Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward

PRIMARY SOURCE MATERIAL
AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
CREDITS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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IMAGE CREDITS

All images and objects are from the Black History Museum & Cultural Center or the Virginia Museum of History & Culture collections, unless otherwise noted.
INTRODUCTION

Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward will introduce students to the area of Richmond, Virginia known as Jackson Ward by examining significant figures and places. This packet will explore primary sources to explain how Jackson Ward became so successful.

READING AND ANALYZING

This primary source packet is designed to help familiarize students with primary source material including photographs, legal documents, and a variety of artifacts. When analyzing the materials, it is important to keep in mind the origin of the source – who created it? What was the purpose? What does this tell you about the period and the person who created it? These questions, the material in the corresponding packet, and the guidelines below will provide an avenue for integrating museum collections into the classroom.

BACKGROUND: Reconstruction and Jackson Ward

After the Civil War ended, the United States entered a period called Reconstruction. Virginia needed significant physical rebuilding because more battles were fought on Virginia soil than in any other state. In addition, there was political and social rebuilding to be done. The cities and farmlands had been destroyed, the economy was decimated, and the people of Virginia had to figure out how to reconstruct their lives.

During the Reconstruction period, three very important amendments were added to the U.S. Constitution. In 1865, (officially marking the end of the Civil War), the 13th Amendment was passed abolishing slavery based on race. In 1868, the 14th Amendment established citizenship “All persons born or naturalized in the United States.” Finally, in 1870, the 15th Amendment enfranchised black men giving them the right to vote and the opportunity to hold office.

The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments created many opportunities for the nearly 4 million newly freed Black Americans in this country. For the first time, Black Americans in South had the freedom to choose how and where they wanted to live, were able to be paid for their labor, get an education, vote and get involved in the making of laws. It was an exciting time of empowerment within the Black community!

However, just because the Civil War ended and slavery ended, did not mean that the same feelings and ideas that led to the Civil War just disappeared. There were still many people who were angry about the outcome of the war and who did not believe that Black and white people were equal. These beliefs led many, especially in the South, to create obstacles to Black empowerment that were both legal and effective. Black Codes were laws intended to criminalize Black people, legalize segregation, and enact literacy tests and poll taxes meant to stop Black Americans from voting.

Despite these challenges, many Black Americans were able to thrive during this period of history. Jackson Ward was a neighborhood in the heart of Richmond, Virginia, located just a few blocks from the former White House of the Confederacy. Yet, it became known for its thriving business and entertainment sector and had so many successful Black-owned businesses that it earned the nickname “Black Wall Street.” The wealth found in Jackson Ward opened up opportunities for art and entertainment and drew many famous musicians and artists to perform there. This earned the neighborhood a second nickname - “The Little Harlem of the South.” How was an African American community in the Jim Crow South able to thrive? This packet will explore this question and more about Jackson Ward and its legacy.
LIST OF SOURCES

Lithograph, The Fifteenth Amendment
Photographic Print, Maggie Walker & Staff of St. Luke Penny Savings Bank*
Microscope, Dr. Zenobia Gilpin, 1938

Law, The Racial Integrity Act, 1924
Program, Dr. Booker T. Washington at City Auditorium, Friday, Nov. 7, 1913
Photographic Print, Hippodrome Theatre

Photographic Print, Grand Fountain, United Order of True Reformers (U.O.T.R)
Photographic Print, Holmes, Leonie Helen

Book Illustration of Rev. John Jasper Hearse, A.D. Price Funeral Home
Diploma, Van de Vyver High School, 1939
Program, Sid Graham presents Bill Robinson, “Born Happy”

Sample Policy, Southern Aid Life Insurance Company
Certificate, Charles Thaddeus Russell, 1922
Matchbook, Ella Fitzgerald

*Courtesy Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site

OVERALL DISCUSSION AND GUIDING QUESTIONS

OBSERVE

1. What do you notice first?
2. Find something small but interesting.
3. What do you notice that you didn’t expect? What do you notice that you can’t explain? What do you notice now that you didn’t earlier?

