

SLAVERY IN NEW ENGLAND

LESSON PLAN

Subject: Slave Ownership in New Haven, 1790: The Paradox of James Hillhouse

Documents: A Biography of James Hillhouse
A 1795 Letter of Judith Cocks to James Hillhouse
"Connecticut Slave Owners in 1790" United States Census
"Births of Negros," Vital Records of New Haven
New Haven First Congregational Church Records, 1794

Focus of Subject Area:

- The life and legacy of United States Senator James Hillhouse and the impact of his slave ownership on that legacy
- The paradox of American Founding Fathers such as James Hillhouse regarding the slavery issue
- The virtually universal practice of slave ownership among the wealthy and influential citizens of Connecticut prior to the gradual emancipation act

Instructional Objectives:

- Identify facts about the life and legacy of United States Senator James Hillhouse
- Examine and interpret the significance of the primary source materials on the Hillhouse legacy
- Analyze and draw conclusions about the paradox of a Northern antislavery slave owner politician

Strategies:

Students will accomplish the instructional objectives by:

- Reading primary and secondary source materials and answering assigned questions

Strategies (cont'd):

- Participating in group activities and class discussions

- Participating in a formal debate
- Submitting a "History Detective" research project

Overview of Lesson Activities:

This unit on James Hillhouse and Slavery in New Haven and Connecticut requires at least four 45-minute class periods and one 90-minute block period for the debate activity. The day before beginning the unit, students will be instructed to read "A Biography of James Hillhouse, answer any assigned questions and be prepared for class discussions on the subject. On the second day, students will examine the letter from Judith Cocks to Hillhouse and two other primary sources documenting Hillhouse's ownership of slaves. This information will be used as the basis for class discussions, a debate, and additional research on the subject.

Assessment:

Students will demonstrate their comprehension of the unit objectives by:

1. Actively participating in class discussions and group activities
2. Writing a persuasive essay which takes a position on the Hillhouse legacy today
3. Completing a research project on the subject of "Hillhouse and His Slaves"

Day One: Who was James Hillhouse?

Procedure:

- Divide the class into four groups
1. Instruct students to create lists of words which describe the character of James Hillhouse
 2. Ask students to read from their lists and create a master list on the board
 3. Ask students why they selected these words and what historic contributions of Hillhouse made them select these words.
 4. Instruct the students to make lists of the four most important contributions of Hillhouse. They must be able to explain and justify their choices.

Day Two: The Paradox of James Hillhouse

Procedure:

1. Review with students their impressions of Hillhouse.
2. Ask students their opinions about Senator Hillhouse's antislavery position in Congress at a time when such views were nationally very unpopular and almost unprecedented among wealthy and influential white men like Hillhouse.
3. Discussion question: "Why do you think Hillhouse took such a position on the slavery issue?"
4. After about 20 minutes of discussion about Hillhouse as a pioneering antislavery Congressman, distribute the letter to Hillhouse from Judith Cocks. Using SOAPSTONE activity have students analyze this document in writing.
5. Just before the end of the period inform students that Judith Cocks was either the slave or the former slave of James Hillhouse.

Day Three: Hillhouse: An Antislavery Slave Owner?

Procedure:

1. Distribute copies of the following primary sources:
 - Connecticut Slave Owners in 1790 in Complicity
 - New Haven First Congregational Church Records, p. 595
 - New Haven Vital Records, p. 420
2. Discuss with students their reactions to this information. Discussion questions: Why would Hillhouse take a bold, public stand against slavery and the slave trade but be a slave owner himself? Was he a hypocrite? What were his motives?

Day Four: Debate Preparation

Procedure:

1. Divide the class into two groups to prepare for a formal debate.
2. Debate question: Shall the name of James Hillhouse High School be changed and shall the Hillhouse grave site be removed from the Connecticut Freedom Trail because James Hillhouse was a slave owner?
3. The groups will prepare their oral arguments for the debate based on the class discussions, reading assignments and their own points of view. To help them to prepare for the debate, using the primary source documents, students will be required to write a persuasive essay on the debate which will be collected on the day of the debate.

