



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1989 Volume I: American Communities, 1880-1980

Urban New Haven in the Making (1920-1980)

Curriculum Unit 89.01.11
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During the past 60 years there have been a number of changes in the Dixwell Community. With the urban renewal, not only the physical structure of the area, but the human dimension as well as showed a considerable change.

The purpose of this Unit is to afford students the opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the historical background, physical structure, organizations, businesses, and individual contributions for the redevelopment of the Dixwell Community.

The majority of activities incorporated in this unit will concentrate on reading.

The activities and strategies in this unit will encourage students to use various skills and abilities for learning.

The students will learn a range of skills: 1) Critical and analytic thinking, 2) Reading comprehension, 3) Vocabulary building, 4) Writing skills, 5) Research and map skills.

Objectives 1) To motivate students to read: 2) To improve some general information concerning the Redevelopment of the community. 3) To expose students to businesses, and organizations in the community. 4) To gain knowledge about historical development and contributions of past and present culture. 5) To gain knowledge, skills, values, social participation, and practice in decision making. 6) To understand how economic development in the U.S. influences the community. 7) To demonstrate and increase social studies vocabulary associated with the unit. 8) To demonstrate the ability to locate and research materials in the library. 9) To understand the social and economic conditions in the community.

This unit will cover a six week period and will be divided into four separate sections. Classes will meet five times a week.

This unit will provide the adolescents (9th -12th grades) with an opportunity to read and discuss issues that are relevant to the community.

The community is a vital resource for teaching economics. Many adolescents seem to feel and alienation towards there local area. They spend large parts of their school day in what they feel is an artificial school environment removed from the everyday activity of community life.

In addition to that, developing a better understanding of the local economy can help them to develop a sense of social efficacy that encourages participation in their community. Community study can help to build a stronger identity with the local area, and can reduce feelings of cynicism and apathy so common among many adolescents.

In learning economics by means of the local community provides students with numerous opportunities to become better citizens.

Students constitute the single most important resource of the local community, namely, its future. Through education, we can consciously foster those attitudes and skills deemed most valuable to the community.

Through this process, students will enter their community with a charge, to carry on the work of reproducing the life of the community.

It is my purpose in this unit, to actively participate in bringing about their vision of the future in the Dixwell Community.

STRATEGIES

WEEK 1 ~~*WEEK 2*~~

Teacher will introduce unit, followed by teacher-centered lectures and discussion on historical background, selection emphasizing that particular element will be assigned as reading and discussion. Student-centered discussion and related activity worksheets. The strategies in this section are purposely geared towards discussion with a deemphasis on reading and writing by the student.

Vocabulary words will be assigned for study and definitions.

WEEK 3 ~~*WEEK 4*~~

Students will select and read a novel. Students will write an autobiography of their chose. Students are expected to write one to three pages in length.

WEEK 5

Students will do role playing, given selected characters by the teacher. Students will visit New Haven's Afro-American Historical Museum, summarizing their findings in one to two paragraphs.

WEEK 6

Students will use reference and map skills. Students will do an comparative study of black owned businesses today (1980) and of communities in the early (1950's).

Classroom Activities

The Dixwell Community has been the center of the black culture in New Haven for many years. Dixwell-

Newhallville represents a major portion of New Haven's inner city, stretching northward from the inner section of Dixwell Avenue, Whalley Avenue and Goffe Street, to the Hamden townline.

In addition to the highly concentrated black population, Dixwell-Newhallville differs from other parts of the city with regard to both age and family structure. The neighborhood has a higher proportion of children under the age of nineteen, as well as female-headed households than the city as a whole.

The Dixwell Community includes more businesses than any other community in New Haven. Dixwell has always been a working class residential neighborhood infused with much industrial, wholesale and commercial activity.

By the 19th Century, Dixwell had become a congested urban center and was still growing. The population was mostly immigrants or first generation American of Italians, Jewish and German Origin. There were about one thousand blacks in New Haven in 1870, and Dixwell had attracted most of them.

