



MARY S. PEAKE
+
BARBARA JOHNS
A FIGHT FOR
ACADEMIC EQUALITY



Justice in the Classroom

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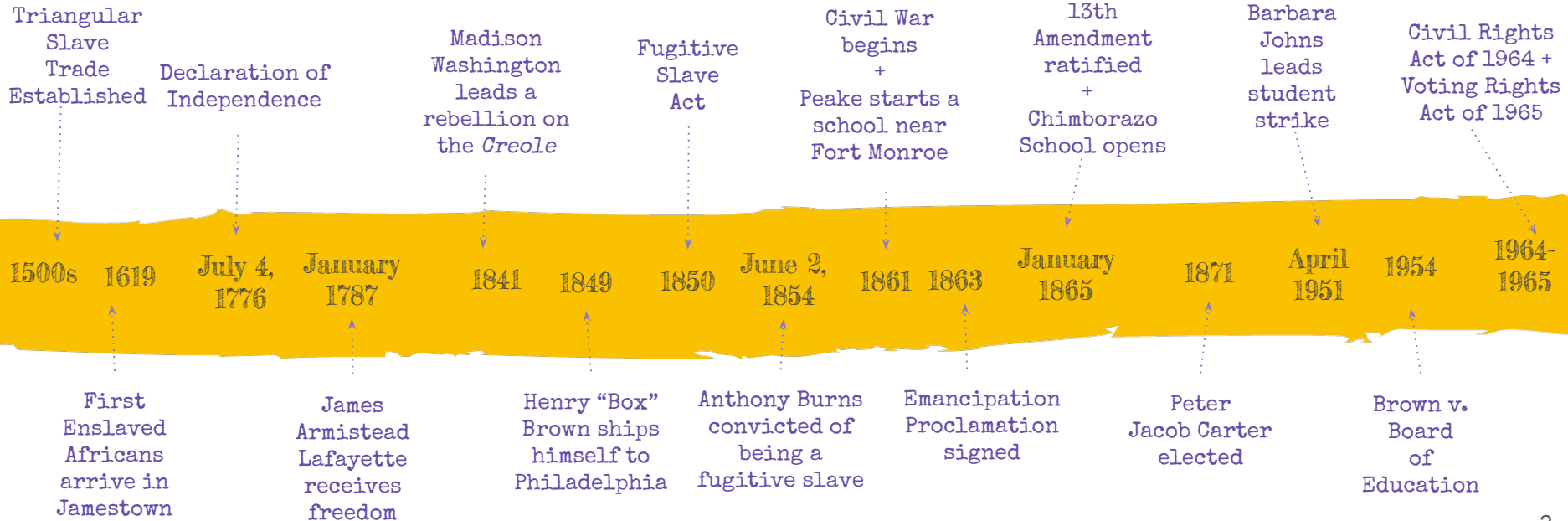
DETERMINED

THE 400-YEAR STRUGGLE FOR BLACK EQUALITY

In a partnership with VMHC, the John Marshall Center has created a set of lesson plans to complement the VMHC's exhibition,

Determined: the 400-year struggle for Black Equality

This is lesson 4: MARY S. PEAKE + BARBARA JOHNS
A FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AND EQUALITY (MS)





THROUGHOUT U.S. HISTORY, AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN HAVE PLAYED AN UNDENIABLE ROLE IN FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM AND EQUALITY.

VISIONARY TEACHERS AND STUDENTS ALIKE RADICALLY IMAGINED A NEW WORLD OUTSIDE OF WHAT THEIR EXISTING CONDITIONS PRESCRIBED.

BY UTILIZING EDUCATION AS A PRIMARY TOOL FOR THEIR RESISTANCE, TEACHING BECAME A WAY TO FIGHT FOR EQUALITY, BOTH IN SLAVERY AND FREEDOM.

-OUR ANCESTOR'S WILDEST DREAMS BY DUNN + NEAL

OBJECTIVE

DESCRIBE HOW THE ACTIONS OF MARY S. PEAKE AND BARBARA JOHNS SHOW THEIR COMMITMENT TO THEIR FIGHT FOR EQUALITY, DESPITE THE CHALLENGES THEY FACED.

V O C A B U L A R Y

You Will Find The Following Terms Throughout Your Activity.
Understanding These Terms Will Be Important For Completing This Assignment

Academic

Relating to education.

Literacy

The ability to read and write.

