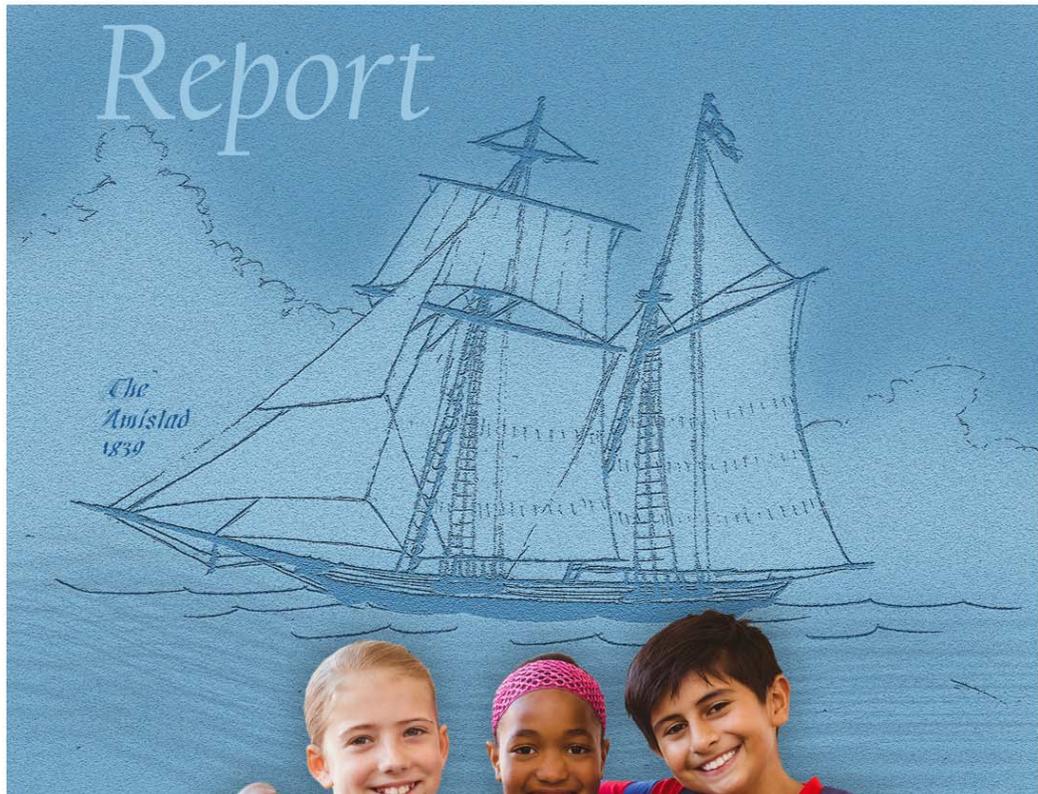


# New York State *Amistad Commission*



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# NYS Amistad Commission Report

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## **Overview of New York State Amistad Commission**

### Introduction

The Amistad Commission (hereinafter “Commission”) was created by the New York State Legislature in 2005 to review New York State’s education curriculum regarding the African slave trade and its implications on American history. The Commission is named for the *Amistad*, a Spanish slave ship that was the site of a famous fight for freedom by enslaved Africans in 1839.

In creating the Commission, the Legislature declared that all people should know of, and remember, the human carnage and dehumanizing atrocities committed during the African slave trade and slavery in America, as well as the legacy of slavery and the history of racism that continued. Lawmakers tasked the Commission with researching and surveying the extent to which the African slave trade and slavery in America is included in the curricula of New York state schools, and making recommendations to the Legislature and Executive regarding the implementation of education and awareness programs in New York concerned with the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country, and the contributions of African-Americans in building our country.

The Commission has undertaken several initiatives to fulfill its statutory obligations, including: researching the extent to which the African slave trade and slavery is currently incorporated in the curricula of New York State schools; creating a webpage with information related to African American history and culture on the Department of State’s website; and creating a Roster of Expert Volunteers as a resource to increase the learning opportunities for educators and students across New York State. Based on its work, the Commission has developed a set of findings and recommendations described in this report for the continued implementation of education and awareness programs in New York concerned with the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country, and the contributions of African-Americans in building our country.

## Commission Structure and Membership

The Commission consists of nineteen members: four appointed by the Temporary President of the Senate; four by the Speaker of the Assembly; and eight by the Governor. The Secretary of State, the Commissioner of Education, and the Chancellor of the State University of New York serve as ex officio members. Public members and designees are listed below.

