



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute  
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## **New Haven's Hill Neighborhood**

Curriculum Unit 79.03.04  
by Peter Neal Herndon

### **Introduction**

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The curriculum unit described here is intended for ninth graders at Richard C. Lee High School, as part of a larger unit on New Haven. The unit will attempt to involve students in the historical process at a personal level by making use of the familiarity the student already has with the subject, i. e., his own Hill neighborhood which surrounds the high school. It is the author-teacher's intent to challenge the student to become a better inquirer, a better observer, a better fact-gatherer, a better thinker because of having been exposed to this unit of study. Obviously, certain facts will be taught; how many of these so called facts are retained, I maintain, depends on their usefulness and interest to the student and the creativity and enthusiasm of the teacher. This unit should prove to be a useful resource for anyone desiring information about a specific neighborhood called the Hill; also, it should provide practical methods and ideas for middle or high school teachers involved in teaching a "neighborhood" unit.

### ***I. Content Objectives***

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At the outset of the course, each student will receive a unit packet, containing, among other things, a list of vocabulary or concept words which he or she will be tested on by the end of the unit. Each of these approximately forty "core concept" words will be defined for the students with space for at least one "example" of their own, from class or from another source. For a list of these concepts, see the list below (Appendix A).

Also contained in the packet will be a 1966 map of New Haven and a map of the Hill neighborhood. These maps will be key resources for the students. General map skills (direction, key symbols and colors, orientation) as well as specific locations will be emphasized. As well as plotting locations, each student will be expected to make his or her own map of the immediate neighborhood surrounding his or her place of residence.

Facts about the Hill, its origins, its changing peoples, its strengths over the years will be taught. It is my intention that students will begin to see some cause and effect relationships between economic conditions (demand for laborers for the Farmington River Canal) and shifting tides of people moving in and out of the Hill community. The unit will focus also on the City Point (originally "Oyster Point") area and emphasize that New

Haven Harbor was and is an employment opportunity. The unit will focus attention on the ethnic groups that lived here and on some lasting contributions to the culture and to the building of historic landmarks (churches, homes, stores and restaurant).

How a city operates and serves its people will be evident to students as we have the opportunity to hear from various resource persons involved in and committed to community services and their improvement in the Hill. Services of particular interest to students and their families, e. g., health, employment, recreation, legal, will be highlighted.

Lastly, emphasis will be placed on some unique historical problems the Hill has experienced over the past twenty years (urban removal caused by the Route 34 Connector) and on what is being done now to revitalize the Hill through neighborhood centers, employment opportunities, housing, and education.

In the pages that follow, I map out some lessons and teaching strategies to suggest how a teacher can get all this “stuff” across to students.

## ***II. Teaching Strategies and Lessons***

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### *A. Week One: Orientation to the Hill*

At the outset of the course, students will view slides of locations in New Haven, some in the Hill, some in other sections of town. They will be given a numbered answer sheet upon which they will check “Hill,” “Other,” (not in the Hill), or “Not Sure” (See Appendix B). There will also be space enough to identify the building or landmark. The purpose here is to point out to the students how well (or how poorly) they recognize buildings in their own neighborhood. The Hill map will then be looked at as a class and some familiar landmarks (Lee High School, Yale-New Haven Hospital, Clemente Middle School) located. The students’ initial assignment will be to locate at least six other locations from a list furnished by the teacher.

*Day Two is map skills day. After having reviewed the previous night’s assignment, each student gets a grid and we go over direction and orientation skills. Map-making skills will be demonstrated and an assignment in map-making given, with appropriate symbols for buildings, parks, churches, cemeteries, etc.*

*Days Three and Four* will be spent in small groups playing the “Hill Neighborhood Game.” In groups of four or five, students will move from one location to another by the throw of a die. The object is to stay out of jail or the hospital and collect as many money-success points as possible. The game is played in rounds on boards that simulate the neighborhood with well known landmarks as objectives and stopping-off places. The object of the game is, of course, to stimulate interest and to familiarize students with Hill landmarks.

*Day Five* will introduce concept building and cognitive skills related to the previous days’ experience. Concepts like community, neighborhood, ghetto, slum, neighbor (what is a “good neighbor?”), urban, suburban, inner and outer city will be discussed and examples tested. A short written test of the week’s work, including nine “Core Concepts” from Appendix A, will be given by the teacher.

