LET FREEDOM RING

CURRICULUM GUIDE FOR HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE

In “The Story of American Freedom,” Eric Foner wrote: “No idea is more fundamental to Americans’ sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom.” But, freedom was not a right given to all people. Freedom had to be fought for by every generation. Claims to freedom have also been contradictory. The rhetoric of freedom was central to the abolitionist movement and to slave owners who claimed the freedom to own their “property.”

“The Let Freedom Ring” curriculum is made up of seven lessons that teach students about struggles for freedom and the conflicts that ensued, bringing freedom to life through the analysis of primary sources. The lessons show how the meaning of freedom is contextual and changes over time. Each lesson looks at a particular moment of history to see how freedom can be redefined, taken away or expanded, and driven by the political, social and economic forces of the time.

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Milestones of American Freedom

**August 20, 1619** Twenty Africans are brought by a Dutch ship to Jamestown for sale as indentured servants, marking the beginning of slavery in Colonial America.

**November 11, 1620** The Mayflower Compact is signed on Cape Cod, establishing a government for the colony.

**April 23, 1635** Boston Latin School is established as the first public school in America.

**June 1636** Roger Williams founds Providence and Rhode Island. Williams had been banished from Massachusetts for “new and dangerous opinions” calling for religious and political freedoms.

**March 22, 1638** Anne Hutchinson is banished from Massachusetts for nonconformist religious views that advocate personal revelation over the role of the clergy. She then travels with her family to Rhode Island.

**September 7, 1654** The first Jewish immigrants in North America flee Portuguese rule in Brazil and settle in New Netherland (New York). The Dutch West India Company allows them to stay, over the opposition of Governor Peter Stuyvesant.

**March 4, 1681** Pennsylvania is founded by William Penn, a Quaker. Because of his religious principles, the colony becomes a religious haven.

**1705** In Virginia, slaves are assigned the status of real estate by the Virginia Black Code.

**August 5, 1735** John Peter Zenger is brought to trial for seditious libel, after his newspaper criticized New York Governor William Cosby, but is acquitted after his lawyer successfully convinces the jury that truth is a defense against libel.

**March 22, 1765** The British Parliament passes the Stamp Act, imposing a direct tax on the American colonies for the first time, to offset the high costs of the British military after the Seven Years’ War. It is repealed a year later after mass protests in the colonies.

**November 20, 1767** The British Parliament passes the Townshend Revenue Acts, imposing a new series of taxes on the colonists to offset the costs of administering and protecting the American colonies. In response, patriots boycott British goods throughout the colonies. The British Parliament repealed the act in 1770.

**March 5, 1770** The Boston Massacre occurs when a mob harasses British soldiers who then fire their muskets into the crowd. The soldiers kill five and injure six.

**December 16, 1773** In response to a tax on tea and the granting of a monopoly to the East India Company, the Boston Tea Party occurs. Sons of Liberty disguised as Mohawk Indians board ships with East India tea and dump all 342 containers of tea into the harbor.

**March–May 1774** In response to the Boston Tea Party, Parliament passes the Coercive or Intolerable Acts shutting the port of Boston, ending self-rule by colonists, and protecting royal officials from being sued in colonial courts. The Quebec Act also inflamed colonists by creating a centralized government and tolerating Catholicism.

**April 18, 1775** Paul Revere and William and Dawes send out a warning that British troops are on their way to destroy the patriots’ weapons depot in Concord. The minutemen of Massachusetts mobilize and defeat the British at the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the first battle of the Revolution.

**January 9, 1776** Thomas Paine’s “Common Sense” is published in Philadelphia. Enormously popular, the 50-page pamphlet attacks King George III and builds support for independence.

**July 4, 1776** The Continental Congress votes to declare the United States’ independence from Great Britain.

**June 14, 1777** The flag of the United States, consisting of 13 stars and 13 white and red stripes, is mandated by Congress.

**October 19, 1781** It has been said that the band of the British Army played the ballad, “The world turned upside down,” as the soldiers marched out and surrendered at Yorktown. It was the last major battle in the War for Independence.

**July 8, 1783** The Supreme Court of Massachusetts abolishes slavery in that state.

**September 3, 1783** The Treaty of Paris is signed by the United States and Great Britain, ending the War for Independence.

**August 6, 1787** The Constitutional Convention finishes writing the U.S. Constitution.
December 15, 1791  The Bill of Rights is ratified and becomes part of the U.S. Constitution.

February 10, 1799  Rioters protest the Alien and Sedition Acts, which limited the rights of immigrants and suppressed criticism of the federal government.

August 13, 1831  Nat Turner leads an insurrection of slaves. Turner’s group kills 57 whites, including many women and children. White vigilantes kill dozens of slaves and force hundreds of free people of color into exile.