REFLECT

1. Where do you think this came from?
2. Why do you think somebody made this? What do you think was happening when this was made?
3. Who do you think was the audience for this item?
4. What tool was used to create this?
5. Why do you think this item is important?
6. If someone made this today, what would be different?
7. What can you learn from examining this?

QUESTION

The passage of each of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments were important within the African American community. For the first time, African Americans had the opportunity to make decisions for themselves about how and where they wanted to live. The 15th Amendment was especially important because African American men had the chance not just to vote, but to be elected to public office and help to write the laws. Having a say in how the government is run and what laws are passed at the local, state, and national level was incredibly empowering for Black men, many of whom had been enslaved and not even considered citizens just a few years prior. This hand-painted lithograph was created by James C. Beard in 1870 to celebrate the ratification of the 15th amendment. It has several different scenes depicting the new opportunities for Black citizens in America including voting and being elected to government. For the African American community in the United States, the right to cast a ballot was worth great celebration!

1. Make a list of the new opportunities depicted in this lithograph. Which of these new opportunities do you believe was most important and why?
2. On the lithograph, there are some specific people pictured and named. Why do you think those specific people were included and named in this lithograph? Choose one person to research. Write one paragraph about that person’s contributions.

Although many new opportunities opened up to African Americans during the Reconstruction period, there were also many former Confederates, angry with the outcome of the Civil War, who actively worked to put up obstacles to the newly freed African Americans. Legal obstacles like Black Codes, segregation, and literacy tests and poll taxes became the norm in the southern states. Beginning in the 1920’s, the Virginia General Assembly passed legislation aimed at protecting the purity of white bloodlines from what many believed to be the evils of race-mixing. The Racial Integrity Act of 1924 legally defined what it meant to be a white person and made interracial marriage illegal in Virginia. This law was not applied only towards Black people, but also Virginia Indians, Asians, and any other race not considered white. By legally defining what it meant to be white, the Racial Integrity Act was also legally defining who was and who was not allowed to patronize whites-only businesses.

1. Read section 5 of the Racial Integrity Act. How is the term “white person” defined?
2. Read section 1. According to this law, what is the penalty for willfully falsifying the color or race of a person on registration or birth certificates?
3. Why would a person try to falsify their race on official documents? Why would the General Assembly feel doing so was a serious crime (felony)?
4. How would this law affect businesses in Virginia?

During the Jim Crow era in the South, African Americans were not allowed to patronize white-owned businesses due to racial segregation. This led to Black communities forming their own parallel economies where they established their own businesses, restaurants, and banks. An important part of creating this parallel economy were fraternal societies that allowed members of black communities to pool their resources and expertise. In 1881, William W. Browne established the first Virginia chapter of the Grand Fountain United Order of True Reformers. Under his leadership, the Virginia
chapter of the True Reformers became one of the most prosperous fraternal organizations in the United States. Members of the Richmond chapter were granted the first ever bank charter making them the first black-owned bank chartered in the U.S. In addition to their bank, the True Reformers opened many other businesses including a hotel, a printing office, a grocery store, a concert hall, and a real estate office.

1. Would it have been more difficult to start businesses without fraternal societies like the Grand Fountain United Order of True Reformers? Why or why not?
2. Why would it be important for there to be a black-owned bank within the black community?
3. Who are the people pictured? What do you notice about the people pictured?
4. Besides banks, what other businesses started by this fraternal organization are pictured here?

Photographic Print, Book Illustration of Rev. John Jasper
VMHC Object Number: 2007.5.74

In addition to fraternal organizations, churches were another major way that African Americans combined resources to help the entire community. John Jasper became one of the country’s most prominent Black preachers in the late 19th century. Born into slavery, John Jasper learned to read and write from another enslaved man while working in a Richmond tobacco factory. He began studying the Bible and preaching to other African Americans in 1839. In 1867, he founded the Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church in an abandoned Confederate horse stable. Two years later, the church moved to the Jackson Ward neighborhood, where it has been ever since.