### *B. Week Two: The Hill in the Nineteenth Century*

This week will again begin pictorially with slides and black and white photographs of 19th century locations built in the Hill during this period. (These pictures include Evergreen Cemetery, home of “Midnight Mary,” 1848; Sacred Heart R. C. Church on Columbus Ave., 1851; Villa at 76 Howard Ave., 1865; Oyster cultivator’s home at 164 Howard Ave., 1885; Church of the Ascension on Howard Ave., 1887; Howard Ave. Methodist Church, formerly Oyster Point Church, 1890; St. Anthony’s Church on Oak Street, completed in 1903. ) Ten new “Core Concepts” will be introduced to the students (See Appendix A).

## **Historical Background**

The old “Third Ward” of New Haven was originally cut off from downtown by the West Creek and covered the entire southwest quarter of the city. By the 1820’s it had become dotted with pockets of poverty. Known at the turn of the eighteenth century as “Sodom Hill,” the Hill is described by one historian as follows:

The Hill ... is a tract of high ground rising steeply from the creek bed, comprising a dense small knot of streets between the hospital and a secondary creek near Columbus Avenue, now a railroad. After the West Creek was filled in the 1870s the neighborhood spread down over the flats along Oak Street.

(Brown, p. 89 )

The Hill, nestled between the docks to the south and the railroad station to the east, quickly became the “melting pot” of New Haven. The Irish were the first to arrive, attracted initially by the need for laborers on the ill fated Farmington River Canal, then employed by the railroads. Significant Irish immigration occurred in the 1840s and early 1850s, during the famine years in Ireland. Then came the Germans in the late 1830s, with increasing numbers of them arriving just before the Civil War.

The “new immigrants” from southern and eastern Europe began arriving in the 1880s. In came the Eastern European Jews, victims of persecutions and pogroms, exchanging their European ghettos for one in New Haven’s Hill neighborhood:

Almost all penniless at first, the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe made their homes in the center of the city—near Congress Avenue—in one of the poorest neighborhoods ... They lived in a close community along Oak Street, no more than three blocks of it . . . Along Oak Street were the stores: merchandise out in front in boxes and barrels or just heaped on the sidewalk . . . Some of the Jews of Oak Street were tailors; there were also shoemakers, blacksmiths, and carpenters among them. Some were (pushcart) peddlers . . . , others were dealers in old clothes, rags, and junk. Some of the young men worked for the O. B. North Company, manufacturers of hardware for carriages and wagons—and many of the young women worked as sewing machine operators of corsets, in Strouse-Adler’s.

(Osterweis, p. 373)

Also in the 1880’s, the southern Italians streamed into New Haven, escaping economic and political hardship at home, and attracted by the new demands for semi and unskilled workers. Many found work at places like Sargent’s and the railroads. Unfortunately, some of the young boys were caught up in the cruel *padrone* system of child labor, condemned in America and Italy alike.

## **Prejudice**

Each minority group, beginning with the Black Americans who had settled in New Haven during pre

Revolutionary days, had to combat hostile feelings on the part of the “accepted” majority. Black people, particularly, were kept out of the economic, political and social mainstream to the extent that by 1860, a Negro social structure had evolved with standards and traditions completely separate from that of the white community (see Warner, pp. 69-98). Prior to the Civil War, anti-black feelings in New Haven were somewhat mitigated by the sympathy aroused on behalf of the captive African prisoners aboard the ship *Amistad* , incarcerated here in the early 1840s. Still, employment for black people in New Haven was at the low end of the scale: most worked as domestic servants, hotel waiters, barbers and tailors.

The Irish were victimized as well by the native New Haveners who called themselves Know Nothings in the 1850s. In 1855, for example, New Haven’s weekly newspaper, the *Palladium* , warned that “too many foreigners are being naturalized without proper safeguards” and that New Haven must be cautious to prevent “Roman (Catholic) despotism. “ (Quoted in Osterweis, p. 386). The so called “Irish vote” was bitterly denounced in the same journal a year later.

The New Haven Germans and Italians evidently were not subjected to the same harsh treatment given to the above groups, perhaps because of their smaller, more scattered population, and their reluctance to vote a one party ticket as the Irish tended to do.

*Days Two and Three* will again be spent in small groups, with each group of students doing research on ethnic groups who came to the Hill and their contributions and problems. Much of this material can be found in *New Haven Celebrates the Bicentennial* (pp. 34-58). Emphasis will be placed on the following groups: the Irish, the Jews, the Italians, the Blacks and the Germans. (Also included are the Armenians, the Chinese, the Lithuanians, the Poles and the Ukrainians. ) Each group will report back to the class on the following questions: What brought this group to New Haven ? When did they come ? What lasting contributions did this group make ? (What famous people came from this group?) What was/is life like for this group in New Haven? What adjustments did the group have to make to New Haven ?

