



The Excelsior Club

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This curriculum unit is recommended for:
(Social Studies, Math, Grade 5)

Keywords: Segregation, McCrorey Heights, 100 Club, Excelsior Club, Reconstruction, Jimmie McKee, Emancipation Proclamation, Thirteen Amendments.

Teaching Standards: See [Appendix 1](#) for teaching standards addressed in this unit.

Synopsis: This unit is in line with the 5th grade Social Studies and math standards. This unit will discuss the value African American placed on specific communities in Charlotte, North Carolina that are now regarded as historical districts. I will give a history of these communities and how it nurtured future leaders and Social Organizations during and after the Civil Rights movement. Some of these communities are in jeopardy of being lost forever due to present day financial obligations, but they will remain a value to the community they served.

I plan to teach this unit during the coming year to 48 students in Fifth Grade Social Studies.

I give permission for Charlotte Teachers Institute to publish my curriculum unit in print and online. I understand that I will be credited as the author of my work.

Introduction

Student Background/ Demographics

My school is one of 164 schools that make up the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools district. My school has approximately 680 students with 70 teachers and support staff. The school population is 76% African American, approximately 17% Hispanic, and 5% White. Within our school population 5% of the students that are certified as academically gifted, and 10% are identified as ELL (English Language Learners). My school falls under the category of Title 1 status.

The Principal allows 5th grade to departmentalize. This year we have five teachers, two teams, and one self-contained class an average class size of about 25 students. I teach Math and Science on my team.

Unit Goal

This unit will address Social Studies and Math standards. I first want to give a bit of historic data about how Charlotte developed as a city from Post-Civil War until the early 1900s. African Americans and Whites lived together rather peacefully until aggressive Jim Crow laws helped force separation of these mixed neighborhoods. I want to highlight a middle class neighborhood, McCrorey Heights, and a social club, The Excelsior Club that served as a nurturing spot for future leaders in the Charlotte community. I wanted to look at the social values that kept these neighborhoods afloat and the financial realities of why some of these areas are non-extents today. What value do we place on some neighborhoods and not others? Does location play a role in preservation, or is it what value the community brings to the larger community that determines its worth? I wanted to explore these questions as I look into these historic communities.

I also want to see the impact financial realities may have played on these communities. Were these communities over the years abandoned by a loss of identity, or were there overwhelming financial burdens that kept them from thriving?

This Unit will cover 5th Grade Social Studies and Math Standards. Social Studies objective 5.C&G.1.3, which analyzes historical documents that shaped the foundation of the United States government. Students will analyze the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment and how African American and White southerners had to adapt and live together with newly social roles and positions in society. Object 5.C.1.3 examines how movements of goods and ideas can influence the desire for wealth and scarcity. This is will be addressed as we see Charlotte's African American community developing schools and business to serve the needs of their community in the early 1900s. Math objective NC.MD.2 has students looking at data that change over time, and represent that change in the form of a line graph. Student will analyze a Charlotte censuses between the years 1890 and 1940. Students will look at the population change between Whites and African Americans and determine what trends lead to the increase or decrease in population numbers.

Content Research

African American Community Development

Charlotte residence experienced a Post-Civil War economic boom. Charlotte's railroads and banks lured many blacks and whites from North Carolina's rural areas to the city. From 1865 to 1880 Charlotte became one of the leading trading centers in the Piedmont. Many seeking work flooded into Charlotte's city streets looking not only for employment, but food and shelter. As employment became plentiful for Whites, newly emancipated slaves were having trouble establishing their place in this new society. This fact made it difficult for newly emancipated slaves to establish their own communities and their place in Charlotte. Blacks and whites often clashed when blacks tried to exercise some of their new-found freedom. As they tried to establish their own communities and political equality, whites felt it important to maintain preserve white supremacy under what they deemed "Negro domination". Political power became a big wedge that blacks and whites fought over during Reconstruction.¹

In Mecklenburg County the relationship between blacks and whites were relatively good compared to other Southern cities. When the war was over the city experienced some burning and looting. For many Charlotteans the troops were a welcome sign of law and order. For the next two and a half years five thousand troops from New Jersey and Ohio made Charlotte their home. Since the city had federal protection many newly freed slaves were more willing to leave the plantation and move to the city where they felt safer.

