

EDLPS 530
History of Education in the U.S.
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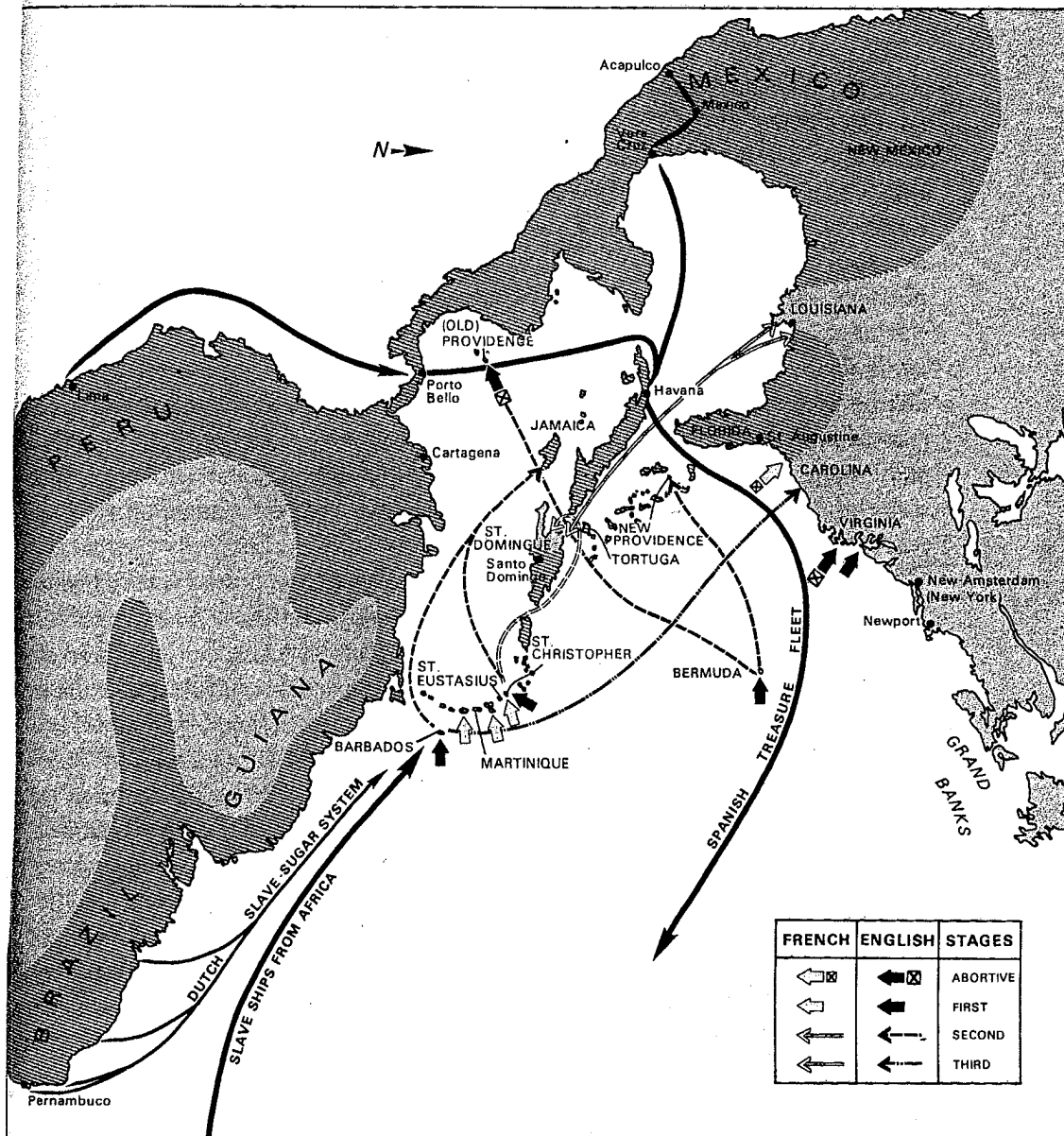
Discussion Question
Education in Colonial America

September 30, 2009

The Company of the Indes, a French trading corporation with a monopoly charter from the French crown, established New Orleans as a permanent settlement of French Louisiana in 1718. The settlement became the capital of the Louisiana territory in 1721, and continued to grow as a center of French colonial trade and governance after the royal government took over direct control of the colony in 1731. In 1726, under contract with the Company of the Indes, Ursuline nuns founded a school for girls in New Orleans. This school enrolled French women, Native American women, and African women, including slaves. It enjoyed substantial support from local French settlers, the Company of the Indes, and the French government, as well as from the Catholic Church; and it prospered further after 1731 when the French government took over administration of the colony. During the same period, however, the one attempt at establishing a school for boys quickly failed. French monks lost the support of local settlers and of the trading company for the school it tried to found in 1725, and the French government rejected the colonial governor's appeals for a boys' school in the 1740s.

What explains the early establishment and success of schooling for girls, including non-French girls, in French colonial Louisiana? (It is interesting to note that the Ursuline school for girls even outlasted French control of the region itself; it has been operating continuously in New Orleans from 1727 until now.) Discuss this question as a group, and come up with one or two credible theories to test out in the class as a whole. Identify questions you would ask to try to test your theories. What kinds of things would you need to know to make your theory more sound?

For more on this case, see Clark Robenstine, "French Colonial Policy and the Education of Women and Minorities: Louisiana in the Early Eighteenth Century," *History of Education Quarterly* 32:2 (Summer, 1992): 193-211.



33. The American Tropics.

The parallelism in the French and English penetration of these Spanish seas can be traced from their abortive colonizations in Florida and Roanoke, their successful footholds in the Lesser Antilles, conquest of important islands in the Greater Antilles, and eventually firm footholds in Louisiana and South Carolina.

From D.W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History: Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven: Yale University, 1986): 169.