*Day Four* will center on a comparison of various jobs Hill residents worked at. The class will make observations on two types of labor: the oyster workers and the textile workers. Below is the account from an article in the of New York *Tribune* January, 1857, describing New Haven’s methods of oystering:

There are the openers, the washers, the measurers, the fillers, the packers, etc., each of which performs only the duties pertaining to its own division. At this season of the year (January), few of the oysters are “planted,” but they are generally taken directly from the (ship) to the openers. An expert at this branch will open 100 quarts per day, but the average is not perhaps over 65 quarts. The standard price is, I think, 2-1/2 cents per quart. This work gives employment to many hundreds of women and boys, and much of the work is done at *private dwellings* , by persons who cannot go into a general *workshop* . The oysters, as they come from the (ship), are heaped upon the middle of the room, the operators occupying the wall sides. Each person has before him a small desk or platform, some three feet in height, on which is placed, as occasion requires, about half a bushel of oysters, from which the opener takes his supply. On the stand is a small anvil, on which, with a hammer, the edge of the shell is broken. The (worker) is provided with a knife and hammer, both of which are held in the right hand; when the shell is broken then the hammer is dropped and the knife does its work. Two tubs or pails, of about three gallons capacity each, are placed within about three feet of the workman, into which he throws, ... the luscious morsel which is to tickle the palate of some dweller in the Far West . . . From the opening room the oysters are taken to the filling room, and thence to the packing department. In the filling room, on a platform are placed a dozen or more kegs or cans, ... The oysters are first poured into a large hopper pierced with holes, in which they are thoroughly washed and drained, when they are ready to be deposited in packages.

(Quoted in Atwater, p. 657)

City Point at this time was called Oyster Point, for obvious reasons. The 1850s were the oyster industry's heyday in New Haven, and profits were huge, as were shipments, which varied from 1, 000 to 1, 500 bushels per day throughout the season!

Students will be asked to compare home and workshop conditions, both in oystering and textile manufacturing. An appropriate role play or debate could be performed if time permits.

*Day Five* will feature exterior and interior photographs of "typical" nineteenth century dwellings (from the Dana Collection at the New Haven Colony Historical Society). We shall consider life during these times in the Hill in relation to the pictures shown: What do the photographs reveal about those who once lived and worked here ? As a comparison, the students will read one or two anecdotes from Michael Gold's book, *Jews Without Money* , that describes in vivid terms "the job" and "the tenement" in New York City.

### *C. Week Three: The Hill in the Twentieth Century*

This week's initial presentation will be pictures of some of the products manufactured in New Haven at the turn of the century, e.g., carriages, guns, clocks, hardware, clothing. The picture of prosperity that existed here until after World War I will be studied and possible reasons for decline speculated on. An appreciation for New Haven as a center of culture, history and national industries will be one goal for this section of study.

### **Historical Background**

The story of industry in New Haven properly begins in the nineteenth century with the mention of the carriage industry, the clock making industry, and, of course, the arms industry. Above, we have already discussed the impact of the Farmington Canal project and later the railroads in terms of attracting laborers to New Haven. Also significant were hardware (Sargent's), matches, pianos, as well as cigars and clothing, including corsets.

One decidedly optimistic description of New Haven follows:

As a bustling New Haven entered the twentieth century, its business and industries sustained a growing population with a constantly improving standard of living. A modern downtown rose adjacent to the Green, with fine stores, good restaurants and commercial establishments that offered every type of modern service.

(Hornstein, p. 86)

The general picture of prosperity continued rosy, with minor discolorations until after World War I, when New Haveners began the great migration to the suburbs. The Hill began losing its always unstable middle class population in great numbers during this time of newly developing opportunities to live in attractive low cost suburban housing.

In the Hill neighborhood the Italians, who had replaced the early Irish and Germans, were in turn being replaced by the black and Puerto Rican minorities, who presently dominate the Hill. One area of historical interest to the Hill is today called Church Street South.