Day Five: The Debate

Procedure:

Students will have 80 minutes to argue their position on the topic and will be evaluated based on their logic, reasoning and use of the primary and secondary source material.

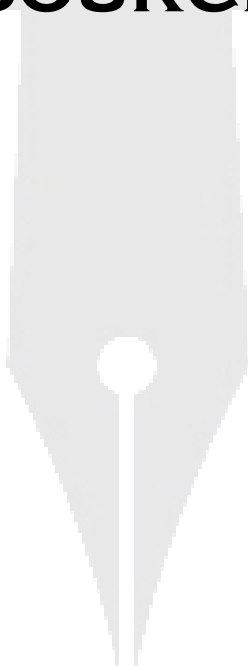
Final Project: A "History Detective" project on Hillhouse and his slaves

To find out what became of Hillhouse's slaves, students will be required to do research using resources on the Internet, the New Haven Public Library, the Connecticut State Library, and the New Haven Hall of Records

Curriculum created by Robert A. Gibson New Haven, CT



SOURCES



A BIOGRAPHY OF JAMES HILLHOUSE

One of New Haven's most illustrious and industrious native sons was James Hillhouse. An attorney, farmer, politician, entrepreneur, veteran of the American Revolutionary War, and long-time Yale official, James Hillhouse did much in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to promote the social, cultural, and economic development of New Haven and the state of Connecticut. His impact on the national political scene was also significant, especially his bold stand against slavery and its expansion in the United States.

James Hillhouse was born in Montville, Connecticut on October 20, 1754, and the son of Judge William and Sarah Griswold Hillhouse. At the age of seven his uncle, James A. Hillhouse, a New Haven attorney, adopted him. He received his education at Hopkins Grammar School in New Haven and graduated from Yale College in 1773 with classmate Nathan Hale. He studied law, was admitted to the bar, and took over the legal practice of his deceased uncle in 1775.

During the American Revolutionary War, Hillhouse served as captain of the Second Company of the Governor' Foot Guard. When the British invaded New Haven on July 5, 1779, he courageously commanded troops along with Yale student volunteers in the unsuccessful defense of the town.

Hillhouse began his political career in 1780 when he entered the Connecticut House of Representatives. He held this post until 1785. He represented Connecticut in the United States House of Representatives from 1791 to 1796. From 1796 until 1810, Hillhouse served in the United States Senate. He was President pro tempore of the Senate during the Sixth Congress. While in the United States Congress, Hillhouse was a Federalist who believed in a strong central government.

During his tenure in the Senate, Hillhouse was an outspoken advocate of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. In 1799, Senator Hillhouse served on a committee to investigate the ending of the slave trade. He helped pass the bill abolishing the slave trade in the earliest constitutionally authorized year, 1807. After the United States acquired the Louisiana Territory in 1803, Hillhouse fought to prohibit the expansion of slavery into the new territory. Two of his amendments restricting slavery passed Congress and were signed into law. Hillhouse said, "I

consider slavery as a serious evil and wish to check it wherever I have authority." Even after his retirement from the Senate, Hillhouse continued his bold opposition to slavery.

A Biography of James Hillhouse

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After leaving the Senate in 1810, Hillhouse assumed the office of Commissioner of the Connecticut School Fund. The Connecticut School Fund was a special state fund established from the sale of land owned by Connecticut in Ohio. The interest from this fund was used for the support of public education in Connecticut. Hillhouse effectively administered this fund for fifteen years. When he resigned from this position in 1825, the fund totaled \$1,700,000.

In 1814, Hillhouse was chosen by the Connecticut General Assembly to be one of the delegates to represent Connecticut at the Hartford Convention, a controversial meeting of Federalist Party delegates from the New England states. The delegates discussed regional grievances against the Federal Government and proposed seven amendments to the United States Constitution.

Hillhouse made major contributions to the beautification of New Haven in the late 1700s and early 1800s. He drained and leveled the New Haven Green. He also urged local leaders to plant elm trees to adorn the city. This resulted in New Haven being nicknamed, "The Elm City." Hillhouse also orchestrated the development of the Grove Street Cemetery to replace the overcrowded, unsightly Old Burial Ground on the Green. Established in 1796, the Grove Street Cemetery was the first incorporated cemetery in the United States to be laid out in family plots.