Oppress

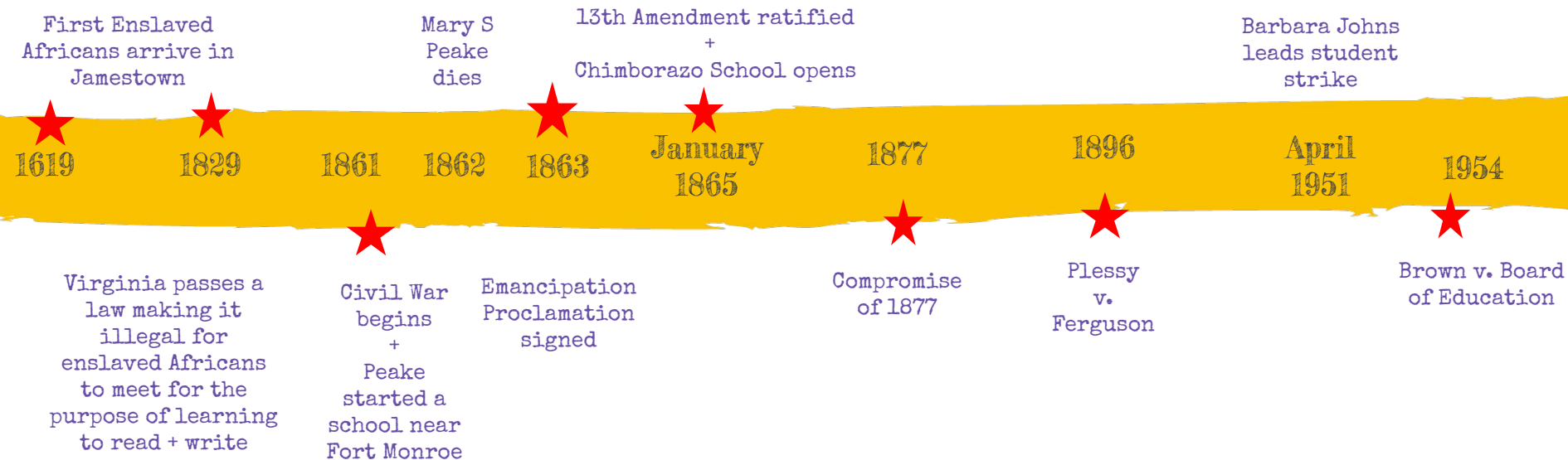
The cruel or unjust treatment of one person by another person in a position of control.

Brown vs. The Board of Education

1954 Supreme Court case which ruled that segregation in public schools was unconstitutional.

USE THE FOLLOWING TIMELINE TO UNDERSTAND KEY EVENTS THROUGHOUT THIS TIME PERIOD + U.S. HISTORY

CLICK ON THE RED  TO LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH EVENT



A drawing depicting Mary S. Peake teaching a group of students



A "CONTRABAND" SCHOOL.



A group of students in March 1981 protesting

What do you see in image 1?
Be specific.

What do you see in image 2?
Be specific.

What do you think these images have in common?

Predict: How can education be used to fight for equality?

MARY S. PEAKE

Peake was born free in Norfolk, Virginia, in 1823. At a young age, she was sent to live with her aunt in Alexandria near Washington, DC. There, she attended a school for African Americans; however, after ten years, her schooling was interrupted when the United States Congress enacted a law that stopped education for free Blacks in Virginia. As a result, all schools for free Black people were closed, and education for enslaved Black people was outlawed.

After relocating with her family to Hampton, Virginia, Peake's teaching career began. While supporting herself as a dressmaker, Peake secretly taught enslaved and free African Americans of all ages to read and write in her home, even though it was forbidden by Virginia law.

During the Civil War, Peake was one of a small number of Black women sanctioned by the U.S government to teach despite local laws prohibiting the education of African Americans. As a result, Peake started a school near Fort Monroe for those who fled enslavement. She initially taught her students at the foot of an oak tree (now known as Emancipation Oak), but ultimately was provided a cottage to serve as her classroom, which is recognized as the very first building of what is now Hampton University.

Following the Civil War, her teachings helped the African American community in Hampton to develop a literacy rate that outpaced most other southern communities. Peake's school served as a model for the freedmen's schools established throughout the South during Reconstruction.

READ THE PASSAGE TO THE LEFT.

● USE THE **RED DOTS** TO MARK CHALLENGES AFRICAN AMERICANS FACED IN EDUCATION.

● USE THE **GREEN DOTS** TO MARK THE ACTIONS + RESISTANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN EDUCATION.