July 19, 1848  The first women’s rights convention is held in Seneca Falls, N.Y., where Elizabeth Cady Stanton authors the convention’s Declaration of Sentiments, based on the Declaration of Independence. It demands women’s equality and suffrage.

January 25, 1851  Sojourner Truth addresses the first Black Women’s Rights Convention held in Akron, Ohio.

March 6, 1857  Dred Scott v. Sanford: The U.S. Supreme Court rules that Dred Scott, a slave brought to a free state by his master, remains a slave.

January 1, 1863  President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing all slaves in territories held by Confederates and calls for the enlistment of black soldiers into the military.

July 18, 1863  African-American troops of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment led by Colonel Robert G. Shaw assault Rebels at Fort Wagner, S.C. Shaw and half of the 600 men in the regiment lose their lives.

November 19, 1863  President Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address at a ceremony dedicating the battlefield as a National Cemetery.

December 6, 1865  The 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, abolishing slavery in the United States.

July 9, 1868  The 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, establishing citizenship for all people born in the U.S. and ensuring equal protection under the law.

May 22, 1869  The National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) is formed in New York City with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as its first president.

May 27, 1869  The American Woman Suffrage Association is formed in Boston by Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell and Julia Ward Howe. The AWSA and the NWSA join in 1890.

February 3, 1870  The 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, declaring that citizens cannot be denied the right to vote based on “race, color or previous condition of servitude.”

February 25, 1870  Mississippi Republican Hiram Revels becomes the first African-American to be elected a U.S. Senator.

November 5, 1872  Susan B. Anthony and 11 other women are arrested in Rochester, N.Y., for voting in the presidential election.

March 1, 1875  The Civil Rights Act is approved by the U.S. Congress. It banned racial discrimination in hotels, theaters, public transportation and jury selection. The Act is nullified by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1883.

March 5, 1875  Mississippi Republican Blanche K. Bruce, son of a slave mother and a white planter, becomes the first African-American elected to the U.S. Senate to serve a full term, 1875 to 1881.

May 6, 1882  The first Chinese Exclusion Act bars Chinese laborers from entering the United States and bars Chinese immigrants from becoming citizens through naturalization.

November 3, 1884  The U.S. Supreme Court rules in Elk v. Wilkins that Native Americans, although born in the United States, were not wholly subject to the jurisdiction of the United States government, and not protected by the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

July 10, 1890  Wyoming becomes the first state to grant women full suffrage rights.

January 1, 1892  Ellis Island opens as the gateway to America for immigrants. Three quarters of newcomers from 1892 to 1932 are inspected here when they enter the port in New York City.

May 18, 1896  The Supreme Court decides 7–2 in Plessy v. Ferguson that segregation is constitutional if separate but equal facilities are maintained, legitimizing Jim Crow.

March 28, 1898  Resolving a lawsuit brought by Wong Kim Ark, a Chinese-American, the Supreme Court determines that children born in U.S. are citizens, regardless of parents’ race or nationality.
February 12, 1909 Participants in the National Negro Conference, including W.E.B. Du Bois, settlement house leaders Lillian Wald and Mary White Ovington and anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells-Barnett, founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

November 22, 1909 After a rousing speech at Cooper Union by Clara Lemlich, a young Jewish immigrant, 20,000 women garment workers strike for better wages and union recognition.

1913 California enacts an Alien Land Law, which prohibits Asian immigrants from owning land and other forms of property. The law will be strengthened in 1920 and other states will pass similar laws.

October 16, 1916 Margaret Sanger opens the first birth control clinic in Brooklyn, N.Y., and is jailed for violating the Comstock Act (an anti-obscenity law).

November 7, 1916 Jeanette Rankin, Republican of Montana, is the first woman elected to Congress.

November 5, 1918 Al Smith is elected the first Irish Catholic governor of New York.

1918–1921 Palmer Raids. U.S. Attorney General Alexander Mitchell Palmer stages a series of raids on suspected radicals. Tensions increase after bombings by suspected anarchists occur in eight American cities in 1919. Thousands are arrested and imprisoned without charge. Immigrants in particular are targeted. None of the organizations or individuals rounded up or deported are tied to any terrorist activities.

August 19, 1920 The 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, guaranteeing women the right to vote.

May 31, 1921 The murder trial of Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti begins. Though most of the evidence against them is circumstantial, Italian immigrants Sacco and Vanzetti are found guilty of murder and executed on August 23, 1927.

November 13, 1922 The Supreme Court rules, in Takao Ozawa v. United States, that people of Japanese heritage are not eligible to become naturalized citizens.

1924 The Society for Human Rights in Chicago is the country’s earliest known gay rights organization.

June 2, 1924 The Snyder Act, or Indian Citizenship Act, grants Native Americans the full rights of citizenship without having to give up their tribal affiliations. However, many western states restrict voting by Native Americans.

