**Introduction**

The documentary, *Octavius V. Catto: A Legacy for the 21st Century*, was produced as a complement to *Octavius V Catto: Remembering a Forgotten Hero*, a biography of Catto geared toward middle and high school students. The text of this biography, numerous primary sources, and additional information about Octavius Catto, his milieu, and his legacy are available at [ushistory.org/catto](http://ushistory.org/catto).

This guide provides suggested strategies to use **BEFORE**, **DURING**, and **AFTER** watching the film with your students. The lesson ideas are meant to be flexible and adaptable for use with students in middle or high school.

**Important Note**

There are violent scenes including a fatal shooting depicted in the film. Consider the impact that viewing gun violence may have on your students before showing it to your class.

**BEFORE VIEWING**

* **Words Before Watching:** *In order to understand the film, students should be familiar with the following terms.*
	+ **Fugitive Slave Act** **of 1850 –** Passed as part of the Compromise of 1850, this strengthening of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 made it much easier for Southern slave holders to reclaim escapees and made even free blacks vulnerable to kidnapping and enslavement.
	+ **Abolitionists –** People who advocated against the institution of slavery. Although Philadelphia was home to many abolitionists and abolition organizations, the majority of city residents were either indifferent to or supportive of slavery.
	+ **Institute for Colored Youth (ICY) –** A school that educated black students with a rigorous, Classical curriculum. Octavius Catto attended and taught at this illustrious institution. Since the late 18th century, Philadelphia had been a center of free black life. Institutions such as Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, and the Institute for Colored Youth were anchors of the community, particularly for members of the black elite like the Catto family.
	+ **Pythians –** The baseball team for which Catto played second base. The team name is a reference to the ancient Greek Oracle of Delphi, a reflection of the Classical education received by the many ICY students and graduates were members of the team.
	+ **Streetcars –** During Catto’s era, these horse-drawn conveyances were a widespread form of transportation. Many of these privately-owned streetcar lines forbade black passengers or only permitted them to ride gripping the outside of the vehicle.
	+ **Moyamensing –** A neighborhood to the south of Catto’s home and school, populated in large part by unskilled Irish immigrants who viewed African Americans as a threat to their livelihood. The unofficial leader of the community was **William McMullen**, a bar owner, political operative, and head of the Moya Hose Company, a combination firefighting team and street gang.
	+ **Democratic Party –** The dominant political party in Philadelphia when black men gained the right to vote through passage of the 15th Amendment in 1868. William McMullen and his followers were loyal Democratic voters, but newly enfranchised blacks overwhelmingly supported the Republican Party, known as “the Party of Lincoln.”

**DURING THE FILM**

* To maintain focus and attention, tell students to make a time-line in their notebook, skipping a few lines between each of the following dates. *(Events covered in the film on the dates are noted in italics)* :
	+ **1839 –** *Catto born to mixed race parents in South Carolina*
	+ **1848 –** *The Catto family moves to Philadelphia*
	+ **1854 –** *Catto enrolls in the ICY*
	+ **1859 –** *Catto returns to teach at the ICY*
	+ **1863 –** *Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania; Catto recruits troop of volunteers but they are rejected*
	+ **1865 –** *Civil War and slavery end*
	+ **1867 –** *Pythians apply to join state and national baseball organizations; rejected*
	+ **1867 –** *Catto and Le Count succeed in integrating streetcars*
	+ **1868 –** *14th Amendment grants citizenship to anyone born in USA*
	+ **1870 –** *15th Amendment gives voting rights to black men*
* Wait until the end of the film to fill in the final date, **1871** *(Mayoral election in Philadelphia, the first in which blacks can vote, is marred by widespread violence against blacks. Catto, one of six black men shot that day, is assassinated outside of his home by Frank Kelly, a member of the Moya Hose Club.*

**AFTER THE FILM**

What follows is a series of quotations taken from the statements made by experts in the film. Following each quotation are three types of questions:

-Evidence Gathering asks students to recall factual information presented in the film.

