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## SECTION IV

### The Economics of Freedom (1840-1855)

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#### Lesson 13

#### Brooklyn's Sweet Profit

**Grade Level:** Middle & High School

**Objectives:**

Students will

- Understand Brooklyn's centrality to the business of slavery.
- Design advertisements promoting goods made by free labor.

**Time:** Two 50-minute class periods

**Materials:**

- Worksheet 1: The Pierrepont Stores
- Worksheet 2: Sugarcoating the Source
- Worksheet 3: Life on a Sugar Plantation

**Background:**

After 1840, the expansion of Brooklyn's anti-slavery movement mirrored the growth of the city; however, its progress coincided with the rapid development of waterfront businesses that were tied to the economies of slavery. As Manhattan's waterfront became increasingly congested and expensive, industrialists looked across the East River to Brooklyn's extensive waterfront. From Red Hook to Williamsburg, industrialists transformed the city's waterfront with factories and warehouses. Sugar, tobacco, and cotton—all valuable products made by unfree labor—lined the city's warehouses.

In particular, Brooklyn's Pierrepont and Havemeyer families amassed a fortune trading in sugar. Their sweet profits were made possible by a domestic and international demand for sugar and the exploitation of workers on the slave plantations of Louisiana and the cane fields of Cuba. Many of these unfree laborers lost their lives doing this gruelling and dangerous work.

William and Henry Pierrepont opened the Pierrepont stores by 1857. The family invited ships from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the West Indies to store their commodities, mostly sugar, at the warehouses. The Havemeyers opened their sugar factory along Williamsburg's waterfront in the same year. They discovered that money could be made in both the storage and refinement of sugar. By the late 19th century, Havemeyer and a number of other magnates created the Sugar Refineries Company in Brooklyn. The company controlled 98% of the nation's sugar production. By 1900, the Havemeyer Company had evolved into today's familiar brand, Domino Sugar.



Gathering the Cane, *Harper's* new monthly magazine (AP2 .H3).  
Special Collections, University of Virginia Library.

**"M is the Merchant of the north,  
Who buys what the slaves produce -  
So they are stolen, whipped and worked,  
For his, and for our use.**

—Hannah and Mary Townsend, *The Anti-Slavery Alphabet*. Philadelphia: Printed for the Anti-Slavery Fair, 1847.

## THE EMPIRE TEA AND COFFEE DEPOT,

WILLIAM BANE,  
317 ATLANTIC STREET, NEAR HOYT,  
BROOKLYN,

Where will be found a choice and carefully selected assortment  
of Green and Black Teas, Green, Roasted, and Ground Coffees,

## WHITE AND BROWN SUGARS,

Spices of all kinds, American and English Mustard, Chocolate,  
Cocoa, Rice, Starch, Dried and Green Fruits in their season.

All the above articles are of the best to be  
obtained in the market.

**SOLD AT THE LOWEST CASH PRICES.**

## BRASS FOUNDRY,

AND  
Finishing Establishment,

279 Hicks street, one door from Atlantic,  
BROOKLYN.

**SAMUEL G. LAW,**  
Silver Plater, Lock-Smith, Bell-Hanger, and  
Manufacturer of Gas-Fittings and  
Fixtures,

Has constantly on hand all kinds of Castings for Gas-fitters,  
Bell-hangers, Lock-smiths, &c. Various sizes of Letters and Fig-  
ures, the largest assortment of Silver-Plated Door-Plates for names,  
and numbers in the city, and at the lowest prices. Keys fitted,  
Locks repaired, and all kinds of Jobbing punctually attended to.  
N. B.—Cash paid for old Brass and Copper.

The Empire Tea and Coffee Depot Advertisement, *Smith's Brooklyn Directory*. William H. Smith. 1854-1855. Brooklyn Historical Society.

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# LESSON PROCEDURES

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1. Display items that contain sugar at the front of the classroom (i.e. soda, juice, candy, cereal, cookies). Ask students to identify what the items have in common. If students have difficulty, encourage them to think about the ingredients.

2. Once students have identified sugar as the common element, ask what they can infer about sugar (i.e. an important staple in today's economy). Explain that during the 19th century, Brooklyn emerged as a central hub connecting the domestic and international sugar markets.

3. Distribute **Worksheet 1: The Pierrepont Stores** and explain that the Pierrepont family opened warehouses to store goods arriving from international locations until their duties and taxes were paid at the Customs House in New York. Ask students to work with a partner to read the list of companies storing goods at the Pierrepont Stores based upon their account books over a 12-month period beginning in 1857.

4. Ask students the following questions:

- What is stored in the Pierrepont stores?
- What types of products are the most common?
- Where did some of the products come from?
- Who was going to buy these products?

5. Explain that many Brooklyn warehouses profited from companies in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the South by storing goods that were made by slave labor. Products such as tobacco, spices, coffee, rum, and sugar were all coveted products in Brooklyn and beyond. They were prominently advertised in various newspapers.

6. Distribute **Worksheet 2: Sugarcoating the Source**. Ask students to work with a partner to examine the newspaper advertisements. Ask students the following questions:

- Do any of the ads contain information about the product's source or origins? Why or why not?
- Do you think residents of Brooklyn in the 19th century would buy these products, knowing that they were brought to market by slave labor?

7. Distribute **Worksheet 3: Life on a Sugar Plantation**. Have students read the first person account and discuss the following questions:

- Describe the working conditions of enslaved people laboring on a sugar plantation.
- If people knew that their sugar came from the work of enslaved people, why didn't they stop using it?

8. Explain that in New York, followers of the Free Produce Movement hoped to convince the public to boycott goods made by slave labor and ran stores selling free labor goods. Place students in small groups and ask them to design an advertisement promoting a product made by free labor. Encourage them to think about how to persuade consumers to change their behavior.

## Linking Past and Present

- Have students research products and services that are made by modern-day slave or forced labor. Students can create ad campaigns to raise awareness of modern day slavery by highlighting products or services that are made by companies that exploit low-wage or no-wage workers around the world. Ask students to discuss who is responsible for stopping modern day slavery. Presidents? Companies? Consumers? The United Nations? What impact can students make?