the Lincoln legacy. How fitting, too, that Williams is an educational inventor of sorts, as well. Mr. Lincoln would be pleased.

Creative in every aspect of the word, *Teaching U.S. History Beyond the Textbook: Six Investigative Strategies, Grades 5–12* will help history teachers to move well beyond the constraining boundaries of traditional history textbooks, empowering teachers to think and teach outside of the box, while at the same time empowering their students to think more critically, historically, and creatively. The strategies developed by Williams, a one-time classroom teacher, are very relevant today even in the face of the standards-based movement. Here teachers can learn how the lesser known figures of American history can be brought to life, in a lively fashion, that integrates best practices while at the same time addressing larger themes of America’s past. Take the case of Ota Benga, an African pygmy brought to the United States at the turn of the last century and put on display in the Monkey House of the Bronx Zoo as the “missing link,” by well intentioned folks, in the name of science and knowledge. On the surface the story of Benga may seem trivial, an anachronistic tale of a New York local curiosity. But digging further and placing this story within a larger historical context and framework, we see under William’s deft hand how much the

Benga tragedy reflects a larger national phenomenon, the large reach of scientific racism into an America of Jim Crow, blackface, and *Plessey v. Ferguson*. Remember, the Bronx Zoo is not in Birmingham, Alabama.

Through the creative use of stories like that of Ota Benga, Williams provides teachers a window into how to get their students to look deeper into a story. Using strategies skillfully modeled on themes from today's popular culture, teachers can guide their students into actual hands-on history. By becoming interpreters of evidence left by the past, students become detectives doing the rigorous digging so necessary to the study and practice of history. Honoring the diversity of voices from our past as well as recognizing the voices of today's secondary-level history teachers, readers will be inspired, and are indeed encouraged, to find their own particular, singular ways to enliven their history curriculum and are encouraged to take the necessary risks so critical to authentic learning and teaching.

Teaching U.S. History Beyond the Textbook offers a dynamic approach and gives teachers many options from which to choose. Lively teacher-friendly prose is invigorated by real-world experiences that Williams brings to his narrative. This is not pedagogical theory being offered, but the real-world "stuff" of education that makes learning active and organic. The classroom environment as envisioned here by Williams truly becomes a history laboratory.

Pedagogically sound, inspired, relevant, and rich, Yohuru Williams' contributions in this book demonstrate what people have known all along about good teaching and what makes a difference in the lives of students we encounter. Even Honest Abe knew this, reminding people in Springfield, Illinois, in 1852 that "history is philosophy teaching by example." *Teaching U.S. History Beyond the Textbook* embodies this timeless hallmark.

Williams has provided for you the formulae. Now it is your turn to set the example.

—James Percoco
Author and historian