

**African American Women Workers
in 19th Century and 20th Century Philadelphia**

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Abstract

I teach a course on African and African American Studies to ninth grade repeaters as well as tenth graders. This curriculum unit is designed to supplement the African American history survey course during Women's History Month in March.

Philadelphia is a city that has a rich history of African American contributions that our students need to learn and know. Many prominent African American Philadelphia women merchants, religious leaders, teachers, nurses and political leaders deserve attention. Indeed, the history of African American women focuses on women as just domestic workers, cooks, maids, and laundresses. Opportunities for African American women were created as these women were denied entrance to white establishments, and they provided services for their own communities.

With more than two centuries of African American slavery in the South, black labor built the antebellum southern economy. Fieldwork provided by men, women, and children produced tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar cane to create a thriving agricultural economy. This labor defined as well a social class system, and changed the role of African Americans. Jobs designated by planters became known as "women's work". Cleaning, cooking, and child care for the master's family and home fit this category.

The guiding challenge is to include African American women laborers in African American history.