-Quotation Analysis invites students to consider word choices, to evaluate the validity of statements, and/or to come up with their own interpretation of the speaker’s meaning.

-21st Century Connections provokes student to compare Catto’s world to their own milieu and to consider the on-going struggle for social justice and equality.

These questions can be answered using information from the film or from both the film and biography.

**Suggested Strategies**

* Put students in small groups, each with a different quotation. Have them share their quotation and responses with the whole class.
* Copy the quotations onto pieces of chart paper.
	+ Have students stand by the quotation that they find the most impactful and then have a few students share why they made this choice. Then, continue by having them go to the most interesting, the least accurate, the most confusing, etc., stopping each time to take responses from different students. Afterward, have them answer the questions for one of the quotations they selected in the activity.
	+ Give students post-it notes to answer questions about the quotations of their choice. Share responses with the whole class.
* Use the quotation(s) and question(s) most relevant to your class as the basis of a whole class discussion, an “exit ticket” prompt, a homework writing assignment, a digital discussion board prompt, or a “bell-ringer” activity at the beginning of the next class meeting.

**Quotations & Questions**

**NAOMI NELSON**: “Octavius V. Catto exemplified the best qualities of his generation. He excelled in sports, he excelled in academics, he excelled in community leadership. He was the future perfect for the African American community.”

Evidence Gathering:

*How did “Octavius V. Catto exemplify the best qualities of his generation”?*

Quotation Analysis:

*What do you think Naomi Nelson means when she states that “He was the future perfect for the African American community”?*

21st Century Connections:

*What do you think are the best qualities of your generation?*

*Who exemplifies these qualities in your school, neighborhood, or on the national or international level?*

**NAOMI NELSON**: “There was this urgency for not just enjoying the trappings of freedom, but the urgency to participate in the process. The urgency to rise above all expectations, the urgency to break down the barriers. And that’s why many people call this period of Catto the first Civil Rights Movement. This desire to exercise your freedom is just so human that why not? Why not?”

Evidence Gathering:

*What actions did Catto and other black activists of his era participate in that could be considered part of a civil rights movement?*

Quotation Analysis:

*What do you think Ms. Nelson means by the phrase “trappings of freedom”?*

*This quotation ends with Ms. Nelson twice asking “Why not?” What do you think she means by this question?*

21st Century Connections:

*Do you think that young people today still feel a sense of urgency to participate in the struggle for freedom (equal rights for all, expanded access to educational and economic opportunity, social justice etc.) or do you think that they are more interested in enjoying the “trappings” that these freedoms can provide?*

**ERICA ARMSTRONG DUNBAR**: “In many ways, Philadelphia is one of the most precarious cities of the north, at least for free black Philadelphians.”

Evidence Gathering:

*In what ways was Philadelphia a precarious place to live for black Philadelphians?*

Quotation Analysis:

*Why do you think Erica Armstrong Dunbar specifies that Philadelphia is particularly precarious for “free” black Philadelphians in the mid-19th century as compared to other northern cities?*

21st Century Connections:

*Do you think Philadelphia is still a precarious place to live for black residents? Why or why not?*

*From what you have heard on the news or learned from friends, family, and/or in school, where do you think might be the most precarious place to live for African Americans today? What are some of the most safe and secure places?*

**DAN BIDDLE**: “Mob was a verb in that era. It was a verb that described what white men and boys quite often did if there was an anti-slavery lecture or meeting in town. They would mob that event.”

Evidence Gathering:

*What instances of mob activity are you aware of that occurred during Catto’s era?*

Quotation Analysis:

*Why do you think Dan Biddle chose to focus on the word “mob”?*

*Are there synonyms he could have used that would have been equally or more powerful?*

21st Century Connections:

*What are some examples of mob-like activity that have occurred in recent months or years?*

*Why do you think people tend to behave differently in a mob than they would on their own or in a small group?*

**REVEREND MARK TYLER** : “In a lot of respects he was the Jackie Robinson of his day. Like today, sports is kind of like the last frontier, if you can break the barrier in sports, then the rest of society kind of follows suit.”