By 1910 segregation laws and the lack of social mobility took a toll on the community. The lack of social mobility led to the period known as the Great Migration that began in 1916. During this period many African Americans migrated to northern and western cities in the United States. Some cities like Chicago and Philadelphia saw a rise in the African American population 148 and 500 percent respectively. This flight led to some African American communities' population going from 44% in 1890 to 34% in 1910. By 1930 African Americans were only 30% of Charlotte residence.²

The area of Trade and Tryon known to this day as the "square" was the heart of Charlotte's booming business district. These businesses such as retail shops, restaurants, banks, and movie theaters were all owned by Whites. African Americans were able to frequent these establishments, but were prohibited of owning their own business to cater to their community. This led to a mass exodus of Africans Americans to Northern cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Detroit. African Americans could expect to make three times the amount of money they made working the land in the rural south.³

Meanwhile, back in Charlotte, White businesses thrived in various industries. The textile, and retail market was booming and invited outsiders to move into the area for economic prosperity. What also made Charlotte attractive to investors was the notion that the African American community was "tempered and obeyed Christian laws" which was code for the fact that African Americans knew their place and Whites could be assured of no civil unrest would obstruct their businesses.⁴

In the 1913 publication called the Greater Charlotte Club highlighted its description and travel information noted the advancements of hydroelectric power, banking, roads, education, religion, and transportation. A brief section about African Americans were mentioned and said:

“...the negro is respected by the white population so long as he respects himself, and the result is that the black man here is making strides which are surprising to those who do not realize the relations existing between the races in this city.”⁵

During the early 1900s several significant African American community and businesses arose. These areas housed entrepreneurs, and educators that would lead Charlotte into the forefronts of business and community activism.

McCrorey Heights

This Charlotte neighborhood was founded by in the early 1900's by then Johnson C. Smith president Rev. H.L. McCrorey. Before serving as President for the University, McCrorey worked in an Investment firm where he used his income to build the community known as McCrorey Heights. The idea was to have an affluent community where Johnson C. Smith professors and other Black professionals could reside. McCrorey had the community plans laid out as early as 1912, but it would take nearly 40 years until the community was a dream realized. The community began to flourish after World War II. The community named it's streets after presidents Washington, Madison, Van Buren, and even the General George S. Patton.⁶

Many of the residents of the community were movers and shakers of the Civil Rights movement and religious faiths. McCrorey, a Presbyterian minister, wanted a community that gave a safe haven to other Presbyterians. Many of the faith went on to become headmasters and directors of private religious schools in the Southeast. The motivation was to give Black students that were denied access to a good education due to underfunded institutions a change to flourish. Even though Presbyterians was the faith of most residence, there was a large AME Zion presence as well.

Many principals and teachers of segregated school were McCrorey Heights residence. Even though they did not hold management jobs in the corporate community, principals were given the task of staffing and managing predominantly Black schools. This also gave female residents an opportunity to work outside the home as teachers and caregivers long before it became a societal norm.

The construction of the Brookshire Freeway in 1960 demolished some of the McCrorey homes. The houses on one side of Van Buren Ave and the hillside of Fairfield were removed as the residents moved to another one of Charlotte's upcoming affluent areas of Charlotte Hyde Park.

McCrorey Heights can boast design influence of designer Harvey Gantt who later became Charlotte's first Black Mayor in 1983.⁷

Many Charlotte community members are starting to look at these communities and realizing the value they bring to the diverse history of Charlotte. According to Emiene Wright, the assistant director of Communications at Johnson Smith University, who co-hosted walking tours through McCrorey Heights:

"McCrorey Heights has been a strangely preserved little enclave. It almost feels like you're in a time machine," says Wright of the original '40s and '50s-built ranch homes that still line the streets. "Not only is it aesthetically beautiful, it's also historical. The majority of important progress moments in Charlotte's racial history had roots in this neighborhood." ⁸

Jimmie McKee

Jimmie McKee was born in Charlotte, NC 1912. He was the second oldest of a family of ten children. At fourteen he was tasked with the responsibility of supporting his siblings when his parents died. Jimmie was forced to drop out of school and take a job at Horton Motor lines presently known as Associated Transport Consolidators, a freight company that ran routes throughout the country, including one in Charlotte, NC. In addition to the job at Hortons, Jimmie worked in some of Charlotte's upscale bars and nightclubs. While working in these White-only clubs he came up the plan of opening an exclusive nightclub for African Americans.

In 1944 Jimmie purchased a home located on Beatties Ford Road close to the middle class neighborhood of McCrorey Heights. He renovated the house and equipped it with banquet and dining rooms, a bar, and small lodging area. Soon the Excelsior Club became the place to hold social events, parties and political functions.