Hillhouse was quite an entrepreneur. He engaged in numerous enterprises to promote New Haven's economic development. In 1785, Hillhouse and three other New Haveners received a license from the Connecticut General Assembly to produce copper pennies for the state. They did this in their mint on Water Street until 1787. In that year they were contracted by the Confederation Congress to mint copper cents for the United States. However, as a business, Hillhouse's mint was unsuccessful.

From 1797 to 1800, Hillhouse was President of the Hartford and New Haven Turnpike Company. The company was incorporated in 1798 to construct and repair a highway between New Haven and Hartford, which were the co-capitals of Connecticut.

Between 1825 and 1828, Hillhouse superintended the construction of the Farmington Canal which ran from New Haven Harbor to Northampton, Massachusetts. The canal made it possible for New Haven, an important seaport at the time, to transport more goods inland and get farm products to the city more easily. Unfortunately, the Farmington Canal was plagued by

financial troubles and was soon made obsolete by the development of railroad technology. It ceased operation in 1847, but in its brief existence it sharply stimulated New Haven's mercantile growth.

A Biography of James Hillhouse

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In addition to all of his political, entrepreneurial, and civic activities, Hillhouse served as the Treasurer of Yale College for fifty years from 1782 until his death in 1832, the longest term of a senior administrator in the history of Yale.

James Hillhouse lived a very rich and rewarding life of dedicated service to his beloved city, New Haven, his state, and his nation. A man of intellect, industry, and integrity, character, conviction and courage, this towering figure of New Haven history remains a role model for all New Haveners. New Haven's first and oldest high school is named in honor of the honorable James Hillhouse. In September 2001, Hillhouse's grave in the Grove Street Cemetery was dedicated as a site on the Connecticut Freedom Trail.

✎ JUDITH COCKS TO JAMES HILLHOUSE

Marietta, 8th March 1795

Sir

I have been so unhappy at Mrs. Woodbridges that I was obliged to leeve thare by the consent of Mrs. Woodbridge who gave up my Indentures and has offen said that had she known that I was so sickly and expencieve she would not have brought me to this Country but all this is the least of my trouble and I can truly say sir had I nothing else or no one but myself I am sure I should not make any complaint to you But my Little son Jupiter who is now with Mrs. Woodbridge is my greatest care and from what she says and from the useage he meets with there is so trying to me that I am all most distracted therefore if you will be so kind as to write me how Long Jupiter is to remain with them as she tells me he is to live with her untill he is twenty five years of age this is something that I had no idea of I all ways thought that he was to return with me to new england or at Longest only ten years these are matters I must beg of you sir to let me know as quick as you can make it convenient I hope you will excuse me of troub Ling you wich I think you will do when you think that I am here in A strange country without one Friend to advise me Mrs. Woodbridge setts out for connecticut and I make no doubt but she will apply to buy Jupiter's time which I beg you will be so good as not to sell to her I had much reather he wold return and Live with you as she allows all her sons to thump and beat him

From Vital Records of New Haven
1649-1850 (Hartford, 1917)
page 420.

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NEW HAVEN VITAL RECORDS

Lemuel Benham and Margaret Green of New Haven were joined in Marriage by Rev^d Mr. Whittelsey april 14 1774

Jonathan Ingersoll of New Haven and Grace Isaacs of Branford were married by Rev^d. Nicolas Street april 1st 1786

David Daggett and Wealthian Munson of New Haven were Married by Rev^d. Chauncey Whittelsey Sept^r. 10 1786.

Simeon Baldwin of Norwich & Rebecca Sherman of New Haven were joined in Marriage July 27: by Rev^d. Doct. Edwards 1787.