1. Why were churches an effective avenue for helping Black communities make progress?
2. Read the text at the bottom of the picture, where would this picture be stored? What year?
3. What is the significance of Congress choosing to have a picture of an African American preacher in the Library of Congress?

Hearse, A.D. Price Funeral Home
VMHC Object Number: 2005.549

Born enslaved, Alfred “A. D.” Price became the first Black funeral director in Virginia to receive an embalming license from the state. His funeral home was one of the most successful in the area. In addition to the funeral home, A.D. Price also owned a blacksmith shop, a livery, and was one of the largest African American real estate owners in the city. The A.D. Price Funeral Home played a major role in Jackson Ward.

1. What are some details about the hearse that let you know the A. D. Price Funeral home was a successful business?
2. How would successful black-owned businesses help improve the lives of those who lived in Jackson Ward?

Sample Policy, Southern Aid Life Insurance Company
BHMVA Object Number: BHM.0232

Receiving its charter on February 25, 1893, the Southern Aid and Insurance Company became the first black-owned and operated insurance company in the United States. A group of men started Southern Aid in Richmond, Virginia with the goal of providing affordable insurance protection to African Americans and create jobs for unemployed young people. In its early years the company struggled because it was not connected to any of the fraternal orders or churches in the area which African Americans in the community trusted. Then A.D. Price took over leadership, renamed the company the Southern Aid Society of Virginia. Under Price’s leadership, the company thrived. By 1937, the Southern Aid Society of Virginia employed more than 300 black men and women in branches all through-out Virginia and Washington D.C.

1. What type of insurance plan was this?
2. What type of job would a person have in order to need this type of insurance?
3. What did the Southern Aid Life Insurance Company agree to do?
4. What would happen to workers in an African American Community if they did not have this type of insurance?

Photographic Print, Maggie Walker and Staffs of the Independent Order and St. Luke Penny Savings Bank
Image Courtesy of Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, MAWA 7231

Maggie Lena Walker was born in Richmond, VA in 1864. From the time she was a teenager, Maggie joined the local council of the Order of St. Luke and worked to promote humanitarian causes and encouraged individual self-help. As an adult she lived and worked in the Jackson Ward neighborhood. She established a newspaper, The St. Luke Herald, in 1902 and a year later founded and served as president of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank. She became the first African American woman to charter a bank in the United States. Her work helped Jackson Ward to gain its nickname of “The Black Wall Street.” Her home is still located in the Jackson Ward neighborhood and is available for tours even now.

1. How are they dressed in this photograph?
2. How would a bank in Jackson Ward, run by African Americans, help those living and working in the neighborhood to build wealth?
3. What challenges would Maggie Walker face as a Black woman in the early 1900’s as she sought to charter a bank?

Program, Dr. Booker T. Washington at City Auditorium
VMHC Object Number: 2008.1.42

By the early 1900s there were so many successful black-owned banks and businesses that Jackson Ward’s Second Street became known as “Black Wall Street.” The wealth that circulated in Jackson Ward gave its leaders power and notoriety that was uncommon for African Americans in the South. Robert Russa Moton, a graduate of Hampton Normal and Agriculture Institute (now Hampton University), became one of the most prominent educators in the United States. In 1912, R.R. Moton sought to bring Black leaders in business, industry, and education in Virginia together with the common goal of improving life for Black Virginians. This group was called the Negro Organization Society. On November 7, 1913, the Negro Organization Society hosted a conference in which Booker T. Washington (a close friend of R.R. Moton) was the keynote speaker. The conference had over 4,000 attendees, including the Governor of Virginia, William H. Mann.

