



BREAKING BIAS

LESSONS FROM THE AMISTAD

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS,
INTRODUCTION,
AND
CREATING BRAVE
SPACES**

NEW JERSEY STATE BAR FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

There is an inherent worth in learning history and being able to connect it to the values of our modern society. This guide looks at our history through an anti-bias lens and focuses on the impact of the African American story on our culture today.

In 2002 the Amistad Bill was signed into a law that required all boards of education in New Jersey to incorporate African American contributions and history into curricula in a cohesive manner; African American history *is* American history. The legislation also established New Jersey's Amistad Commission, which created a valuable online curriculum and resources. You can find these materials on the Commission's website at www.njamistadcurriculum.net.

This guide is intended to be complementary to the Commission's curriculum. Where the Amistad curriculum is focused on the history of African Americans from the times of ancient Africa to the present, this guide serves as a tool tying the law to the lessons of the Amistad. By taking a deeper look at the overt and covert impact of racism and empathy, equity and equality, class and justice, educators and students will come to understand the systemic themes which arise from African American history in this country.

Being trained in the use of the Amistad Commission's Curriculum, as well as the New Jersey State Bar Foundation's Guide will aid educators in fulfilling their responsibilities to integrate African American contributions and history into everyday curriculum. We hope that you will find all of these resources to be enlightening and enriching to your students.

Elissa Zylbershlag
Former Director of Conflict
Resolution and Anti-Bias Initiatives,
New Jersey State Bar Foundation

Lillie J. Edwards
Ph.D., Co-Chair, Curriculum Committee,
New Jersey Amistad Commission

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEVELOPED, WRITTEN and EDITED BY Dr. Donnetrice Allison, Dr. Deirdre Foreman, Scott Hirschfeld, Jessica Taube, and Elissa Zylbershlag

CONTRIBUTIONS BY Dr. Davida Harewood and Dr. Will Guzmán

DESIGNED BY Dianne Kirsch

THANK YOU TO Linda McDonald Carter



Creating Brave Spaces

Talking about race and other facets of identity can engender strong feelings. It is important to create environments in which students can participate in these conversations constructively, and express opinions and questions without fear of judgement. This requires that educators create time to teach and practice social and emotional skills, including developing an awareness of one's own biases, building empathy, managing conflict and appreciating the perspectives of others.

"Safe spaces" is often used to describe settings that are conducive to positive dialogue. However, social justice educators have more recently reconceptualized these settings as "brave spaces." "Safe space" suggests that participants will not need to experience discomfort when discussing sensitive topics, but talking about issues such as race often involves difficulty and risk. Since members of marginalized groups often experience such struggles in their everyday lives, the expectation of "safety" for majority group members can be seen as an exercise of privilege. "Brave spaces" conveys the idea that all participants will embrace the discomfort of hard conversations with courage and openness.¹

The following group expectations are offered as a set of understandings that can be introduced to students as you work to build brave spaces. They can be adapted to suit the age and experience level of students.

¹ Arao, Brian and Clemens, Kristi. "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A New Way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice." *In The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections From Social Justice Educators*, edited by Lisa M. Landreman, 135-150. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2013.

GROUP NORM	EXPLANATION
Recognize your own bias	We all have prejudices. They have been learned and can be unlearned over time. Change is a process.
Respect others	Value the perspectives of others. Listen openly and communicate nonjudgmentally.
"Try on" new ways of thinking	Let your guard down in response to ideas that are different; consider points of view that are new.
Speak from your own experience	Use "I-statements" that express your personal feelings; avoid "you should statements" that pass judgement on others.
Assume good will	Look for the good intentions of others before taking offense. At the same time, challenge biases in others directly and constructively.
Own your intentions and impact	Avoid being defensive when your words or actions hurt others. Reflect on your meaning and how you have affected others.
Ask questions	Be curious and open-minded. Don't avoid questions for fear that they won't come out right. Try your best to frame questions respectfully.
Find comfort in discomfort	Some discussions will make us feel uneasy. Remember that these feelings are a necessary part of learning and growing.
Conflicts may arise	Disagreements and hurt feelings will happen. Use conflict resolution skills and manage disagreements with civility.
Confidentiality	Don't reveal the identities of actual people when sharing instances of bias. Everything said in the room stays in the room.
Take space, make space	Participate and add your voice to the conversation. If you are taking too much space, step back and make room for others.