The black population had grown so rapidly that Dixwell had earned a reputation as *THE HARLEM OF NEW HAVEN*. The growth of the black population continued steadily, by the 1930's, blacks make up 50% of Dixwell population. The 50's saw a continued growth of blacks and out-migration of other cultural groups. By the 60's, blacks constituted 75% of Dixwell population.

According to the 1980 census, the Dixwell-Newhallville neighborhoods encompasses 12% of New Haven total population, 89% is black, while 9% is white. This differs considerably from the city wide figure—32% black, and Hispanics represents 8% of the population.

There has been a strong belief that much of the vitality and creativity that has marked Dixwell society is due to the rich cultural traditions brought here by the immigrant population.

This Curriculum Unit will address the following:

ORGANIZATIONS

A. The Church

The history of Dixwell's black community begins with the establishment of New Haven's first black church. The church was founded on Temple Street in 1820, by a small group of black leaders and Simeon Jocelyn, a powerful abolitionist who served as the first minister of the church. The church was very active in the underground railroad, it has struggled to further human and civil rights throughout its history. In 1887, the church moved to Dixwell and was renamed the Dixwell Congregational Church.

Religion continues to play a vital role in New Haven's black community today. The ministers and members have written publications, attend anti-slavery conferences in the state and nationally. The church continues to support social and educational programs that were started.

There are approximately 15 churches in New Haven which are devoted exclusively to the worship of black families. The total assessed valuation of all black church buildings and their holdings is approximately \$200,000.

B. Q HOUSE

The Q House has played the strongest role in the Dixwell community. It was established in 1924, by leading blacks and whites in Dixwell to serve youth, community center and a base for groups, charities, and organizations. Its alumni are ranked among the who's who of American black community, which includes civil rights workers, athletes, judges, writers, and politicians. The dedication of those who grew up with the Q House is so strong, the annual alumni dinner dance draws more than 800 Q House alumni from throughout the nation. At a time when everybody's lives are up-rooted, kids can still learn values that will help them aspire to making achievements for themselves.

Today the Q House provides counseling and activities for troubled youngsters, gives drama, and art classes and sponsor trips and involved neighborhood youths in projects. This organization is concerned about opportunities for young people and tries to help families and unwed mothers raise their kids, along with instilling values. The Q House is located at 98 Dixwell Avenue.

BUSINESSES

A. STANDARD ELECTRIC COMPANY

Charles Tribbett, a Yale University graduate in Electrical Engineering, was one of the city's largest electrical contractors. He operated the *Standard Electric Company* at 124 Dixwell Avenue. The headquarters provided the community with minor emergency repairs and supplies; the main work of the company was to complete wiring in new buildings.

B. THE EXCEL MARKET

The black grocery store for many years was called the *Excel Market*. In the 1930's Pete Harris and Bob Phillips opened the market on Dixwell Avenue between Foote and Webster Streets. It was a large, well stocked store and needed only the cash support of the area's black residents to be successful. These men opened the store with limited capital and were financially unable to compete with the white stores, who were willing to offer unlimited credit to its customers. The store finally had to close as had two other large, well stocked black operated stores had to do, 40 years later, for the same reason.

C. THE LYRIC THEATRE

The Dixwell community had its own movie house many years ago. It was called the *Lyric Theatre*, but known as the "Nicklet" because the admission was only 5¢ (a nickel). It was located on Dixwell near Webster and Foote street. Every afternoon was a sell-out with kids enjoying themselves. The evening attendance was also great in numbers.

D. THE UNIQUE BOUTIQUE

Located at 287 Dixwell Avenue is one of the oldest black run businesses in New Haven. The Boutique has been in operation more than 25 years. The Boutique features an extensive selection of hats, jewelry, haircare products, posters, incense, and general collection of odds and ends. Beverly Fernanders (Huckaby and Eugene Huckaby, Jr. are the owners and managers of the Unique Boutique #1 and #2. It opened in 1970 to sell black products.)