November 4, 1924 Nellie Tayloe Ross of Wyoming and Miriam A. “Ma” Ferguson of Texas are the first women elected governors.

July 12, 1932 Hattie Wyatt Caraway of Arkansas becomes the first woman elected to the U.S. Senate in a special election to succeed her deceased husband.

July 5, 1935 The Wagner Act, named after Senator Robert F. Wagner, is signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, granting workers the right to collective bargaining.

April 9, 1939 Marian Anderson sings to an audience of more than 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial after the Daughters of the American Revolution refused to allow her to sing at Constitution Hall because she was black.

February 19, 1942 After the Attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signs Executive Order 9066, resulting in the internment of 120,000 Japanese and Japanese-Americans.

December 17, 1943 The Chinese Exclusion Act is repealed, making people of Chinese ancestry eligible for U.S. citizenship.

April 15, 1947 Brooklyn Dodger Jackie Robinson becomes the first African-American to play in a major league baseball game.

November 11, 1950 The Mattachine Society, the first national gay rights organization, is formed by Harry Hay, considered by many to be the founder of the gay rights movement.

June 30, 1952 The Walter-McCarran Act grants all people of Asian ancestry the right to become citizens. However, the act sets restrictions on the number who can immigrate.

May 17, 1954 In a unanimous decision, the Supreme Court rules in Brown v. Board of Education that “separate but equal” in education is inherently unequal.

September 21, 1955 Daughters of Bilitis, the first national lesbian political organization in the U.S., is founded by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin.

December 1, 1955 Rosa Parks is arrested for refusing to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Ala., touching off the modern civil rights movement.
November 7, 1956 Dalip Singh Saund, a Democrat from Riverside County, Calif., is the first South Asian to be elected to the U.S. Congress.

August 22, 1959 Republican Hiram Fong is the first person of Chinese descent to be elected to the U.S. Senate.

March 11, 1959 Lorraine Hansberry becomes the first African-American to write a drama performed on Broadway when “A Raisin in the Sun” opens.

April 16–17, 1960 Ella Baker, a longtime civil rights activist, invites students involved in protest sit-ins to a conference in Raleigh, N.C. The group organizes the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a major force in the modern Civil Rights movement.

March 29, 1961 The 23rd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, granting residents of Washington, D.C., the right to vote in U.S. Presidential elections for the first time.


February 19, 1963 Betty Friedan publishes “The Feminine Mystique,” a precursor to the women’s liberation movement.

June 12, 1963 Civil Rights leader Medgar Evers is assassinated by a white supremacist in Jackson, Miss.

August 28, 1963 The March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom brings 250,000 Americans to the capital, setting in motion the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his famous “I Have a Dream” speech.

January 23, 1964 The 24th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is ratified, ensuring that the right to vote in all federal elections cannot be taken away by the United States or any states due to failure to pay any poll or other tax.

June 21, 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer volunteers Michael Schwerner, a Columbia University graduate student, James Chaney, a young Mississippi activist and Andrew Goodman, a student at Queens College/CUNY, are murdered. Eighteen men were charged with conspiracy to commit murder. Seven were indicted on civil rights violations. One man was convicted of murder almost 35 years later.

July 2, 1964 The Omnibus Civil Rights Act is passed, making it illegal to discriminate based on race, religion or gender in places and businesses that serve the public.

August 22, 1964 Fannie Lou Hamer, chairwoman of the integrated Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, gives testimony to the Democratic Party National Convention in Atlantic City, N.J. She unsuccessfully demands that the M.F.D.P. be seated as the Mississippi delegation in place of the racist all-white delegation.

November 3, 1964 Patsy Takemoto Mink becomes the first woman of color as well as the first Pacific Islander elected to the House of Representatives.

March 7, 1965 The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and SNCC (the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) lead a peaceful demonstration against unjust voter registration tests in Selma, Alabama. Under the direction of Governor George Wallace, law enforcement officers brutally attack hundreds of demonstrators with clubs and tear gas, in the infamous “Bloody Sunday.”

March 21–25, 1965 March on Montgomery, Ala. led by Martin Luther King, Jr. The four-day march ends with a rally outside the state capitol in Montgomery on March 25, attended by 25,000 people.

July 1, 1965 The Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 is signed by President Lyndon Johnson on Liberty Island, eliminating the racist quota system of the National Origins Act of 1924.

August 6, 1965 The Voting Rights Act is passed, authorizing the U.S. Attorney-General to send federal examiners to register black voters, and suspend all literacy tests in states where less than 50% of the voting-age population had been registered or had voted in the 1964 election.