By the mid-1980s Jimmie health was declining and he was forced to sell his club. He was honored not only as a successful businessman, but a community philanthropist. He donated funds to Johnson C. Smith University, the NAACP, the Colored NC Police Association, the local YMCA, and other community businesses. Jimmie died of cancer on July 25, 1985 at the age of 75. ⁹

The Excelsior Club

The club was established as a place where African Americans could socialize and fellowship in a private setting much like their White counterparts in other Charlotte communities. Founder Jimmie McKee wanted a club to match the stature of the White country clubs he had experienced. The name of the club was intended to convey a message that this was a club to exceed all others hence the name Excelsior. With the proper permits in place, the club opened in 1944 with the capacity to accommodate seventy-five patrons. ¹⁰

New members were carefully screened and recommended by existing members to make sure the club maintained its status. The membership grew from its original twenty-five to five times the number. The club gained the reputation of the premier place for Charlotte's Black professionals.

It entertained doctors, lawyers, educators, ministers, and it welcomed some famous entertainment acts like Nat King Cole, James Brown, Louis Armstrong, and Sam Cook.¹¹

It also became the premier club for local bridge tournaments and political gatherings. Since the club catered to the Social elite of the African community it was expected that politicians who wanted to gain the vote of African Americans must make a stop at the club and fellowship with the patrons.

The Excelsior club made effort to fund the needs of Johnson C. Smith University through the 100 Club. The club was started in 1964 by Jimmie McKee, Dr. Emery L. Rann, and other members. The initial goal was to raise 12,500 for the University. Not only did they reach that goal but by 1967 they had given JCSU 50,000 as a part of their centennial fund drive.¹²

Through the years the club has had several owners who have tried to maintain the club's upscale status. Up until 2008 the Excelsior club hosted a weekly Thursday night venue. However, tax obligations and major repairs closed the Club. The present owner, State Rep. Carla Cunningham, proposed a deal where the County Commission would buy the historic landmark for \$350,000. The County passed on the offer due to the initial cost and the extensive repairs needed for the building. Ms. Cunningham said she would decide what to do after the midterm elections in November.¹³

Instructional Implementation

The 5th grade unit that discusses Reconstruction is taught after the two units of the Civil War. The first unit discusses the causes the war, the second goes into detail about the battles fought and how the fallen Southern economy made way for a new way of life for both whites and blacks.

Students will learn about the initial economic divide between northern and southern that was fueled by slavery. Students will learn how the attack on Ft. Sumter led to the start of the Civil War. Students will go through several key battles, and how the advancement of military technology helped one side gain advantage to win the war. Students will also learn how combat conditions, medical care, and diseases led to the harsh conditions soldiers faced during this time. As the war ended Southern states had to not only rebuild their states from the ground up, they also had to ask permission to be readmitted back in the Union. African Americans and Whites had to figure out if they were going to live together even though Whites dominating the political and social structure. How were they going to create a new system that balanced power more equally?

Data and graphs are part of the Math Unit in 5th grade discussed in the first quarter. Students will look at race in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte between the years of 1890 and 1940 and see the decrease of the African American population and the growth of the White community. Students will also compare the cost of everyday items and annual salary of 1940 to 2018.

Day One Lesson

The teacher will lead a brief discussion about the purpose of The Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment. Students will visit two websites. The first contains the Thirteenth Amendment and the second, The Emancipation Proclamation. Both are primary sources and are transcribed.

<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>

<http://www.nps.gov/ncro/anti/emancipation.html>

Students will read both documents and answer the following questions:

(The questions are leveled according to my reading groups. Hummingbirds are my above-grade-level reading group. Mockingbirds are my on or slightly above grade level reading group. My Larks are my below-level reading group.)

Hummingbirds

1. Do you believe the Proclamation impact was greater in symbolism or in actually freeing the Slaves? Explain.
2. What if the war ended in 1863, would slavery still exist in America? Even after the Emancipation Proclamation?

Mockingbirds

1. Why were some states excluded from the Emancipation Proclamation?
2. How did it free the slaves?

Larks

1. Did the Emancipation Proclamation free the slaves? Explain.
2. What impact did it have on the War? Explain.

Activity

After all three groups have read both documents they will discuss the following questions in a round table session.

1. What did the Emancipation Proclamation declare?
2. If the Emancipation Proclamation was supposed to end slavery what was the purpose of the Thirteenth Amendment?

Day Two Lesson

Students will first read pages 308- 311 in their Social Studies Alive textbook. Next, they go to the website from the Charlotte's landmarks Commission: Remembering Slavery in Mecklenburg County:

<http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Remembering-Slavery-in-Mecklenburg-County.pdf>

This site contains transcribed interviews of former slaves. The interviews were conducted as a Federal Writers project in the 1930.

Activity

In the chart below students will list the positive and negative changes African Americans in the South experienced in the years after the Civil War.