Abraham Bishop of New Haven and Nancy Dexter of Newbury Port, (Massachusetts State) were Married at Newburyport by the Rev^d Doctor Bais March 11 1792

Simeon Jocelin of New Haven and Luceanah Smith of Southington were Married by Rev^d. William Robinson June 17: 1789

[188] Births of Negros

Cap^t Thomas Rice gave an account of his negro which was born Aug^t. 6 1785 whose name is Venice Recorded Jan^r: 23^d 1789

Cap^t Tho^s Rice gave an acct. of his negro Jack Son of his negro woman Jude who was born Dec^r. 2^d 1789 Recorded march 9 1790

⇒ James Hillhouse is in the possession of a negro Girl named Hager who was born on y^e 17th day of March 1786 as also of a negro boy Named Jupiter born y^e 22^d day of June A D 1789 which Children will by Law be free at y^e age of Twenty-five years s^d hillhouse Sworn to y^e Truth of y^e above acct before Sam^l Bishop Jus^t of Peace

Cap^t Thomas Rice gave an account of a negro Child named Hebe Daughter of his negro woman named Silvia which was born in his house may 30th 1792 — Recorded Nov^r: 16. 1792

[189] Births

Elifabeth the Daughter of Isaac Thompson was born oct^r. 18th 1766

Sufanna the Daughter of Isaac Thompson was born July 11th 1768

Amelia the Daughter of Isaac Thompson was born oct^r. 18 1771

Mary the Daughter of Isaac Thompson was born may 8th 1773

Lyman y^e Son of Isaac & Sibel Dickerman was born may 12 1774

John Dixwell the Son of m^r. Solomon & M^{rs}: Anna Pinto was born Oct^r 12 1774

Elifabeth y^e Son of Abel & Eunice Burret was born aug^t 7th 1769

Eunice y^e Daughter of Amos Perkins J^r: & Abiah Perkins was born may 19th 1773

No	Surname	Vol.	Page
	Dinah, negro of Rog[] Alling, adm. ch. Aug. 2, 1744	10	91
	Dinah, negro woman, ch. mem. Mar. 1, 1758	9	4
	Dinah, negro, m. Thom [], negro, May 11, 1786, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	9	119
	Dinah, d. Apr. 25, 1802, A 82	3	52
	Dinath, negro servant of Roger Alling, bp. Aug. 5, 1744	1	42
	Diodate, wid., ch. mem. Mar. 1, 1758	9	3
	Dorcas, m. [] Lanson, people of color, Oct. 16, 1814, by Rev. Nathaniel W. Taylor	10c	3
	Dyar, negro servant of Mr. Chandler, d. [Jan.] [], 1762	9	179
	Emma, servant to John Goodrich, bp. May 3, 1789, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	2	17
	Esther, a free molatto woman, m. Isaac, servant man to Mr. Douglass, July 18, 1771, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	9	112
	Exeter, negro man of James Rice, d. Aug. 24, 1764, A 23	9	121
	Frances, s. Phyllis, negro, bp. June 5, 1785, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	9	178
	Frances Augusta, dau. of [], bp. Sept. 23, 1827, by L. Bacon	9	107
	Gad, negro, bp. May 19, 1728	4	201
	George Pitcairn, s. of [], bp. May 24, 1812, by N. W. Taylor	1	35
	Glascow, his w., d. Sept. 5, 1804, A 24	4	190
	Hagar, servant of John Blag, m. Eminus Sume, free negro, July 9, 1783, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	3	53
✓	Hagar, servant of Hon. James Hillhouse, bp. July 21, 1794, "in private"	9	116
✓	Hagar, servant of Hon. James Hillhouse, d. July 23, 1794, A 9	2	26
	Harry, d. Apr. 28, 1801, A 66 *(Perhaps "Harry Huggins")	2	45
	Henrietta, d. Pomp, bp. July 17, 1802	3	54
	Isaac, servant man to Mr. Douglass, m. Esther, a free molatto woman, July 18, 1771, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	3	14
	Isborn, free negro, m. Mindwell Lake, wid. of Jethro, Oct. 24, 1763, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	9	121
	Jack, m. Cloe [], negro servants of Mr. A. Babcock, Nov. 14, 1765, by Rev. Chauncey Whittelsey	9	44
		9	46

From: Connecticut Church Records
 NEW HAVEN FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH 1639-1937
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 CONNECTICUT STATE LIBRARY: 1947, page 595.

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