November 1, 1966 Edward W. Brooke of Massachusetts is elected the first African-American U.S. senator since Reconstruction.

June 30, 1966 The National Organization for Women (NOW) is formed to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

November 8, 1966 Barbara Jordan becomes the first African-American to serve in the Texas state senate since 1883. She later serves in the U.S. Congress.

August 30, 1967 Thurgood Marshall becomes the first African-American to serve on the U.S. Supreme Court.
November 7, 1967  Carl Stokes is elected mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, the first African-American mayor of a major city.

February 14, 1968  United Farm Workers President Cesar Chavez begins a 25-day fast to organize support for migrant farm workers.

June 27, 1969  The Stonewall riots begin, when patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar in New York’s Greenwich Village, fight back during a police raid. The gay rights movement becomes a mass movement for equal rights.

May 1, 1970  Lesbians in the women's liberation movement form a “Lavender Menace” action to protest homophobia at a National Organization for Women (NOW) conference.

August 26, 1970  Betty Friedan leads the Women's Strike For Equality in New York City on the 50th anniversary of women's suffrage.

November 3, 1970  The Bronx elects Herman Badillo the first Puerto Rican to the U.S. Congress.

March 22, 1971  The Equal Rights Amendment was proposed by Congress after a 48-year struggle. It has never been ratified.

March 23, 1971  The 26th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution gives 18 to 20-year-olds the right to vote.

September 26, 1971  Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm announces she will run for the presidency, the first African-American woman to run for the office.

June 23, 1972  Title IX bans sex discrimination in educational institutions that receive federal financial assistance.

August 12, 1972  Wendy Rue founds the National Association for Female Executives (NAFE), the largest business women's organization in the U.S.

January 22, 1973  Roe v. Wade is decided by the U.S. Supreme Court. The court ruled that laws prohibiting abortions violate a constitutional right to privacy. Texas attorney Sarah Weddington argued the case.

September 20, 1973  Billie Jean King defeats Bobby “No broad can beat me” Riggs in the battle of the sexes tennis match.

August 6, 1975  The Voting Rights Act is amended to include rights for those with little or no proficiency in the English language.

July 7, 1981  President Ronald Reagan nominates Sandra Day O'Connor as the first woman to serve as U.S. Supreme Court Justice.

December 14, 1985  Wilma Mankiller is sworn in as principal chief of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. She is the first woman in modern American history to lead a Native American tribe.

August 29, 1989  Ileana Ros-Lehtinen is the first Latina woman as well as the first Cuban-American elected to Congress.

June 1, 1990  The Hispanic Federation is founded. It has registered tens of thousands of voters in New York City under the leadership of Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez.

November 4, 1992  Carol Moseley Braun becomes the first African-American woman elected to the Senate; Nydia Velázquez becomes the first Puerto Rican woman elected to Congress.

March 12, 1993  Janet Reno becomes the nation’s first female Attorney General.

May 20, 1993  The National Voter Registration Act is signed by President Bill Clinton, which allows voter registration at the same time as an application for renewal of a driver’s license or motor vehicle registration. In addition, it provides for voter registration opportunities for those seeking services from all state offices and state-funded programs, and voter registration by mail.

October 8, 1993  Toni Morrison becomes the first African-American to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

December 17, 1993  Judith Rodin is named president of the University of Pennsylvania; she is the first woman to head an Ivy League institution.

January 23, 1997  Madeleine Albright becomes the nation's first female Secretary of State.

May 20, 1997  Major General Claudia Kennedy is promoted to Lieutenant General; she is the first female three-star general in the U.S. Army.
October 1, 1997  Virginia Apuzzo becomes the highest ranking openly lesbian official in the Clinton Administration when she is appointed Assistant to the President for Administration and Management.

October 26, 2001  In response to the 9/11 attacks, legislation known as the Patriot Act is passed with little debate, giving federal agencies broad new powers that may impinge upon the civil liberties of citizens and non-citizens.

March 24, 2002  Halle Berry becomes the first African-American woman to win an Academy Award® for Best Actress.

June 26, 2003  The U.S. Supreme Court rules 6–3 in Lawrence v. Texas that sodomy laws in the U.S. are unconstitutional.

September 20, 2003  Nearly 1,000 Immigrant Workers Freedom Riders begin their cross-country journey to highlight the struggle for immigrant and labor rights.

May 17, 2004  Same-sex marriages become legal in Massachusetts.

May 1, 2006  Hundreds of thousands of immigrants and their supporters attend nationwide rallies and skip work, school and shopping to influence immigration legislation and build support for immigrant rights.

January 4, 2007  Nancy Pelosi becomes the first woman elected to serve as speaker of the House of Representatives.

November 4, 2008  Barack Obama, U.S. Senator from Illinois, is elected the first African-American president of the United States.