African American Life in the South After the Civil War	
Positive Changes	Negative Changes

Day Three Lesson

Students will refer to the tables and answer the following questions:

Activity

1. In the year 1940 what was the difference between the Negro and White population?
2. Which ten year span did Negroes have the biggest growth?
 - a. 1890 to 1900
 - b. 1910 to 1920
 - c. 1930 to 1940
 - d. None of the above
3. Use a coordinate grid to graph the difference for your answer for question # 2.
4. What ten year span did Whites have the lowest increase of growth?
 - a. 1930 to 1940
 - b. 1910 to 1920
 - c. 1900 to 1890
 - d. None of the above
5. Make a coordinate grid to graph the difference for your answer for #4.

Based on the information provided by the Survey of African Americans Historical Sites in Mecklenburg County answer the following question:

Charlotte By Race: 1890-1940

Year	City Total	Negro	White
1940	100,899	31,403	69,475
1930	82,675	25,163	57,490
1920	46,338	14,641	31,693
1910	34,014	11,752	22,259
1900	18,091	7141	10,938
1890	11,557	5134	6417

Source: U.S. Census of the Population. Figures for whites include native and foreign born.

4. Which of the following expressions are true?

- a. The number of Negro population growth in 1940 compared to the growth of the White population only doubled in size.
- b. The Negro population from 1890 to 1900 grew by three thousand.
- c. The total City growth between 1890 and 1940 among Whites and Negroes was eleven thousand
- d. The difference between the White and Negro population in 1940 was about 38,000.

Based on the previous day website: The Survey of African Americans Historical Sites in Mecklenburg County, answer the following question:

Day Four Lesson

Students will refer to the table and answer the following questions.

Item	1940	2018
Average New Home Cost	3,920	290,381
Income	1,725	52,274
Ford Sedan New	1,315	35,100
Gallon of Gas	.11	2.64

Activity

1. What is the percentage of increase between the average house cost in 1940 and 2018?
2. If you wanted to pay off your 2018 Ford Sedan in three years, assuming no interest, what would your monthly payment be?

What is the percentage of increase of between gas prices in 140 and 2018?

Appendix 1: Teaching Standards

Social Studies

5.C.1.3- Explain how the movement of goods, ideas and various cultural groups influenced the development of the regions in the US. Charlotte's railroads and banks lured many from North Carolina's country to the city.

5.C&G.1.3, which analyzes historical documents that shaped the foundation of the United States government, students will analyze the Emancipation Proclamation and The Thirteenth Amendment to see what changes southerners had to make to adapt to a new way of life and social positions.

5.C.1.3 examines how movements of goods and ideas can influence the desire for wealth and scarcity.

Math

NC.5.OA.2 – Students will evaluate numerical expression to solve the problems looking at White and African American residence in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte.

5.MD.B and NC.5.MD.2 - Students will represent data in a graph from the collected data about Charlotte's population between 1890 and 1940. Student will graph the difference in population numbers of African American and Whites in Mecklenburg County and the city of Charlotte.

NC.4.NBT.4 Add and subtract multi-digit whole numbers up to and including 100,000 using the standard algorithm with place value understanding.

Literacy

RI.5.4 - Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases in a text relevant to a topic or subject area. Student will learn the meaning of following vocabulary words used in this lesson: Reconstruction, Black Codes, Emancipation Proclamation, and Thirteen Amendment

RI.5.5- Compare and contrast overall text structure of events, ideas and information. Students compare and contrast the different roles black and whites in shaping Charlotte society from the 1900's to the 1940's.

RI.5.7- Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly. Student will examine the Primary sources like the Emancipation Proclamation, and U.S Census reports from Mecklenburg County and the city of Charlotte.

Appendix 2: Assessment



Mr. Jimmie purchased this club in 1944 and paid \$2,500. Unfortunately the place is in need of \$525,000 worth of repairs. If you have an average income of 120,000 a year and wanted to use no more than 20% of your annual income to repair how long would it take you to repair this Club?

Appendix 3: Student Resources

Social Studies Alive! America's Past – This is the 5th Grade Social Studies textbook. The Civil War and Reconstruction are discussed in Lesson 21 pg. 297-311.

The Great Migration - This leveled book discusses the reason why many African American migrated to the north. I briefly explain the lack of mobility caused by the Jim Crow laws in the south. It looks at the crowded conditions African American were faced with as they migrated north.

Chromebooks- Some of the activities require student to access websites that have been hyperlinked to the lesson.