Evidence Gathering:

*In what ways was Octavius Catto similar to Jackie Robinson?*

Quotation Analysis:

*What do you think Reverend Tyler means when he describes sports as “the last frontier”?*

21st Century Connections:

*Who might be called the Jackie Robinson of our day and why? Can you think of a “Jackie Robinson” who is not African American? Not male? Not American?*

*Do you agree with Reverend Tyler that “if you can break the barrier in sports, then the rest of society kind of follows suit”?*

**ALLEN GUELZO**: “The one thing that keeps this from going lethal is the fact that blacks cannot vote. So blacks are, for all practical purposes, politically powerless.”

Evidence Gathering:

*What group of people lived in proximity to the center of the elite black community? Why did they feel threatened by African Americans?*

Quotation Analysis:

*Can you make Allen Guelzo’s quotation more clear by filling in the blank:*

*“The one thing that keeps this\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ from going lethal is the fact that blacks cannot vote.”*

21st Century Connections:

*Are there groups in the United States today that, like poor whites and African Americans in Catto’s Philadelphia, compete for the same economic and social opportunities leading to tension and even violence? What might be effective ways to resolve these conflicts?*

**MURRAY DUBIN**: “On Election Day, in an organized fashion, police and Moya hose men physically beat and took black voters out of line, accosted black men in the street. It was a day filled with terror if you were African-American.”

Evidence Gathering:

*What indication was there that the anti-black violence on Election Day was an organized effort and not just a series of random acts by individuals?*

Quotation Analysis:

*What inferences can you make about the race, social class, and/or ethnic origin of the police in Philadelphia during this era based on what Murray Dubin describes?*

21st Century Connections:

*Why do you think tensions between police and African American communities remain high?*

*What might be a solution to the on-going distrust that many communities of color have for police forces?*

*In Catto’s time, there were no African Americans in the police force; do you think that having black officers has improved relations between the police and communities of color in Philadelphia? Why or why not?*

*Philadelphia is approximately 47% black, but only about 18% of the city’s police officers are African American. Do you think the city should prioritize recruiting more black officers? What strategy do you think would be most effective? What would you include in a training program for new recruits for the police force to improve interactions with the public?*

**ERICA ARMSTRONG DUNBAR**: “What will be the direction for the lives of people of color? How will black men and women live in a nation where slavery no longer exists, but it's very clear that equal rights, that citizenship, that these very ideas will continue to be contested and are contested for centuries to come?”

Evidence Gathering:

*What strides toward equal rights were made during Catto’s lifetime?*

Quotation Analysis:

*What are synonyms for the word “contested” in this quotation?*

21st Century Connections:

*The writer William Faulkner is credited with the statement that “the past isn’t dead, it isn’t even past.” In what ways does the legacy of slavery remain a part of 21st century American life?*

*What ideas related to equal rights and citizenship are currently being contested within your community, in Philadelphia, or on the national level?*

**Expert Biographies (in alphabetical order)**

**Dan Biddle** is a co-author of *Tasting Freedom: Octavius V. Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America.* Until 2016, he was a reporter and editor and the *Philadelphia* *Inquirer* and is a winner of Pulitzer Prize. Currently, Biddle is teaching journalism at the University of Delaware.

**Murray Dubin** is a co-author of *Tasting Freedom: Octavius V. Catto and the Battle for Equality in Civil War America.* He wrote for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* for over three decades and is also the author of *South Philadelphia: Mummers, Memories, and the Melrose Diner.*

### Erica Armstrong Dunbar is the Charles and Mary Beard Professor of History at Rutgers University and the Director of the Program in African American History at the Library Company of Philadelphia. She is the author of *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* and *Never Caught: The Washingtons’ Relentless Pursuit of their Runaway Slave, Ona Judge.*

**Allen Guelzo** is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era and Director of Civil War Era Studies at Gettysburg College. He is the author of several award-winning books about Abraham Lincoln and is a non-resident fellow of the W.E.B. DuBois Institute at Harvard University and a research scholar at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

**Naomi Nelson** is a longtime museum educator and historian. She taught art history at Lincoln University and served as executive director of the Belmont Mansion in Philadelphia. Previously, she was a vice-president of the National Underground Freedom Center in Cincinnati.