E. BOWEN PETERS CULTURAL ARTS CENTER

Located at 388 Dixwell Avenue is known for jazz, modern, Afro or ballet classes. Going into their 12th year, the

center offers twice-weekly dance lessons for children and adults, which culminate in an annual performance.

F. THE DAVIS & WALLER PHARMACY

Located on Dixwell Avenue, is the only black owned and operated business of its kind in New Haven.

G. THE SOUNDTRACK II CAFE

Located at 9 Dixwell Avenue, offers jazz and rhythm and blues three night a week, one of the liveliest bars on Dixwell Avenue, has been in business for several years.

H. BOB'S QUALITY MARKET

Located at 507 Dixwell Avenue, offers the finest selection of southern and Jamaican food. He's been in business for several years.

I. SOSENSEY'S N & B, INC .

Located at 246 Dixwell Avenue has been a Dixwell institution since 1919. It offers an impressive array of paints, tools and construction materials along with a friendly atmosphere.

INDIVIDUALS MAKING CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY

FREDERICK FRANCIS SMITH , the inspiration for the Freddy Fixer Parade. At the close of World War II, Frederick Smith was one of only four doctors on Dixwell. He became the first black on the staff of medicine at Yale University. He was active in Dixwell's oldest black church, Dixwell Congregational Church (today the Dixwell Avenue, United Church of Christ); He helped found New Haven Urban League, and he served as a police commissioner from 1962-1965. It was in 1964, when he took a personal role in Dixwell's development, building 25 units of housing in what came to be known as Dixwell Plaza. In 1962, Civic leader wanted a personality to symbolize the effort to clean up and restore Dixwell. They also wanted a project that would include the children.

Some say, Frederick the symbol of pride and restoration in the black community, was named for Freddy Fixer parade. Other say, Freddy was a purely mythological character.

LAURABELLE McCOY , 92 years old, a retired nurse was New Haven's first black alderwoman and now lives on Bristol Street, has been an active member of the Dixwell community for more than three quarters of a century. Born in Collowal, New York, January 6, 1890, came to New Haven and found that minorities weren't doing anything.

In order to stop segregation, she went to work as a nurse and began trying to change things. She also took different jobs trying to break the ice, it wasn't easy.

MRS. LOUISE ROBINSON , has been the chairperson of the Ebony Fashion Fair for the past 16 years. The fair is presented annually to help benefit the Dixwell Congregational Church.

CHARLES FLETCHER AND BILL DOUGLAS , both held a record for continued employment with predominantly black institutions in New Haven. Together they have a total of 106 years as staff members of Dixwell Community House.

WALTER MITCHELL , a 20 year salesman for Mantilla Motors, was the first black licensed automobile dealer in Connecticut. He opened the business in 1946 on Dixwell Avenue between Bristol Street and Lake Place.

ACTIVITY LESSON : # 1

QUESTIONS FOR COMPREHENSION

- A. How do people start communities?
 - 1. Define the term community.
 - 2. Identify three reasons why communities begin (need for shelter, transportation, the church, safety, jobs, better place to live.)
- B. Why do communities need government?
 - 1. Discuss three reasons why communities need government (provide leadership, carry out laws, solve problem).
- C. How do communities learn about the news?
 - 1. Define the term communication.
 - 2. State at least five types of intra community transportation (bicycle, auto, walking, taxi, mopeds, bus, train, and motorcycle).
- D. *Problems of Modern Communities*
 - 1. Name three problems communities must solve (poverty, drugs, crime, jobs, education, redevelopment of the community).

ACTIVITY LESSON # 2

A. Making the front page

- 1. I will engage class in a cooperative venture. The production of a front page or front page section, which will involve a section made up of individual contributions. Students will do research on individuals in the library.

ACTIVITY LESSON # 3

A. Journals

1. Students will keep journals of personal thoughts and problem they find in the community. Expressing emotions in written form finding solutions to problems. This activity will allow students to confront the problem and try to find a solution, following open teacher-student discussion.