### Members

- Acting Secretary of State Rossana Rosado, Chair (Ex-Officio)
  - Teneka Frost-Amusa, Esq., Designee, Secretary of State
- Commissioner of Education Mary Ellen Elia, Vice Chair (Ex-Officio)
  - Patricia Polan, Designee, Commissioner of Education
- SUNY Chancellor - Nancy Zimpher (Ex-Officio)
  - Carlos Medina, Designee, SUNY Chancellor
  - Tamu Chambers, Designee, SUNY Chancellor
- Robert Balachandran, President of BellRow Title Agency, a nationally certified Minority Business Enterprise, and Senior Vice President of National Sales at Royal Abstract
- Harold Bellinger, Assistant to the President for Affirmative Action and Diversity at Nassau Community College
- Nuriyah Angela Maria Boné-Owens, Chief Executive Officer, Cultural Entrepreneur and Freedom Trail Expert at mrsowens.com Cultural Ventures LLC
- David Byer-Tyre, Curator of the African American Museum of Nassau County
- Jonathan Cornue, Curriculum Development Specialist at the Madison-Oneida BOCES and Vice President of the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum
- Julius D. Edwards, President and Chief Visionary Officer of 3reshold Companies
- Fredrick C. Harris, Professor of Political Science and Director of the Center on African American Politics and Society at Columbia University

- Robert V. Lloyd, Executive Director of the Long Island Citizens for Community Values
- Geoffrey Prime, Founding Partner at Prime & O'Brien, LLP, a criminal defense firm
- Enid Schildkrout, Curator Emerita, American Museum of National History and Chief Curator Emerita, Museum for African Art
- Mary Theresa Streck, Principal of the Ark Community Charter School
- James Turner, Professor Emeritus of African and African American Politics and Social Policy and founding Director of the African Studies and Research Center at Cornell University
- Sylvia Wong Lewis, Chief Executive Officer and Founder of the Narrative Network, a newsletter covering multicultural news

## **Commission Subcommittees:**

**Website Redesign.** The Website Redesign Subcommittee focuses on creating and maintaining a robust and user-friendly public interface that explains the rationale for the formation and work of the Commission. The website also provides links to educational resources and organizations that provide the public and educators with information regarding the African American experience in America and its broad implications for our culture and society today.

**Educational and Cultural Resources.** The Educational and Cultural Resources Subcommittee is developing a “cultural tourism map” by identifying historic sites throughout the state, coordinating links with other New York entities, and developing a resource list of libraries, museums, galleries, exhibits, events, historic places, and educational entities. It is drafting a list of experts and thought leaders able to assist the Commission. To the greatest extent practicable, resource listing will be developed for all regions of the state.

**Educator Input.** The Educator Input Subcommittee conducts outreach to educational professionals in order to seek their input on how to enhance teaching and expand knowledge to students and the public regarding the mission of the Commission.

## **Work of the Amistad Commission**

### Survey of the Social Studies Framework and New York State Common Core Curricula

In 2010, the Commission expressed support for the “Infusion” method of instruction as it relates to the African American experience taught in schools. “Infusion” is a process that involves the blending or incorporating of two entities into one. This process creates a synergy resulting in the improved strength and quality of the outcome. Upon adoption of New York State Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, the State Education Department (“SED”) examined the Social Studies Core Curriculum and Resource Guide and decided to develop a new framework for social studies curriculum development.

The Commission’s recommendation that African American history and culture be infused with the content areas of the curriculum taught in New York State schools became a guiding principle as the New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework (the “Framework”) was developed. The Social Studies Content Advisory Panel (SSCAP) convened in 2011. The SSCAP consists of a diverse group of K–12 and Higher Education educators from across New York State. This group has played an integral role in redefining social studies and in the development of the Framework.

The development of the Framework honored the understanding that multiple perspectives are an important element in the social studies. In addition to the SSCAP, other groups and individuals had input into the development of the Framework, including Earl Davis, the Director of Project Brownstone, a not-for-profit organization that empowers underserved youth in Harlem through textbook stipends and cultural programming.

In support of the work of the Amistad Commission, Project Brownstone conducted an online survey gathering empirical data on individuals’ educational experiences with African American history. In January 2014, Mr. Davis contacted the Office of Curriculum and Instruction regarding social studies instruction in New York State and the incorporation of the African American experience within the curricula of public schools. At the time, SED was in the process of developing the new Framework, and invited Mr. Davis to review the Framework and submit his suggestions for incorporation of the African American experience. His suggestions are now in the Framework for Grades 4, 7, 8, and 11.

The Board of Regents adopted the Framework as the foundation for social studies curriculum development in New York State at the April 29, 2014 meeting. The Framework serves as a guide for local curriculum, providing key ideas, conceptual understandings, and content specifications. Districts and teachers use their professional expertise and local community resources to develop local curriculum. The African American story lives within the Framework as an integral part of American history. The Framework is located at <https://www.engageny.org/resource/new-york-state-k-12-social-studies-framework>.

## Highlights of the Social Studies Framework include:

- **4th grade:** In the fourth grade, the Framework uses a chronological foundation of New York State history to help guide teachers in exploring history from a state and local perspective. In this course, students examine the colonial experience of African Americans, comparing and contrasting life under the Dutch and under the British. Students also explore why African Americans volunteered to fight with the British during the war. Students will investigate life as a slave in New York and the people who took action to abolish slavery, including Samuel Cornish, Fredrick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Harriet Tubman. Students will research how their local community contributed to the Civil War. Students will research people who made contributions to business, technology and their community, including individuals like Thomas Jennings, the first African American to be granted a patent. Students also discuss the migration of large numbers of African Americans to New York City and other northern cities to work in factories beginning in the 1890s and they will investigate artists, writers and musicians associated with the Harlem Renaissance
- **5th grade:** Students study the Western Hemisphere and investigate the Middle Passage and the conditions experienced by enslaved Africans. The students will also examine the struggle for equality, civil rights or sovereignty for different groups of people in the Western Hemisphere including African Americans.
- **7th grade:** Students examine the changing status and role of African Americans under the Dutch and English colonial systems. Students will examine the development of the United States Constitution and the Three-Fifths Compromise. Students learn that slavery continued to grow in the new nation and that enslaved Africans utilized a variety of strategies to survive and resist their conditions. As students study westward expansion, they will examine ways the westward movement affected African Americans. The abolitionist movement is discussed

and students learn ways in which enslaved Africans organized and resisted their conditions. New York State's role in the abolition movement and the locations of Underground Railroad stations is studied. During lessons on the Civil War, students examine how the enlistment of freed slaves helped change the course of the Civil War and the students will examine the roles of African Americans in the conflict.

- **8th grade:** Students examine the Reconstruction Amendments (13th, 14th, and 15th) in terms of the rights and protections provided to African Americans. The Freedmen's Bureau, impacts of the sharecropping system on African Americans, reasons for the migration of African Americans to the North, and the rise of African Americans in government are taught. Students explore methods used by Southern state governments to impact the lives of African Americans, including the passage of Black Codes, poll taxes, and Jim Crow laws. Students discuss the response of some Southerners to the increased rights of African Americans, noting the development of organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and White Leagues. Students also examine the ways in which the federal government failed to follow up on its promises to freed African Americans and the effects of the *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling. Students investigate the Progress Era reformers including W.E.B. Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, and Booker T. Washington. Students will examine race relations in America including the East St. Louis Riot, the Silent March and the Tulsa Riots and they will examine the contributions of the Harlem Renaissance. The role of the Tuskegee Airmen within the segregated military during World War II is studied as well as the work done at the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Students investigate the Civil Rights Movement and its leaders, as well as the effect on American society.
- **9th Grade:** The course focuses on Global History and Geography, and as the students learn about the expansion of European transoceanic trade routes, they also examine the impact of the Encounter on the indigenous populations of the Americas, leading to an increase demand for labor. The impact of the slave trade on Africans political and cultural systems is also examined.
- **11th Grade:** Students analyze slavery as a deeply established component of the colonial economic system and social structure, indentured servitude versus slavery, the increased concentration of slaves in the South, and the development of slavery as a racial institution. Students examine the impact of the Revolutionary War on workers, African Americans, women, and Native Americans. In the development of our Constitution, students examine the compromise regarding slavery. Students study the issues surrounding the

expansion of slavery into new territories and how the long-standing disputes over states' rights and slavery led to the Civil War and the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. The Civil War and Post Civil War Era are explored, including the constitutional rights extended to African Americans and the efforts to limit the rights of African Americans. Reform efforts by individuals and the consequences of those efforts are examined, including Ida Wells and her writings about lynching African Americans; Booker T. Washington's contributions to education, culminating in the Tuskegee Institute; W.E.B. Du Bois and the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP); the publication of *The Crisis*; and the Silent Protest (1917). As students examine World War I, they will investigate the contributions of African Americans to the war effort and the Great Migration that occurred. Students will examine the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan and the cultural achievements of the Harlem Renaissance. The contributions of African Americans in World War II are examined as well as the discrimination they faced. Long-term demands for equality by African Americans that led to the Civil Rights Movement are also taught. Students examine the roles and impact of Civil Rights leaders and groups; examine legislative and judicial achievements during the movement and analyze the significance of key events in the movement including the Montgomery bus boycott, federal intervention at Little Rock, Arkansas, the Birmingham protest, and the March on Washington.

In addition to the New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework, the State Education Department (SED) funded a Resource Toolkit Project. The authors of the National Council for the Social Studies College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework worked with New York State teachers to develop a collection of inquiries aligned to the Framework. Some of these resources provide the continued inclusion of African-American history such as:

Sugar and Slavery located at: <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/slavery/>

Uncle Tom's Cabin located at: <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/utc/>

Emancipation located at: <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/emancipation/>

Civil Rights located at: <http://www.c3teachers.org/inquiries/civil-rights/>

Using Race to the Top funding, SED contracted with vendors to produce curriculum materials to support the Common Core Learning Standards in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. The curriculum materials for ELA are called "modules" and some

of the modules have included stories of African-Americans. The following is a list for those modules:

- **Prekindergarten:** In the Listening and Learning Strand, under “Important People in American History,” there are sections on contributions from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and President Obama.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/preschool-important-people-american-history-teacher-guide>
- **Kindergarten:** In the Listening and Learning Strand, under “Presidents and American Symbols,” sections of the lessons focus on President Obama as the first African American President.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/kindergarten-domain-12-anthology-presidents-and-american-symbols>
- **Grade 1:** In the Listening and Learning Strand, under “A New Nation: American Independence,” there are sections on the history of slavery.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-1-listening-learning-domain-10-anthology-new-nation-american-independence>
- **Grade 2:** In the Listening and Learning Strand, under “Fighting for a Cause,” there is a focus on inequality, discrimination, and segregation. This section also includes information about contributions from Jackie Robinson and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-2-listening-learning-domain-12-anthology-fighting-cause>
- **Grade 4:** In fourth grade students learn about voting rights and responsibilities focusing on women’s suffrage with an infusion of the roadblocks (Jim Crow laws) and progress (13<sup>th</sup> -15<sup>th</sup> Amendments) African Americans made towards obtaining voting rights, including the election of the first African American president.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-4-ela-module-4>
- **Grade 5:** In fifth grade, students read *Promises to Keep: How Jackie Robinson Changed America* and analyze how Jackie Robinson is a specific example of an athlete who served as a leader who broke barriers in society.
  - See <http://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-5-ela-module-3a>
- **Grade 7:** In seventh grade, students examine the autobiography of Frederick Douglass, with specific attention to understanding how he used language in powerful ways and how he told his story in order to serve his purpose of abolishing slavery.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-7-ela-module-3a>

- **Grade 8:** In eighth grade, students examine the Civil Rights Movement, and the various media used to tell the story of the Little Rock Nine through the study of *A Mighty Long Way* by Carlotta Walls Lanier and a photo essay titled *Little Rock Girl 1957*.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-8-ela-module-3b>
- **Grade 9:** In ninth grade, students read *Sugar Changed the World: A Story of Magic, Spice, Slavery, Freedom, and Science* which provides students new information about the past that can inform the choices they make today.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-9-ela-module-4>
- **Grade 10:** In tenth grade, students focus on “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the rhetoric he uses to advance his cause.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-10-ela-module-2>
- **Grade 11:** In eleventh grade, students study concepts of oppression and power structures focusing on how rhetoric becomes a tool to combat oppression through a close reading of the first chapter of W.E.B. Du Bois’ *The Souls of Black Folk*, followed by Booker T. Washington’s “Atlanta Compromise Speech.”
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-11-ela-module-2>
- **Grade 12:** In twelfth grade, students read *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* and analyze the argument presented in *New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander.
  - See <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-12-ela-module-1> and <https://www.engageny.org/resource/grade-12-ela-extension-module>

## Roster of Expert Volunteers

To further enrich the learning opportunities regarding the African American experience, the Commission created a Roster Form on its website to solicit volunteers willing to share their relevant knowledge and expertise across New York State. Information received from those who complete the form is reviewed by the Commission’s Educator Input Subcommittee. Once approved by the Subcommittee, the information is posted on the Commission’s website. In order to increase interest in joining the Roster, the Commission recommends more education regarding the purpose of the Roster and a marketing campaign to encourage further participation.

## Amistad Commission's Online Presence

In 2012, assisted by the Commission's Website Redesign Subcommittee, the Department of State undertook a broad redesign of the Amistad Commission website. The website is now a robust catalogue of interactive resources that provides readers with access to upcoming cultural events, academic publications, audio recordings, online exhibits, book recommendations and photographic displays that honor and explore various aspects of the slave trade and African American history and experience. While there are a number of resources that focus on the legacy of slavery in the United States, content has been curated that reflects the wide breadth of the African American experience, including a commemoration of the contributions of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen and photographs of the Selma to Montgomery March of 1965. Information is regularly updated to celebrate significant events, such as the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Black History Month. An "Amistad News" section updates readers on African American history as discussed in national and local media outlets which include editorial items and columns/stories from newspapers and news outlets from around New York State and across the country. These news items not only relate to the history of slavery, but the overall history of African-Americans, including important accomplishments, obituaries, current events, and topics on the subject of race that are in the current news cycle. Finally, the site highlights the ongoing work of Governor Cuomo to protect and preserve artifacts and historical sites related to African American history.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

1. **Finding:** A strong connection to the State's education department and a budget appropriation are critical to the effectiveness of the Commission.

Several other states created Amistad Commissions with similar objectives to New York's Amistad Commission. For example, New Jersey signed the Amistad bill into law in 2002 to "promote the implementation of education and awareness programs in New Jersey concerned with the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country, and the contributions of African-Americans in building our country." The main duties of New Jersey's Amistad Commission are to survey current African American history teaching materials, inventory additional materials for incorporation into curricula, provide implementation assistance to schools, and work with the Department of Education to develop curriculum guidelines for teaching African American history.

