

Voices Rising

Assimilation and the American Experience
A Teaching American History grant

Project Summary

Purpose/Focus:

Voices Rising: Assimilation and the American Experience, funded through a three-year, federal Teaching American History grant, will offer high-quality professional development in selected American history content and analysis to Everett, Malden, Medford, and Revere teachers in grades three, five, and eight, the levels at which the teaching of American history occurs in the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.

The aim of the *Voices Rising* project is to help both native and non-native students see themselves reflected in the history of our country, thereby making American history more relevant to their own experiences and promoting a common cultural heritage. The project will accomplish this in the grant's three-year span by focusing on various segments of our country's history, presented so that students can see the immigrant/disenfranchised group role in the founding of America (year 1), the building of America into a powerful nation – the Industrial Revolution (year 2), and in the realization of American ideals – Civil Rights, Suffrage Movement, etc. (year 3).

Methodology:

The idea behind the manner in which students acquire historical knowledge successfully is that they must study the past in the same manner as historians. In order to accomplish this, however, teachers must first understand historian methodology and model this approach for their students. The *Voices Rising* project will allow teachers to enhance their American history content knowledge while using the tools of historical inquiry, starting with evidence (i.e., documents, artifacts, letters, pictures, memorials, buildings, films, etc.) and comparing different sources of information in search of emerging patterns. Just as historians do, from the evidence and inquiry, students must offer an interpretation, making choices about information to include or exclude, and expressing cause and effect. Ultimately, historians (and students) must extrapolate from their sources to tell a larger story that confirms, denies, or complicates the traditional understanding of some aspect of the historical record. Learning to use *primary sources* is critical to this approach.

Professional Development:

To train teachers to use this historian approach and to develop corresponding American history lessons, the *Voices Rising* project will occur in three overlapping phases that will be repeated in each year of the grant, as follows:

Phase 1: Summer Institute

Suffolk University and University of Massachusetts Lowell will share the responsibility of providing yearly, weeklong summer institutes that will offer American history content in the

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classroom component, and hands-on experience in orientation tours of the national parks and historic sites involved for each selected grant year and theme. During the summer institutes, teachers will also become acquainted with the Boston Public Library and Massachusetts Historical Society, both of which contain extensive primary source collections in American history. The purpose of the summer institute orientation is to provide a forum for teachers to begin seeing connections among American history content, the primary sources located at national parks/historic sites and libraries, and the selected learning standards in American history for targeted grade levels.

The same procedure will occur in year two of the grant, with UMass Lowell conducting the summer institute, and in year three, with Suffolk University once again presenting the institute, all in accordance with the appropriate grant-year theme.

Phase 2: District-based Seminar Series:

Building from the summer institute, Suffolk University and UMass Lowell historians will continue to present American history content by conducting eight, three-hour, after-school (3 p.m. – 6 p.m.) seminars in the partner school districts between September and December. American history topics will be aligned with both the targeted theme for the year and with state American history standards. Historians will provide books and printed materials for the seminars. During this period, teachers will continue to visit the national park or historic site that they have selected as the focus of their lessons, and will be given more in-depth information by park rangers and librarians to assist with teachers' selection of primary source materials. By the end of this seminar series, teachers will make a final determination concerning their focus for the development of their primary-source-based lessons that integrate content, national park/historic sites, and learning standards.

Phase 3: Lesson Development Workshops

Teacher Learning Center Directors will conduct nine, three-hour, after-school workshops in the districts between December and March to assist participating teachers in merging historical content and analysis with appropriate pedagogy, resulting in each teacher developing and implementing a primary-source-based lesson centering on one of the project's national parks or historic sites. Individual lessons will be appropriately grouped into project-based units by the Teacher Learning Center Directors and distributed widely through the districts' supporting electronic infrastructure, *PBU Builder* (www.pbubuilder.org). The national parks/historic sites will provide links on their sites to these project-based units.

Finally, teachers will share their lessons with each other and with the public at a two-day showcase event in May 2007.