ACTIVITY LESSON # 4

A. Vocabulary

Students will write a sentence and a definition using the following words.

1. community
2. culture
3. society
4. development
5. contribution
6. organization
7. structure
8. economic
9. topographic

ACTIVITY LESSON # 5

A. Timelines of Events

1. Students will be given the opportunity to place the historical event on the timeline in the correct order. The students will be looking for major issues and the places where these events took place.

As each student completes its survey, the findings are mounted on a timeline near the date of survey period. The students will then discuss the cumulative findings in the context of these questions.

1. In which year were there more interest in local issues?
2. Which issues, if any, are still of interest or importance today?
3. What contributions were made in the early 80's in the Dixwell community?

EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

Set up a library of Novels (on famous blacks in the classroom for students to use.)

ACTIVITY LESSON # 6

A. Map Skills

1. Students will locate specific geographic features on a Connecticut map.
2. Students will state at least two ways the geography of Connecticut affects the people of Connecticut? (jobs, way of life, culture).
3. Students will compute the distance between two or more given neighborhoods using a scale of miles.
4. Students will construct a specialized map of New Haven's neighborhoods using appropriate symbols.

ACTIVITY LESSON # 7

1. Students will identify at least five areas in which people are dependent upon one another and people of other communities (services, raw materials and goods, transportation, economics, industry, technology, and communication).
2. Students will describe one way in which the environment affects the way of life in each of these areas:
 - a. resources
 - b. transportation
 - c. services
 - d. industry
 - e. economy
 - f. recreation
 - g. food
 - h. clothing
 - i. shelter

ACTIVITY LESSON # 8

1. Students will list the factors which were instrumental in the migration of blacks from the South to the North.
2. Students will list those factors which gave rise to the Harlem Renaissance. Teacher-student discussion.
3. Students will list the key factors which gave rise to the Civil Right Movement of the 1950's, 1960's, and the 1970's and list individual blacks who were active in the Civil Rights Movement.

CLASSROOM MATERIALS

1. black board
2. chalk
3. paper
4. pen/pencil
5. poster board
6. multi-color markers
7. student notebooks
8. construction paper
9. encyclopedias
10. tracing paper
11. maps
12. teacher make reading inventory/checklist
13. filmstrip projector

Teacher's Bibliography

Burnett Whit ed., *Black Hands on a White Face* , New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1971.

Selection of stories written by black and white authors which deal with significant dramatical experiences in their lives.

Clarke, John Henrik, ed., *American Negro Short Stories* , New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

An anthology of thirty-one stories reflecting black experiences in the U.S.

Gesell, Arnold, *Youth: The Years from Ten to Sixteen* , New York: Harper and Row Publishing Company, 1956.

It traces the development of behavior in the setting of the home, school, and the community.

King, Woodie, editor, *Black Short Story Anthology* , New York: Columbia University Press, 1972.

A collection of short stories about various aspects of the black culture and being black in the sixties.

Stewart, Daniel Y., *Black New Haven 1920-1977* , Advocate Press, Inc., New Haven, 1977.

Deals with the redevelopment of New Haven's black communities.

Student Reading List

Clarke John Henrik, ed., *American Negro Short Stories* , New York: Hill and Wang, 1966.

An anthology of thirty-one stories reflecting black experiences in the U.S.

Gesell, Arnold. *Youth : The Years from Ten to Sixteen* . New York: Harper and Row Publishing Company, 1956.

An indepth study of adolescent development. It traces the development of behavior in the setting of the home, school, and the community.

King, Woodie, editor. *Black Short Story Anthology* , New York: Columbia University Press, 1972.

A collection of short stories about various aspects of the black culture and being black in the sixties.

Stewart, Daniel Y., *Black New Haven, 1920 1977* , Advocate Press, Inc., 1977.

Deals with what the area was like before redevelopment.

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