*REFLECT:
WHAT ARE YOUR TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS
TEXT? WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?*

A young teacher describes her experience with the children at Peake's School in Hampton:

"At the end of the first week there was a decided improvement manifested, and in four weeks you hardly ever saw one hundred and fifty children more cleanly in their persons and apparel. Their lessons were, in most cases, quickly and correctly learned, and their behavior was kind and affectionate toward each other, while in singing the sweet little Sabbath school songs, I should not hesitate to put them side by side with the best of our Sabbath-school scholars at the North. And they so fully appreciate my humble efforts in their behalf, that my table in the school room is loaded, morning and noon, with oranges, lemons, apples, figs, candies, and other sweet things too numerous to mention, all testifying their love to me, although I can do so little for them."



HOW DOES THE QUOTE ABOVE DESCRIBE
THE CHILDREN AT THE HAMPTON
SCHOOL?

WHY IS THIS DESCRIPTION IMPORTANT?



FOLLOWING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, WHAT CHALLENGES DID AFRICAN AMERICANS CONTINUE TO FACE IN EDUCATION?



DESPITE THE CHALLENGES THEY FACED AND YEARS SEPARATING THEM, WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE LIVES AND ACTIONS OF MARY S. PEAKE AND BARBARA JOHNS?



DESCRIBE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES AFRICAN AMERICANS FACED IN ACCESSING AN EDUCATION WHILE THEY WERE ENSLAVED.

DESCRIBE MARY S. PEAKE'S EFFORTS TO HELP AFRICAN AMERICANS ACHIEVE EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION.

BARBARA JOHNS

Barbara Johns was born in New York City in 1935, and grew up during the Jim Crow era in Prince Edward County, Virginia, where Black and white students attended separate schools.

The conditions of the African-American schools were much worse than the whites-only schools. Johns attended Robert Russa Moton High School, the only high school for Black students, which suffered from overcrowding and poor facilities. The building was built to fit 150 students, but by the 1950s had more than 400 students enrolled. The county's all-white school board erected three tar-paper-covered buildings on school grounds as a solution, but those were so shabby that they were described by Black students as "chicken shacks."

On April 23, 1951, Johns took a stand against the unequal treatment of African-American students in the county. She bravely stood in front of 450 of her fellow students at an assembly and delivered an impassioned speech urging them to join her in a strike against the school district. Following her lead, the students left the school in protest of the sub-par conditions. This walkout was one of the first of its kind across the nation.

Johns's courage and the persistence of her fellow students inspired the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored Persons) to pursue a legal challenge to the conditions at Moton H.S. Attorneys Oliver W. Hill and Spottswood Robinson III agreed to help, and brought a suit against Prince Edward County that sought to end racial segregation in schools. This case, *Davis v. Prince Edward*, would eventually become part of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the 1954 United States Supreme Court case that declared "separate but equal" schools unconstitutional and ended school segregation across the nation.

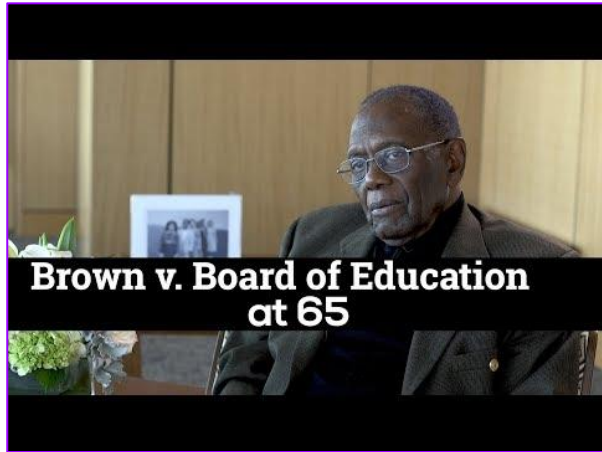
To honor Johns's contributions, it was recently announced that a statue of Barbara will soon represent the Commonwealth of Virginia in the U.S. Capitol building, following the 2020 removal of the Robert E. Lee statue which stood for 111 years in that location.

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REFLECT:
WHAT ARE YOUR TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS
TEXT? WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE?

WATCH ONE (OR BOTH) OF THE INTERVIEWS FROM PARTICIPANTS
IN THE WALK OUT + ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW



*WHOSE INTERVIEW DID YOU WATCH? WHAT
WAS THEIR CONNECTION TO THE WALK OUT?*

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOUR INTERVIEWEE DESCRIBE?

*OR TROUBLING ABOUT THIS INTERVIEW?
WHAT DO YOU FIND SURPRISING, INTERESTING,*



DESCRIBE SOME OF THE CHALLENGES AFRICAN AMERICANS FACED IN ACCESSING AN EQUAL EDUCATION DURING THE JIM CROW ERA.

DESCRIBE BARBARA JOHNS'S ROLE IN THE STRUGGLE TO INCREASE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS.