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## The African American Community in Ogden, Utah: Teaching Local History Within a National Framework

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## THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN OGDEN, UTAH:

### TEACHING LOCAL HISTORY WITHIN A NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

#### **Historical Background:**

Beginning in 1869, the newly built Union Station in Ogden Utah became a major terminal for the transcontinental railroad. Around that same time George Pullman began recruiting emancipated slaves as employees on his luxury railroad cars. As a result a sizeable number of African Americans began working on the railroad. Many African Americans found residence in Ogden since it was a major railroad hub. As a result a small African American neighborhood that was six blocks long and two blocks wide formed in the city.<sup>1</sup> Businesses and organizations formed to support the emerging African American community within Ogden.

It has been noted that although they were paid less than their white counterparts, the railroad workers earned relatively high wages within black communities. Many businesses formed around the railroad junction. Clubs, restaurants and barber shops that catered to the black community opened near the railroad hub. One club in particular that is examined in the unit of lessons is the Porters and Waiters Club that opened on the city's notorious twenty-fifth street. Initially the club only served African Americans, but it was desegregated after World War Two. Since the club opened with black railroad employees in mind, the Porters and Waiters Club is used to provide insight on the development of the railroad's connection to the larger African American community in Ogden. Often railroad workers earned higher wages and had greater job stability than other occupations readily available to the African American community. Due to unfair housing practices many middle class African Americans lived within the same

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Stene, "The African American Community of Ogden, Utah: 1910 – 1950" (Master's thesis, Utah State University, 1994) 59.

neighborhoods as their lower paid contemporaries. Some of the oral histories students will read discuss racial segregation in residential neighborhoods.

Ogden's black community was so energetic that it once was a destination for famous Jazz musicians. After performances in Salt Lake, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, and Fats Domino would "catch the train to Ogden to visit the Porters and Waiters Club."<sup>2</sup> Two lesson plans place Ogden within the context of the Harlem Renaissance and the Great Migration, allowing students to realize the importance of African American art and literature within a local framework. This aligns with Utah Core, Standard 5 Objective 2A: "Examine the experiences of black Americans and women in the early 20th century, account for the sudden growth of black consciousness"<sup>3</sup>

Lesson plans also examine Ogden's African American community during the mid-twentieth-century. An article found in the *Standard Examiner* cites the owner of the Porters and Waiters Club, Annabelle Weakley, as one of Utah's civil rights leaders. The president of Ogden's chapter of the NAACP stated that Weakley's club "became a safe place for people in the black community to come and relax."<sup>4</sup> The article continues on to state, "To this day, African-Americans thank Annabelle Weakley-Mattson, the "Queen of 25th Street," who welcomed black railroad workers, airmen and jazz greats alike to her colorblind club in the crossroads of the West."<sup>5</sup> Annabelle Weakley was closely connected to railroad employees and had an impact on shaping the African American business community in Ogden. Articles students will read from the *Standard Examiner* suggest that as the Civil Rights movement was gaining

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<sup>2</sup> Carli Jennings, "Jazz from the Station: 25th Street, Desegregation, and all that Jazz," *The Ogden Source* 01, no. 1 (October 2015): 24-25. *The*

<sup>3</sup> See Utah State Office of Education "core standards" for United States History II <http://www.uen.org/core/core.do?courseNum=6250>

<sup>4</sup> *Ogden Standard Examiner*. News Brief. July 28, 1961, 11.

<sup>5</sup> Jensen, Derek P. "Utahans Pave Way for Civil Rights, See Long Road Ahead." *Salt Lake Tribune* 19 Jan. 2009: n. page. Print.

momentum nationwide, local authorities increased pressure on African American businesses to leave Twenty-Fifth Street. In fact, after the club desegregated police scrutiny appears to escalate. In 1960, The Porter's and Waiters Club began seeing an increased presence of local authorities. By the end of 1961, the club closed its doors. A dissertation on the African American community in Ogden suggests that "Most Utah Whites appeared content to simply ignore the African Americans in their communities."<sup>6</sup> However, many of the oral histories students will examine suggest otherwise. This unit contains lessons organized around the existing oral history interviews and use the interviews to shed light on what was happening in black communities throughout the nation. This material aligns with Utah Core Curriculum for Social Studies Standard 3 Objective 1A, Standard 9, Objective 1A and 1C, which states "The students will understand the emergence and development of the human rights and culture in the modern era."

### **Introduction of Lesson Plans:**

Before the turn of the twentieth century, education reformer Mary Sheldon Barnes argued that local history offered students "a close and intimate connection with the great whole of history."<sup>7</sup> With that in mind, I created a unit of lesson plans based on the African American community in Ogden. The lessons cover a date range between 1869 with the completion of the transcontinental railroad, and conclude during the second half of the twentieth century. The lessons begin with the arrival of African Americans working for the railroad, and finish with the examination of oral histories completed by Weber State University in 2013. Lessons are designed in segments so teachers can use part or the entire lesson based on classroom needs. A combination of primary and secondary material is provided in the source materials.

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<sup>6</sup> Stene, "The African American Community of Ogden, Utah: 1910 – 1950," 68.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted by Robert E. Keohane, "Historical Method and Primary Sources," in Thursfield, ed., *The Study of Teaching American History* (National Council for the Social Studies, *Seventh Yearbook*, Washington, 1946), 332-33.

The lessons are designed to give a local perspective to broader national movements occurring in the United States during the period of time being studied in class. These lessons are not meant to replace curriculum on broader national movements and events, instead they are designed to demonstrate how national trends impacted our local community. Currently the majority of lessons regarding African Americans are taught on a national level independent from what was happening locally. I believe that this gives the students the impression that segregation and racism was a Southern problem and that it didn't occur in Utah. Ogden will provide a case study of race in a western city that offers a different, but equally important narrative of race relations in the 20th century. This unit of lessons will not replace lessons broad national trends and movements, they will be used to supplement the existing curriculum. This unit can be used as a thread of lessons plans to incorporate throughout the year as concepts such as westward migration, urbanization, race, and African American history are taught. The lessons are designed so that teachers can pick and choose which lessons fit best within their own classrooms.

I argue that this project is relevant for several reasons. First, Ogden developed as a fairly diverse community by Utah standards, and that trend has only increased. Allowing students to examine race on a local level, may help them to recognize trends that continue, such as self-segregation, ambivalence, or outright discrimination. Second, I think it is important for students to realize that Ogden did reflect national trends regarding race and that putting the concept into a national context may result in a more meaningful learning outcome. From my experience teaching, students only consider pioneers and the driving of the "golden spike" to have any relevant meaning to local history. Third, bringing concepts to a local level will make the learning experience more meaningful on a personal level. As educators Maurice Moffat and Stephen Rich

“History has happened where we are. Local history is that part of it which we feel belongs to our own lives, because it has directly affected what we do, where we go, and how we act.”<sup>8</sup>

In addition to fitting with the Utah Core Curriculum Standards for United States History II, the lessons also follow the Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies. Lessons are not meant to replace lecture or traditional teaching methods. Instead, they are meant to provide materials that allow students to practice literacy skills by using primary and secondary documents. This unit of lessons is designed to supplement lectures that focus on the national narrative with literacy and skill based lessons with a local emphasis. Guided reading, discussion, and note taking strategies are included in the “optional resources” file. Lessons are designed so teachers can adjust their own preferences for note taking and annotations to the assigned reading materials such as Cornell notes, metacognitive markers, closed reading strategies, etc. The lessons are designed with scaffolded instruction, guided questions are provided through out the unit. In order to align with Ogden School District’s focus on increasing rigor, Depth of Knowledge (DOK) indicators are included with every activity. A DOK chart can be found in the optional materials file. As the year progresses and skill levels increase the readings become more advanced. Students will analyze more complex secondary readings and finish the unit with a final paper.

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<sup>8</sup> Maurice P. Moffatt, and Stephen G. Rich. "The Place of Local History in Modern Education." In *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 26, no. 2 (1952): 79-88.

## **Outline of Lesson Plans:**

Lesson One: Students will examine the connection between the railroad and the African American community. Using an introductory article, students will examine race relations developed in the post-Civil War United States. This lesson fits into the larger framework of segregation that emerged nationwide during the last decades of the nineteenth-century.

Lesson Two: Students will read and discuss a secondary article describing the work of a Pullman porter. They will compare the reading to a local primary document that describes regulations and instructions issued to railroad employees issued by the Union Pacific Office Manager, in Ogden Utah.

Lesson Three: Students will analyze a primary document that outlined the role and responsibilities of railroad employees. Students will consider since many African Americans in Ogden worked for the Union Pacific railroad, how expectations outlined in such documents might impact views of race locally.

Lesson Four: Students will watch a brief documentary clip about the African American community in Ogden. Students will examine a brochure issued by the Pullman Company titled “Go Pullman for Heart of Town Convenience” and analyze the different portrayal of white and black Americans in the advertisement. They will use previous readings/ assignments to put the advertisement into a historical context.

Lesson Five: Students will examine how Harlem Renaissance ideas and culture spread West during and after the Great Migration. Students will compare and contrast a local example of the development of “black consciousness” within the larger national framework. Students will complete an oral history assignment to encourage them to think about what types of questions they might ask if conducting an interview.

Lesson Six: Students will continue their examination of how Harlem Renaissance ideas and culture spread West during and after the Great Migration. Students will continue reading how a local experience fit within or diverged from national trends.

Lesson Eight: Using primary and secondary documents, students will study the complex view of Pullman porters in American society. They will examine that although the job paid well, porters were still required at times to withstand discrimination and racism at work.

Lesson Nine: Students will read two separate chapters from Albert Broussard’s work *Expectations of Equality*. They will take part in a Socratic seminar to discuss trends in African American communities in the West. They will use this exercise to analyze African American communities after WWII discuss the successes and shortcomings of the Civil Rights Movement.

Lesson Ten: Students will examine how local accounts of black communities in Ogden compare to the larger narrative. Students will compare previous reading with oral histories from the New Zion Community Advocate collection in Weber State’s digital archives. Through this activity

students will determine if there is correlation between experiences in Ogden and other communities in the West. This is designed to be the final project in the unit.

**Primary and Secondary Sources used:**

Additional material that will be used to create lessons are primary documents from the Union Stations collection that outline the roles and expectations of black employees. For example, *The Pullman Scrapbook* details the day to day activities and responsibilities that occurred on Pullman railcars. The scrapbook contains a section detailing the role of the Pullman Porter. It describes the role and expectations the company had for Pullman Porters. Duties such as housekeeping, making beds, and maintaining comfortable temperatures are described. The company makes it clear that included in the job description of a Porter is to be available to white customers “any time during the day or night.”<sup>9</sup>

A similar document in the Union Station Archives is a binder of instructions issued by the Union Pacific Railroad Company titled *Regulations and Instructions – Dining Car Service*, revised January 1st, 1922. The source is typed and issued by an office manager from an office in Ogden, Utah. This source outlines instructions to employees working for the company. The first section explains the importance of being courteous to customers, and under no circumstances can employees disagree with passengers. The source also details who can eat, where they can eat, and at what time. The document has special instructions for “colored” employees. White employees were allowed to be served if there were open seats in the dining car. African American employees were not allowed to eat in the dining car and were served “rolls and coffee”

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<sup>9</sup> *Instructions to Porters, Attendants and Bus Boys*. Pullman Company, 1952.



at 5:30 a.m. in the pantry behind closed curtains.<sup>10</sup> “Colored” employees were instructed that they could only eat once everyone had finished and the dining car had been cleaned.

Experiencing subservient attitudes at work may have encouraged employees to shape a completely different atmosphere outside of work. Perhaps facing demeaning experiences in the workplace encouraged railroad workers to take their wages and mold a leadership position within their segregated communities. It is also noted that leisure time off the job was valued among railroad employees. Businesses and organizations that formed within railroad communities provided an outlet for when they were not experiencing racism on the railroad. These materials will be useful as components of a lesson plan because they place a local experience of African American railroad employees into national historical context.

Another source of archival material is Weber State’s Special Collections. Of particular value for a secondary classroom are the New Zion Oral History Interviews. The project interviewed African American Ogden residents who were eighty or older. According to the project description, “The interviews looked at the legacy of the interviewees through armed services, work, social life, church, NAACP and educational systems in an environment where their culture was not predominant.”<sup>11</sup>

Mary Swain gave an account of what Ogden was like when the railroad still held importance. She discusses moving to Ogden in the 1940s. She claims that during that time the only jobs available in the city to African Americans were either with the railroad or the federal government. Mary Swain describes the African American community that emerged in Ogden:

“There were several black businesses here when I first moved here. Blacks owned beauty shops, clubs, dry cleaners, hotels, and newspaper companies just to name a few.

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<sup>10</sup> *Instructions to Porters, Attendants and Bus Boys*. Pullman Company, 1952.

<sup>11</sup> New Zion Oral History Interviews. Weber State Special Collections. Ogden, UT

Somehow we got systematically destroyed in that area. I am not quite sure how or what happened, but one by one, the businesses started to disappear.”<sup>12</sup>

With that statement the interview concludes. Swain directly refers to the systematic destruction of African American businesses and community.

Students will also use “Utah Digital Newspapers” from the database *Utah Online Library* to examine primary sources related to the topic. In particular the *Standard Examiner* will be provided useful material to research more about the African American community in Ogden. For example, several articles that suggest local authorities singled out Annabelle Weakley’s Porters and Waiters Club. In 1960 the local authorities began to cite Weakley with offenses such as not having a proper liquor license. As the months progress more stories concerning illegal activities such as gambling taking place at the club appear in the *Standard Examiner*. By 1961, one of the most important institutions in Ogden’s African American community shut its doors. An article in *the Standard Examiner* states that the police department had recommended moving the club away from Twenty-Fifth Street before the local authorities even began looking into the club’s illegal activities.<sup>13</sup>

The lessons created also use secondary sources to put local history into a larger framework .Two articles by Larry Tye are included to give students a general overview of why African Americans were chosen to staff railroad cars as well as their experience on the railroad. For the lessons on art and music in Ogden, students will read the introduction to *The Harlem Renaissance in the American West* by Bruce A. Glasrud and Cary D. Wintz. For back on African American communities in the West during the last half of the twentieth-century students will

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> *Ogden Standard Examiner*. News Brief. February 8, 1962, 15.

read the final two chapters of *Expectations of Equality: A History of Black Westerners* by Albert Broussard.

This project will allow me to use the research I have conducted to improve my teaching of African American history in the classroom. By bringing black history to a local level, students will realize that African American history is not a separate history that unfolded in the American South. By using Ogden as a local example, students will study national movements such as the railroad, Great Migration, Harlem Renaissance, discrimination and segregation, and finally Civil Rights. I hope that you will find that this project will fulfill the requirements to complete my Plan B portfolio.

Examining views of race and the impact it has had on United States history has been the overall theoretical framework I have focused on in my research. For the other two components of my Plan B Portfolio, I will submit a historiography that I completed in the American West seminar on race and the shaping of Southern California communities. This historiography relates to my overall project because relates to the development of African American communities in the West. It provides a larger framework to compare and contrast the development of an African American community in Ogden.

Another paper included is final paper I submitted in the Environment and the Early Modern World seminar on race, social class, and access to the environment. This historiography relates to my project because it examines race and inequity. Often when we think of institutionalized racism we think about education, employment, and residence. Access to amenities, such as outdoor recreation is often overlooked. The works cited in this paper provide case studies that can be compared to Ogden, or the Wasatch front as the region is rapidly becoming more diverse.

A historiography of Pullman porters from my History Methods class is also included. This Historiography relates to my Plan B project because it examines the railroad's relation to the African American community. The works in this paper provided a national framework to the research examined locally. Pullman porters and railroad workers were specifically researched, since many African Americans that came to Ogden worked for the railroad.