This is the place where the East and West Creeks met the harbor— energizing center of the city for 300 years. At the foot of the hill Columbus Avenue crossed the West Creek. Beyond was the Long Wharf, with the East Creek,

later the canal, and finally a web of railroads converging from New York, Boston, the Naugatuck Valley and the north. Docks, coal yards and factories surrounded them. In these few acres of land and water lay the fertile triangle from which the city grew outward like a fan. By the 1940s this old center had fallen into decay.

( Brown, p. 9 5)

Urban blight was becoming apparent throughout the Hill as mid century approached. What was to be done ? Could “renewal” mean a regeneration of spirit and enterprise among the residents of the Hill; or would the people be swept along by a tidal wave of political indifference?

Initially, we as a class will discuss New Haven in terms of location, natural and economic resources, labor market, and attractiveness from educational, recreational and cultural points of view. Assignments will encourage students to map out an advertising campaign that would focus interest on New Haven’s historical, economic, cultural, or recreational advantages to draw businesses or private individuals to New Haven.

*Day Two* would be a talk from someone in the area of New Haven development (Chamber of Commerce, Goals for New Haven, Mayor’s Office) to speak on the topic of New Haven as an attractive place to live and work.

*Days Three and Four* would be group project days in which students would divide up and choose one of the four-plus areas outlined in Day One above: (1) historical; (2) economic; (3) cultural; (4) recreational. Then they will prepare a map of sites relating to the topic chosen together with preparation for a one class period demonstration and display to “See New Haven First. “

*Day Five* would feature student presentations to the rest of the class on their advertising campaigns.

#### *D. Week Four: Resources and Services*

This week’s classes will attempt to familiarize the student with present day services provided and future services needed. *Day One* will be a general lesson on services cities traditionally have provided for their residents and how such services are funded. This should provide a good opportunity to reinforce concepts of local, state and federal responsibilities (division of powers). Taxation and revenues will be a big part of this lesson.

*Day Two* will be a panel of local service resource people from a number of agencies that students should be familiar with, e. g., Hill Health Center, Hill Cooperative Youth Services, the Skill Center (job training), People Acting for Change (P.A.C. ). The goal here is to make students aware of the availability of practical services that they and their families should be aware of. Students might take one of these various service organizations and do additional research and follow up.

*Days Three and Four* : Small group work and report work focusing on health services, youth services, recreational services and crime prevention using material provided by our speakers. How well are services being made available and being delivered to the people of the Hill community? Is quality of life high for Hill residents ? Are needs being realistically met by the amount of services available ? Is quality housing a problem in the Hill? What new services and additional improvements in existing services would improve the quality of life in the Hill?

*Day Five* would be the culminating activity of the week, wherein students, encouraged by the teacher, would lead a panel discussion or debate in which they would present ideas for additional or improved services, such

as housing, crime, health, zoning, public transportation, housing codes, quality of education, recreation, or pollution. Research materials will be available to students all week so that they will be presenting informed opinions and recommendations.

### **III. Classroom Activities**

#### **Introduction**

The above unit contains precise goals and objectives, week by week. Below, I have tried to give samples of worksheets and readings of the type to be used throughout the unit of study.

#### *Lesson I (Week One, Day One)*

This is the introductory lesson to the unit and must be carefully prepared by the teacher. Refer back to the above description of the lesson for specific goals; see Appendix B below for the sample worksheet for this lesson. Note the questions included at the bottom of the worksheet.

Some students no doubt will be surprised at how much they know already about Hill landmarks; others will be just as surprised at how little knowledge they have. Pay attention to observation skills whenever displaying photographs or slides, and encourage the students to freely associate with the pictures being displayed.

#### *Lesson II (Week One, Day Two)*

Equipping each student with a working knowledge of map skills is an ambitious, but realizable goal. Map work can be entertaining as well as enlightening. The key is to start simple, and start "hands on." The students will get instructions as to how to plot direction on a grid and then do their own. (The game "Battleship" may be played if you want to have some fun and have extra time. ) Then, on their own New Haven maps, they can begin to draw in symbols for some of the locations suggested in the previous lesson. The major emphasis is to begin to develop a familiarity with maps and directions, so that they are initially comfortable with maps, so that they may go on to the more advanced tasks of map interpreting and mapmaking later in the course. Hint: colored pencils or markers definitely increase interest and encourages artistic flair!