Freedom Summer- Two friends Joe and John share a love of playing marbles, but John Henry is Black and cannot enjoy doing all the things his White friend can do because they live in the 1960s segregated South. When a law is passed to end segregation the two friends realize people's mind change slower than laws.

Envisions Topic 14 & 15- This is the 5th grade online Math book where students gain knowledge of Coordinate planes and Line graphs.

Appendix 4: Teacher Resources

Social Studies Alive! America's Past – This is the 5th Grade Social Studies textbook. The Civil War and Reconstruction are discussed in Lesson 21 pg. 297-311. Teachers may use their online Teacher's Guide.

Studies Weekly- These online Social Studies articles introduces the topic of Reconstruction in week #28 of the Social Studies curriculum. Students may be assigned this reading and are given access to online extension activities.

Envisions Topic 14 & 15- 5th grade online Math book where students gain knowledge of Coordinate planes and Line graphs. Students may be assigned games, extension and enrichment activities.

<http://landmarkscommission.org/2016/11/02/excelsior-club/>- This website gives a historical overview of the Excelsior Club and its founder Jimmy McKee.

<https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/great-migration> - This website gives an overview of the Great Migration Southern African Americans made to Northern and Western cities for better economic opportunities.

<http://landmarkscommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mecklenburg-African-American-Resources-Survey.pdf> - This website looks at Mecklenburg county rural and suburban properties that existed in Charlotte as far back as 1783. This site gives brief description and pictures of historical African American neighborhoods.

<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html> - The website shows and explains the Thirteen Amendment in a student friendly way.

<http://www.nps.gov/ncro/anti/emancipation.html> - This Nation Parks Service website has the Proclamation as a Primary Source document.

<https://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/local/article219499940.html>- This website gives the current status of the Excelsior Club's financial situation. Present owner, Rep. Carla Cunningham, gives her account of her battle with City Council to preserve the historic Club.

<https://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/13thamendment.html>- This document contains a primary source document of the Thirteenth Amendment.

<http://www.nps.gov/ncro/anti/emancipation.html>- This document contains a primary source of the Emancipation Proclamation.

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Greenwood, Janette Thomas. *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White "Better Classes" in Charlotte, 1850-1910*. n.d. This book provided the best social view of Charlotte from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's. This book looks more at the perspectives of Charlotte and the things that uniquely affected the city.

Hanchett, Thomas. "Creating Black Neighborhoods." *In Sorting Out The New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975*, by Thomas Hanchett, 9. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998. This book looks at One-Hundred year history of what formed some of Charlotte's neighborhoods and industries.

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History of Washington Heights. J. Murray Atkins Library. n.d. <https://guides.library.uncc.edu/c.php?p=621704&p=5213318>. Accessed October 25, 2018. This site provides copies of property map provided by the Mecklenburg Planning Commission.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/19017314/>. Library of Congress. n.d. <https://www.loc.gov/item/19017314/>. Accessed October 25, 2018. This website has primary documents of historical documents like the Emancipation Proclamation and the Thirteenth Amendment.

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Teachers' Curriculum Institute Social Studies Alive America's Past, Palo Alto; Teacher's Institute, 2015. This is a 5th Grade Social Studies textbook that covers United States History from Native Americans arriving on the continent of North and South American until the United States in the 21st Century.

“The Excelsior Club.” *Charlotte-Mecklenburg historical landmark Commission*. September 4, 1984. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historical Landmarks Commission, Survey and Research Report, The Excelsior Club. Assessed October 25, 2018. This site gives a Historical perspective of the social and political impact the club had on the African American community in 1944 Charlotte.

Tom Hanchett. 10 August 2, 2018. <https://mccrorey.historysouth.org/> (assessed October 17, 2018). This site has present day pictures of McCrorey Heights. Notable past community leaders and University Presidents homes are highlighted along with mention of innovative architectural designs of homes.

Unknown. *Survey of African American Buildings and Sites in Mecklenburg County*. n.d <http://landmarkscommission.org/uploads/2016/02/Survey-Of-African-American-Historical-Sites.pdf>. Assessed October 26, 2018. This site has pictures of the Excelsior Club and the dimensions of the building, and its value when it was purchase in 1944.

Notes

¹ (Greenwood n.d.)

² (Editors, 1 2010)

³ (Unknown n.d.)

⁴ (Unknown n.d.)

⁵ (Unknown n.d.)

⁶ (History of McCrorery Hights 2018)

⁷ (Graff 2018)

⁸ (Hanchett 1998)

⁹ (Tom Hanchett 2018)

¹⁰ (The Excelsior Club 1984)

¹¹ (Lunsford 2018)

¹² (Unknown n.d.)

¹³ (MORRILL 2018)