

Teaching American History Project  
**A Justification: Southern Support of Slavery**  
By: Karen Diaz

**Grade:** 9-12

**Length of Period:** 1 class period

**Inquiry:** Students will be asked to analyze the document “William Harper’s Apology” (1837) via the think pair share method. Students will be answering the essential questions:

- How was slavery justified in this particular source?
- What assumptions does the author make about slaves, women and the economy and how does this help or hurt his argument?

**Objectives:**

Students will know and be able to:

- Determine the intended audience of the source
- Explain the author’s justification for slavery
- Assess the strength of his argument

**Materials:**

- <http://www.nathanielturner.com/educationhistorynegro12.htm> (See attached)
- Graphic organizer (See attached)
- Chapter 1: “Cotton Comes North” (pages 2-7) of the book Complicity (See Attached PDF file)
- Homework Questions for “Cotton Come North”

**Activities:**

- Recall information already learned about slavery in America
- Handout Source: “William Harper’s Apology” and the graphic organizer
- Taking turns, students will read the document aloud in class
- Using the Think Pair Share Method I will have students, by themselves, think about and write the arguments used in the reading to justify slavery
- I will then pair the students so they can share their thoughts with each other.
- At this point they should compare/share “notes” to ensure they have a complete list of the ways in which the author justifies slavery.
- In addition to sharing these observations I will then have the pairs discuss the assumptions made about slaves, women, and the economy
- Students should write their responses on the graphic organizer provided
- Pairs will then be asked to share their analysis of the justifications and assumptions with the rest of the class

- After the class has discussed the shared responses ask students to verbally share their opinion of the following question: Overall will Harper's Apology help or hurt support for slavery? Explain
- Students should then write their responses on their organizers along with their response to the exit ticket question: What, according to Harper, is the role of slavery in the creation of textile mills?
- The exit slip question is a way to get them thinking about New England's role in the economics of slavery.
- Optional - For homework students will be asked to read Pgs 2-7 from Complicity and answer the provided questions

**Assessment:**

- Informal assessment comes from observation of students working individually and then in pairs as they analyze the written document and fill out the graphic organizer.
- Participation in partner and full group discussion
- Individual questions and comments from students
- The graphic organizer will be collected at the end of the lesson for a formal assessment

**CT State Standards:**

- Cite evidence from a source to determine an author's purpose and intended audience
- Analyze and explain multipurpose visual materials
- Compose a thesis statement using primary and secondary sources
- Ask relevant questions related to social studies/history to initiate, extend or debate a point of view during a discussion
- Use evidence to form an interpretation of a historical event
- Evaluate primary and secondary interpretations of a historical event

Graphic Organizer for William Harper's Apology

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Channel \_\_\_\_\_

Justification	Description- Use you own words to summarize but an occasional quote may be helpful
"Slavery was forced upon us..."	It is part of a struggle for the white man's very existence without it the white race would be in a state of ..."destitution, weakness and misery"

Assumptions made...

What assumptions does the author make about slaves, women and the economy and how does this help or hurt his argument?

Assumption made about..	Description/Assessment
Slaves	
Women	
Economy	
Other?	

Overall will Harper's Apology help or hurt support for slavery? Explain

**Exit Slip Question:**

What, according to Harper, is the role of slavery in the creation of textile mills?

## William Harper Bio (1790-1847)

**William Harper** (1790-1847, Class of 1808), first a lawyer, went on to become a noted South Carolina judge and U.S. Senator. He was elected to the lower house of the state legislature in 1828. That same year he was elected a chancellor of the state and served until 1830, when he was elected judge of the circuit court of appeals. He later resigned and again became a chancellor, which he remained until his death.

Harper also served on the Board of Trustees of South Carolina College.

The articulation of pro-slavery literature probably rests with South Carolina Chancellor (or Chief Judge) William Harper, whose many orations, legal decisions, and articles contributed immensely to the legality of slavery in Southern culture.

\* \* \* \* \*

## William Harper's Apology (1837)



Slavery was forced upon us by the most extremist exigency of circumstances in a struggle for very existence. Without it, it is doubtful whether a white man would now be existing on this continent--certain that, if there were, they would be in a states of the utmost destitution, weakness, and misery. I neither deprecate nor resent the gift of slavery.

The Africans brought to us had been slaves in their own country and only underwent a change of masters...that there are great evils in a society where slavery exists, and that the institution is liable to great abuse, I have already said. But the whole of human life is a system of evils and compensations. The free laborer has few real guarantees from society, while security is one of the compensations of the slave's humble position. There have been fewer murders of slaves than of parents, children, and apprentices in society where slavery does not exist. The slave offers no temptation to the murderer, nor does he really suffer injury from his master. Who but a driveling fanatic has thought of the necessity of protecting domestic animals from the cruelty of their owners?

...It is true that the slaved is driven to labor by stripes (lashes); and if the object of punishment be to produce obedience or reformation with the lest permanent

inure, it is the best method of punishment. Men claim that this intolerable. It is not degrading to a slave, nor is it felt to be so. Is it degrading to a child?

Oidium (hatred) has been cast upon our legislation on account of its forbidding the elements of education to be communicated to slaves. But in truth what injury has been done them by this? He who works during the day with his hands does not read in intervals of leisure for his amusement or the improvement of his mind--or the exception is so rare as scarcely to need the being provided for. If there were any chance of elevating their rank, the denial of the rudiments of education might be a matter of hardship. But this they know cannot be and that further attainments would be useless to them.

...Supposing finally that the abolitionists should effect their purpose. What would be the result? The first and most obvious effect would be to put an end to the cultivation of our great Southern staple (cotton)...the cultivation of the great staple drops cannot be carried on in any portion of our own country where there are not slaves...Even if it were possible to procure laborers at all, what planter would venture to carry on his operations? Imagine an extensive rice or cotton plantation cultivated by free laborers who might perhaps strike for an increase of wages at a season when the neglect of a few days would insure the destruction of the whole crop. I need hardly say that these staples cannot be produced to any extent where the proprietor of the soil cultivates it with his own hands.

And what would be the effect of putting an end to the cultivation of these staples and thus annihilating, at a blow, two-thirds or three-fourths of our foreign commerce? Can any sane mind contemplate such a result without terror? Our slavery has not only given existence to millions of slaves within our own territories; it has given the means of subsistence, and therefore of existence to millions of free men in our Confederate States, enabling them to send forth their swarms to overspread the plains and forests of the West and appear as the harbingers of civilization. Not only on our continent, but on the other it has given existence (in textile mills) to hundreds of thousands and the means of comfortable subsistence to millions. A distinguished citizen of our state has lately stated that our great staple, cotton, has contributed more than anything else of later times to the progress of civilization. By enabling the poor to obtain cheap, and becoming clothing, it has inspired a taste for comfort, the first stimulus to civilization.

**Sources:**

Chapter VI. "The Instruction of Negroes."  
In Edgar W. Knight.. [\*A Documentary History of Education in the South before 1860\*](#). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1953



Chapter 10 "Up From Slavery: Educational and other Rights of Negroes." In Edgar W. Knight and Clifton L. Hall. [\*Readings in American Educational History\*](#). New York Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951.

Many states had laws prohibiting the education of blacks; here black youngsters are turned away at the school door

OPTIONAL HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT BASED ON COMPLICITY READING

Ms. Diaz

Homework question for "Cotton Comes North" Pgs 2-7 form Complicity

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Channel \_\_\_\_\_

1. What did the mayor of New York City want the city to do in 1860 and what reason did he give?
2. What was the "lifblood" of the New York City economy?
3. Why does the author call cotton "national currency"?