**Reverend Mark Tyler** is the senior pastor at Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church in Philadelphia. In addition to presiding over this historic church, he is also a scholar and prominent activist and community leader. Reverend Tyler earned his PhD in Educational Leadership at the University of Dayton.

**MORE FROM HISTORY MAKING PRODUCTIONS**

Below is a selection of webisodes that are relevant to O.V. Catto’s life and to the broader themes of constitutional and civil rights history, particularly in a local Philadelphia context. They were produced to accompany three of History Making Production’s documentary projects: *Philadelphia: The Great Experiment* and *The Daring Women of Philadelphia.* All webisodes and educational materials are available at [*historyofphilly.com*](http://historyofphilly.com/)*.*

**Philadelphia: The Great Experiment**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNCY1R-Lsqw>

***Baseball: The Philadelphia Game, 8:57***

Narrated by former Phillies player Jimmy Rollins, this webisode recounts Philadelphia’s central role in the development of the sport of baseball with particular attention paid to the story of Octavius Catto and the Pythians.

*A watch-along worksheet includes a Venn Diagram to compare early and modern baseball, a time-line, and an analytical question based on a quotation from the film*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7Imk8CAFsA>

***Civil Rights: A Movement is Born in Philadelphia, 9:36***

From the first written protest against slavery in 1688 through the assassination of Octavius Catto in 1871, this webisode describes major turning points and introduces key players in the battle for freedom and equality in Philadelphia. Former mayor, Michael Nutter, narrates.

*A note-taking sheet and a Bingo game are available to help students review and retain the information in the film.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=3&v=vwQ2QByWpDY>

***The Volunteers: Firefighters in Philadelphia, 8:26***

Firefighting in Philadelphia from the city’s earliest years through the professionalization of firefighting in 1871 is recounted with an emphasis on independent fire companies such as the Moyas, the combination street gang, political organization, and firefighting crew who were instrumental in fomenting the anti-black violence that culminated with the assassination of O.V. Catto.

*A watch-along worksheet includes a “T-chart” for listing the pros and cons of the independent fire companies, a time-line, and an analytical question based on a quotation in the film.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=47&v=qPuqgOyu8iU>

***Urban Renewal: The Remaking of Society Hill, 6:15***

This webisode depicts the transformation of Society Hill from a run-down working class neighborhood with a substantial African American population into one of the city’s wealthiest communities, raising questions about gentrification and displacement that we continue to struggle with today.

The watch-along worksheet includes fill in the blank questions, a graphic organizer comparing Society Hill before and after urban renewal, and an analytical question that asks them to draw their own conclusions.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Zd-PuQZVFE>

***Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom, 7:05***

Richard Allen—first pastor of Mother Bethel Church, founder of the AME Church, and much more—was a key leader in developing the strength of Philadelphia’s free black community in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the community into which the Catto family assimilated in the 1850s.

**The Daring Women of Philadelphia**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=jYiu0Y-OTSc>

***Lucretia Mott: Philadelphia’s Revolutionary, 6:30***

This webisode documents the life and work of Lucretia Mott, a Quaker, an abolitionist, a feminist, and a woman well ahead of her time.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6r5vHv0I-Y>

***Notes From a Colored Girl: The Civil War Pocket Diaries of Emilee Frances Davis, 4:41***

Historian Kay Whitehead explains the significance of a unique primary source: the daily writings of a young, black woman living in Philadelphia during the Civil War era.

**Questions, suggestions, requests for professional development sessions? Contact Director of Education Amy Cohen <http://amyc@historymakingproductions.com>**