The New Jersey Department of Education's core function includes educational oversight of school districts and curriculum development. Thus, the New Jersey Department of Education was considered best suited to survey current teaching materials, inventory new materials, and develop and implement curriculum guidelines for teaching African American history. The New Jersey *Amistad* Commission has a dedicated staff and a sizable budget, hosts yearly summer institutes for educators, and has a web-based curriculum for educators designed to correlate with the state curriculum benchmarks for social studies, civics, and history.

In Florida, the African American History Task Force, established within the State Department of Education, advocates for teaching African American history, raises awareness of related state mandates, and recommends Department of Education actions needed to adopt instructional materials. The work of the Task Force is bolstered by a 2002 statutory requirement for public schools to teach the history of African peoples, from slavery to the contributions of African Americans to American society. The Task Force maintains an active website, plans instructional events, and provides extensive curriculum resources and professional development tools for teachers on a separate web portal. The Task Force has an identification system that recognizes school districts as achieving "Exemplary Status" when they meet a number of benchmarks, including developing African American history initiatives, strong professional development for teaching African American history, and integrating African American history into their curriculum frameworks. The Task Force operates with dedicated state funding.

In Maryland, the Governor established a Commission on African American History and Culture in the Governor's Office of Community Initiatives in 2008. The Commission's responsibilities are mainly tied to public education on African American history and culture. Its responsibilities include coordinating projects and administering any funding for activities that further the understanding of African American culture, and operating a state museum on African American culture. Maryland also has a law that requires counties to adopt procedures for public school libraries to collect materials concerning African American history for students in each age group and reading level. The Commission is managed by an executive director, dedicated staff and operates with dedicated state funds.

In Arizona, the governor created a Commission on African American Affairs in 2007 to advance the interests of African Americans and to address challenges they face. The Commission's responsibilities include advising the governor on policies affecting the African American community, assisting African American

community groups in developing programming; improving community relations, organizing statewide conferences promoting the history and culture of African Americans; and holding town halls on African American affairs. The Department of Administration was granted funding to establish the Commission. Additional funding was arranged by authorizing the Commission to apply for, and spend, grants of money or property to assist it in carrying out its functions.

New Mexico established the Office of African American Affairs to study key issues for African Americans and to conduct conferences encouraging the sharing of African American history and culture. The Office was authorized to promote and develop programs to meet the needs of African Americans, adopt and promulgate rules to carry out its duties, submit an office budget, and accept gifts from any source to carry out its duties.

**Recommendation:** In order to continue to meet the primary objectives of the Amistad Commission, to strong connection to the State Education Department is necessary. It is recommended that the Amistad Commission's work be continued in the State Education Department's Office of Cultural Education with a dedicated staff and budget.

2. **Finding:** The State of New York is home to a number of institutions of higher learning and other organizations that support and promote African American history and culture. These institutions and organizations share a mission to educate others on the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, and the triumphs of African-Americans.

Many State University of New York (SUNY) colleges and universities have renowned African American and African Studies programs. For example, the Africana Studies graduate program at The University at Albany has maintained its ranking as second in the nation, according to *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* magazine. Both the graduate and undergraduate program at the University at Albany provide students with an interdisciplinary understanding of African and African American history, culture, politics and society. Eight other SUNY colleges and universities offer programs in African American and African Studies, with courses that foster a greater understanding of the experiences of African peoples across the globe. These courses are offered toward a minor, major, and at the graduate level. Many private institutions of higher learning also offer similar programs involving the African and African American experience.

In the North Country region of New York, the North Country Underground Railroad Historical Association (NCUGRHA) runs the North Star Underground Railroad Museum. NCUGRHA researches, preserves, and interprets the history of the Underground Railroad, slavery, and abolition along the Upper Hudson River-Champlain, and the Canal-Lake Champlain corridor of northeast New York. The North Star Underground Railroad Museum exhibits and videos reveal hidden success stories, and bus tours revisit underground escape routes. The museum is a reflection of the importance of human freedom and its relevance for the present and future generations.

Central New York is home of The National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum. Located in Peterboro, the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum honors antislavery abolitionists, their work to end slavery, and their legacy. In partnership with the Upstate Institute at Colgate University, a Cabinet of Freedom was formed and the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum (NAHOF) was launched. On March 19, 2007, SED approved a provisional charter for the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum to be organized for educational purposes. Further, the institution has introduced the Peterboro Academy—a web resource that posts informative resources related to the Abolition Movement, slavery and human trafficking, and American Civil War history.

Also located in Central New York, the Discover Syracuse Freedom Trail commemorates places, people, and events significant to the history of the 19th-century Abolitionist Movement and the Underground Railroad. The Trail includes a series of eleven illustrated information signs and is a project of the City of Syracuse and the Preservation Association of Central New York (PACNY). Also, the Community Folk Art Center, Inc. (CFAC), a unit of the African American Studies Department at Syracuse University, provides both a showcase for African Diaspora artists and a setting for dialogue and interaction among professional artists. CFAC's mission is to exalt cultural and artistic pluralism by collecting, exhibiting, teaching and interpreting the visual and expressive arts. Public programming includes exhibitions, film screenings, gallery talks, workshops and courses in studio and performing arts.

In Buffalo, New York, the Merriweather Library houses the Center for Afro-American History and Research, the largest resource center in Western New York for African American history. This collection was established in 1965, and in 1975, the Afro-American Historical Association of the Niagara Frontier began to incorporate microfilms of primary source material on the history of African

Americans in the Western New York area. In addition to the numerous books, microfilms, and pictures, the collection has several specialized databases and has now acquired a new resource that makes Black Studies research more convenient and robust: the microfiche Schomburg Clipping File contains more than 9,000 records that preserve and document important accomplishments in the African American experience.

In the Capital Region, the Underground Railroad History Project of the Capital Region, Inc. (URHPCR) researches and preserves the local and national history, international connections, and legacies of the anti-slavery and Underground Railroad movements. The URHPCR hosts an Annual Public History Conference on the Underground Railroad Movement.

New York City is home to several institutions engaged in the preservation of African and African American art, history, music, research, and culture. The New York City Public Library's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has a library, exhibitions, and on-line resources regarding the history of African Americans in New York. The American Museum of Natural History has a permanent exhibition on Africa, with a section on Africans in the Americas, including an exhibit on slavery. The New York Historical Society mounts exhibitions on African Americans, and several past exhibitions are available online including "New York Divided: Slavery and the Civil War". The African Burial Ground in New York City is a national monument. In Queens, the Louis Armstrong House Museum is open to visitors. In 2008 the Museum for African Art (now the Africa Center) mounted a travelling exhibition entitled "Grass Roots: African Origins of American Art." The teacher's guide for the exhibition is online at: <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/grassroots/gr.pdf>. This resource charts the importance of African-Americans' knowledge of rice cultivation for the development of antebellum economy as well as the persistence of the African-American art of coiled basketry up to the present time. Also, the Studio Museum in Harlem has ongoing and changing exhibitions of the work of African and African American artists.

The Long Island region is home to the African American Museum of Nassau County. The mission of the Museum is to educate and promote an understanding and appreciation of African American culture, art, and traditions through education, interpretation, exhibitions, collections, and programs for the enrichment of the public, with an emphasis on Long Island. The museum's vision is to become the outstanding regional resource for African American historical

information. Also, on Long Island, is the Sandy Ground Historical Society, the oldest continuously inhabited free Black settlement in the United States. The Sandy Ground community has been included in the State & National Registers of Historic Places. The Sandy Ground Historical Society Museum is a Program Site for the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. It conducts ongoing research and preserves the history of the Sandy Ground community. The Sandy Ground Historical Society Program is chartered by the Department of Education to educate adults and children on the history of Sandy Ground. It illustrates the history of Sandy Ground in diverse ways using traditional exhibits, guided tours of the Museum, music, arts & crafts, film, ethnic foods, and lectures.

**Recommendation:** It is recommended that the Amistad Commission establish partnerships with institutions of higher learning and organizations similar to those listed above to conduct workshops, seminars, and conferences for educators and the public. Such partnerships would provide additional dynamic opportunities for the enhancement of students' knowledge of African American history and culture.

3. **Finding:** Instruction aligned to the Social Studies Framework recently adopted by SED and the curricula developed from the State Learning Standards are ultimately controlled by local school districts. Incentives would encourage local districts to develop specialized curricula on African American history.

Legislation in other jurisdictions empowers state Departments of Education to measure school district accountability for the inclusion of African American history in local school district curricula. For example, in Tennessee the State Department of Education Commissioner is required to develop a system to monitor school board compliance with a mandate for the inclusion of African American history into school curricula. While New York statute requires the State Board of Regents to prescribe courses of instruction on human rights issues, including slavery, there is no overarching mandate that African American history be incorporated into school curricula. The New York State Education Department should design an instructional program that would meet the Commission's broader goal of ensuring that African American history and the contributions of African Americans are incorporated into school curricula at all levels.

In New Jersey, the Amistad Commission offers grants to exemplary teachers, catalogs the best practices of winners, and publicizes those practices for other

instructors. An instructional program in New York could also incorporate the State's existing Master Teacher program to designate teachers as leaders in the field of African American history. New York's Master Teachers receive a bonus and train teachers in other schools. The Master Teacher program could incorporate African American history, and the Amistad Commission website could feature curricula developed by winning teachers.

A grant program at the university or graduate level would also generate resources and creative cultural programming for school curricula. For instance, the Black History Commission of Arkansas offers small-scale grants to fund projects related to the preservation or commemoration of African American history. The grants are funded by the state Assembly and Governor and are administered by the Commission. New York could institute a similar program with funding from the State and City University systems and the state legislature to support student research projects at the college or graduate level. Eligible projects would be those that generate unique resources or create cultural programs for curriculum enrichment. Those resources would then be incorporated onto the Amistad website for use by educators and in professional development programs organized by the Education Department.

**Recommendation:** To increase awareness and encourage local districts to utilize curricula on African American history, it is recommended that a recognition system, with the designation of special status or other awards, be established to publicly recognize schools that do an excellent job teaching subjects related to the African American experience. Grant programs for university and graduate-level students studying teaching could also be utilized to generate educational resources for teachers.

4. **Finding:** A continued online presence for the Amistad Commission is necessary to keep educators and the public informed about the work of the Commission and learning opportunities available across the State.

**Recommendation:** Additional improvements to the Commission's webpage and online presence should be made, including the following:

- a. Create an online portal for educators to access materials that would supplement their instruction of African American history, including model lesson plans aligned with the Common Core, webinars on the lessons, and bibliographies of relevant source material.

- b. Feature organizations and other resources related to the Commission's mission. Recommendation #2 highlights a number of organizations and resources within New York State that promote African American history and culture. Further examination of available resources should take place and be posted to the Commission webpage.
  - c. Use social media so that the Commission can increase its presence among youth, share historical photos, and create an up-to-date and interactive calendar of events.
  - d. Provide more educational information and develop a marketing campaign to encourage further participation from the members of our community who have expertise in the African American history and progress.
5. **Finding:** Additional data is needed for a better understanding of how the new social studies framework and other subjects that are a part of the State education standards are taught and implemented in schools, and about the learning opportunities that exist in our communities.

Volunteer survey methods could be used to gather data at various stages of implementation of the new curricula across local school districts and to gather information about what learning opportunities exist across the state. The educational opportunities survey should be designed for grades K-12 to seek information about the effectiveness of the new standards for teaching and learning about African American history. Additionally, cultural resource surveys should be conducted to identify and record all cultural resources pertaining to African American history and experience throughout each region in the state. The lifelong learning resources survey would be aimed at institutions of higher learning in New York State to report findings regarding the extent and breadth of education concerning the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country and the contributions of African Americans to our society as these topics are presently being incorporated into courses taught at institutions of higher learning in the state, such as SUNY and CUNY.

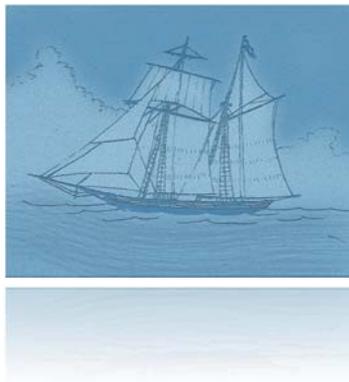
**Recommendation:** The following educational surveys should be conducted across New York State:

- a. K-12 Educational Opportunities Survey;
- b. Cultural Resource Survey;
- c. Lifelong Learning Resource Survey.

Appropriate staffing and funding will be needed to conduct these surveys.

## Conclusion

While the Amistad Commission has had some success in ensuring that a true and accurate history of slavery and the African slave trade is included in our State's educational curriculum, more work remains. The permanent establishment of the Commission in the State Education Department with the resources necessary to continue its work is an important consideration given the impact such education will have on the children of our State. In addition, establishing partnerships with educational institutions and organizations that host or provide information on African American culture and cultural events is necessary to further the work of the Commission. Continued efforts are needed to keep the information on the Commission's website up-to-date. Surveying school districts and communities to gain insight on the progress of the new social studies curriculum and to determine what other learning opportunities exist will help solidify that "the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, the depth of their impact in our society, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to the development of this country" remains a significant part of New York State history.



## APPENDIX

NYS Arts and Cultural Affairs Law

ARTICLE 57-B

### THE AMISTAD COMMISSION

Section 57.51. Legislative findings.

57.52. Amistad commission; established.

57.53. The Amistad commission; duties and responsibilities.

57.54. Authorization

§ 57.51. Legislative findings. The legislature finds and declares that:

1. During the period beginning late in the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century, millions of persons of African origin were enslaved and brought to the Western Hemisphere, including the United States of America; anywhere from between twenty to fifty percent of enslaved Africans died during their journey to the Western Hemisphere; the enslavement of Africans and their descendants was part of a concerted effort of physical and psychological terrorism that deprived groups of people of African descent the opportunity to preserve many of their social, religious, political and other customs; the vestiges of slavery in this country continued with the legalization of second class citizenship status for African-Americans through Jim Crow laws, segregation and other similar practices; the legacy of slavery has pervaded the fabric of our society; and in spite of these events there are endless examples of the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to the development of this country.

2. All people should know of and remember the human carnage and dehumanizing atrocities committed during the period of the African slave trade and slavery in America and of the vestiges of slavery in this country; and it is in fact vital to educate our citizens on these events, the legacy of slavery, the sad history of racism in this country, and on the principles of human rights and dignity in a civilized society.

3. It is the policy of the state of New York that the history of the African slave trade, slavery in America, the depth of their impact in our society, and the triumphs of African-Americans and their significant contributions to the development of this country is the

proper concern of all people, particularly students enrolled in the schools of the state of New York.

4. It is therefore desirable to create a state-level commission, which shall research and survey the extent to which the African slave trade and slavery in America is included in the curricula of New York state schools, and make recommendations to the legislature and executive regarding the implementation of education and awareness programs in New York concerned with the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country, and the contributions of African-Americans in building our country. Such recommendations may include, but not be limited to, the development of workshops, institutes, seminars, and other teacher training activities designed to educate teachers on this subject matter; the coordination of events on a regular basis, throughout the state, that provide appropriate memorialization of the events concerning the enslavement of Africans and their descendants in America as well as their struggle for freedom and liberty; and suggestions for revisions to the curricula and textbooks used to educate the students of New York state to reflect a more adequate inclusion of issues identified by the commission.

§ 57.52. Amistad commission; established.

1. The Amistad commission (commission), so named in honor of the group of enslaved Africans led by Joseph Cinque who, while being transported in eighteen hundred thirty-nine on a vessel named the Amistad, gained their freedom after overthrowing the crew and eventually having their case successfully argued before the United States Supreme Court, is hereby created and established. The commission shall consist of nineteen members, including the secretary of state or his or her designee, the commissioner of education or his or her designee, and the chancellor of the state university of New York or his or her designee, serving ex officio, and sixteen public members. Public members shall be appointed as follows: four public members, no more than two of whom shall be of the same political party, shall be appointed by the temporary president of the senate; four public members, no more than two of whom shall be of the same political party, shall be appointed by the speaker of the assembly; and eight public members, no more than four of whom shall be of the same political party, shall be appointed by the governor. The public members shall be residents of the state, chosen with due regard to broad geographic representation and ethnic diversity, who have an interest in the history of the African slave trade and slavery in America and the contributions of African-Americans to our society.

2. Each public member of the commission shall serve for a term of three years, except that of the initial members so appointed: one member appointed by the temporary

president of the senate, one member appointed by the speaker of the assembly, and two members appointed by the governor shall serve for terms of one year; one member appointed by the temporary president of the senate, one member appointed by the speaker of the assembly, and three members appointed by the governor shall serve for terms of two years; and two members appointed by the temporary president of the senate, two members appointed by the speaker of the assembly, and three members appointed by the governor shall serve for terms of three years. Public members shall be eligible for reappointment. They shall serve until their successors are appointed and qualified, and the term of the successor of any incumbent shall be calculated from the expiration of the term of that incumbent. A vacancy occurring other than by expiration of term shall be filled in the same manner as the original appointment but for the unexpired term only.

3. The members of the commission shall serve without compensation but shall be entitled to reimbursement for all necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties.

4. The secretary of state, or his or her designee, shall serve as the chair and the commissioner of education, or his or her designee, shall serve as the vice-chair of the commission. The presence of a majority of the authorized membership of the commission shall be required for the conduct of official business.

5. The department of education shall provide technical assistance and data to the commission as may be necessary for the commission to carry out its responsibilities pursuant to this article.

§ 57.53. The Amistad commission; duties and responsibilities. The Amistad commission shall have the following responsibilities and duties:

1. to survey and catalog the extent and breadth of education concerning the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country and the contributions of African-Americans to our society presently being incorporated into the curricula and textbooks and taught in the school systems of the state; and, to inventory those African slave trade, American slavery, or relevant African-American history memorials, exhibits and resources which should be incorporated into courses of study at educational institutions and schools throughout the state.

2. to compile a roster of individual volunteers who are willing to share their knowledge and experience in classrooms, seminars and workshops with students and teachers on the subject of the African slave trade, American slavery and the impact of slavery on our society today, and the contributions of African-Americans to our country; and

3. to prepare reports for the governor and the legislature regarding its findings and recommendations on facilitating the inclusion of the African slave trade, American slavery studies, African-American history and special programs in the educational system of the state.

§ 57.54. Authorization.

1. The Amistad commission is authorized to call upon any department, office, division or agency of the state, or of any county, municipality or school district of the state, to supply such data, program reports and other information, as it deems necessary to discharge its responsibilities under this article.

2. These departments, offices, divisions and agencies shall, to the extent possible and not inconsistent with any other law of this state, cooperate with the commission and shall furnish it with such information and assistance as may be necessary or helpful to accomplish the purposes of this article.