#### *Lesson III (Week Three, Day One)*

This week begins the student projects on "New Haven, A Nice Place to Visit or Live." We start out with a reading from Beals' book, *Our Yankee Heritage* , (pp. 372-374) in which fictionalized characters discuss the many industrial and recreational advantages of New Haven

We then go on to discuss the following questions:

Questions to Consider: (1) Do you agree with Larry that because industries have traditionally moved out of New Haven, this has helped New Haven ? What reason does he give on the positive side of things ? (2) What is meant by "diversification of industry?" Explain how this has helped New Haven in the past. (3) How can diversification help New Haven's people today, according to the reading ? (4) What does Larry mean when he refers to "New Haven's real story?" Do you agree with his statement? Explain. (5) Evaluate Mr. Thompson's closing comments about New Haven State whether you agree or disagree and why.

This lesson will, I hope, stimulate interest in some aspect of New Haven's industry, culture, commerce or some other area which the student can research and report back to his classmates. The rest of the lesson follows



the description given above in the Teaching Strategies and Lessons section: slides and a brief history lesson, during which students will be expected to take notes.

## **APPENDIX A CORE CONCEPTS**

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*Week One* : city (inner city, outer city), community, grid plan, neighborhood, rural, suburban, urban

*Week Two* : downtown, economy, ghetto, immigrant, landlord, melting pot, migrant, slum, tenant, tenement

*Week Three* : ecology, urbanization, ward

*Week Four* : lead poisoning, mass transit, mayor, municipality, resource (natural, economic, public), transportation, welfare

*Week Five* : alderman, bureaucracy, civic, eminent domain, redevelop, renovate, urban renewal, zone

## **APPENDIX B WORKSHEET: LESSON ONE (DAY ONE)**

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*Directions* : As you are shown the photographs of New Haven locations, identify the place on this worksheet under the heading, "Location Name" Then check the proper choice under "Where Located." Later we shall fill in the space under the last column, "Facts About Location."

*Photo*

No.

*Location Name*

*Where Located*

*Not Sure*

Sure

Facts about Location

1 Defenders' Monument

2 Yale-New Haven Hospital

3 St. Anthony's Church

4 Hill Central School

5 Roberto Clemente School



- \*6 Lee High School
- 7 Seamless Rubber Co.
- 8 Albie Booth Boys' Club
- 9 Sacred Heart Church
- 10 Church St. South Housing
- 11 Union Station
- 12 Police Department
- 13 Hill Health Center
- 14 Skill Center
- 15 City Point

### Questions

1. How many locations did you recognize ? On the Hill map in your packet, locate *at least six* of the locations numbered 7-15. Place the number at the correct place on your map.
  2. Under the "FACTS ABOUT LOCATION" column, write in one fact for any *eight* locations listed above (address, when built, architects' names, usefulness , etc.).
- \*NOTE: The first six will be filled in for the student.

## Student Bibliography

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Durkin, Marguerite, ed. *A Guide to New Haven's Neighborhoods* . New Haven: The Office of Community Relations, Yale University, 1978.

A handy informative glimpse into New Haven's neighborhoods. Especially helpful are the 1970 census map, list of service agencies and various tables and charts giving neighborhood statistics .

Hornstein, Harold, ed. *New Haven Celebrates the Bicentennial*. New Haven: New Haven Bicentennial Commission, 1976.

Particularly useful to this unit is the fifteen page segment on ethnic groups and their contributions to New Haven. The book is filled with excellent pictures and is a "must" to any student of New Haven history.

## Teacher Bibliography

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Atwater, Edward, ed. *History of the City of New Haven* . New York: H. W. Munsell and Co., 1887.

A classic monumental work, of particular use in studying biographies of nineteenth century prominent figures in New Haven.

Beals, Carleton. *Our Yankee Heritage: The Making of Greater New Haven* . New Haven: Bradley and Scoville, Inc., 1951.

A readable account, making use of dialogue among fictionalized characters to make New Haven's story come alive. Suitable for your better students.

Brown, Elizabeth Mills. *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976.

A valuable resource to this unit, with good photographs of city landmarks and historical as well as architectural insights.

Osterweis, Rollin G. *Three Centuries of New Haven, 1638-1938* . New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1953.

Essential to anyone with a thirst for New Haven history, especially in industrial development; also, immigrant and cultural history. Well footnoted.

Powledge, Fred. *Model City: A Test of American Liberalism*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970.

The bitter fight over the decision to build the Oak Street Connector is well detailed and interestingly told.

Warner, Robert Austin *New Haven Negroes: A Social History* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940.

A fascinating account of New Haven's black population from colonial times to 1940; required reading for anyone teaching a New Haven unit.

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