1. Who do you think those pictured in the program are? Why would they be pictured?
2. Make a list of the businesses you see advertised in the program. How many different types of businesses did you see?
3. Find the advertisement for the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank. What is the total amount of resources that the bank has? Research to see how much that would be equivalent to today.
4. Find the advertisement for the Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company. In 1911, how much had been paid to policy holders? Research to see how much that would be equivalent to today.
5. Think about your answers to questions 2-4, what does that tell you about the success of Jackson Ward?
6. What is the significance of having a white governor as one of the keynote speakers at this event?
The public education system began developing after the end of the Civil War. For the first time, education was considered a right of all children regardless of race. From the very beginning, public schools in Virginia and throughout the South were segregated. At first, there was not much difference between the black and white schools. They were both usually one room schoolhouses that covered multiple grades. However, as more public funding was allocated to public schools, the differences between black and white schools became apparent. White schools received more funding allowing them to have more teachers, better buildings, and more resources. However, despite these unfair differences, there was a determination within the black community to ensure their students were educated. Leonie Helen Holmes, pictured here, graduated from the Richmond Colored Normal and High School. This school, located in Jackson Ward, was both a high school and a “normal” school, a teacher-training academy. Leonie was a graduate of the high school and had completed the teacher-training preparing her to enter the teaching profession.

1. Based on your observations of the image, why do you think this image was taken?
2. Look at the setting of this image. Where do you think this image was taken? Why do you think that?
3. Based on this image, do you think education was considered important? Why or why not?

Certificate, Charles Thaddeus Russell, 1922
BMHVA Object Number: BHM.0289

Education created new opportunities for African Americans in the workplace. Careers that required technical knowledge, skills, and certifications became available. Charles Thaddeus Russell, a Richmond native and Hampton Institute graduate, was among the first group of African American architects to receive state certification in Virginia. Russell played a large role in transforming how Jackson Ward looked by designing multiple businesses, houses, and multi-use commercial buildings throughout the neighborhood. His first professional commission came in 1910 when Maggie Walker asked him to design her St. Luke Penny Savings Bank building. Other notable buildings designed by Russell were the Richmond Beneficial Insurance Company and the remodel and expansion of Sixth Mount Zion Baptist Church.

1. What does this certificate say about Charles T. Russell? Who certified him?
2. What is the significance of being a state-certified architect? What would that mean for Charles Russell?
3. What would it mean to the Jackson Ward community to have a Black architect available to design their buildings?
4. Besides an architect, what else would be needed to build the infrastructure in Jackson Ward?

Microscope, Dr. Zenobia Gilpin, 1938
BHMVA Object Number: BHM.0100

As with other industries in the South, segregation had a huge impact on the medical care available to African Americans. Despite facing both racism and sexism, Zenobia Gilpin became a nationally renowned doctor in the Jim Crow South. After graduating from Howard University Medical School in 1923, Dr. Gilpin worked in Richmond providing medical services to those in the Black Community. Dr. Gilpin had her own practice specializing in women’s health and developed a program in which health clinics were held inside Black churches. This program became a model across the nation as many city hospitals refused to treat Black patients. Dr. Gilpin was an outspoken advocate for addressing the racial disparities apparent in public health. She also held leadership positions in civic organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

1. What possible types of medicine did Dr. Zenobia Gilpin practice? Why do you think that, based off this artifact?
2. Thinking about the era, what types of obstacles would Dr. Gilpin have faced while having a career in medicine?
3. Do you think the health care available to someone still differs depending on their race? Research to find examples and/or evidence to back up your idea.
Photographic Print, Hippodrome Theatre
BHMVA Object Number: BHM.PH.0413

Because Jackson Ward was home to many thriving African American businesses, people in Jackson Ward had extra money to spend on things like entertainment. Just as with other businesses during this time, Black people were not allowed to enter white theaters. In 1914, the Hippodrome opened and was the only movie and performing arts theater that Black people could attend in Richmond. It later became a celebrated theater, attracting legendary artists like Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, and Louis Armstrong. Jackson Ward had such a thriving entertainment industry that it earned a second nickname, “Little Harlem of the South” after the Harlem Renaissance in New York.

1. What do you think is happening in the image?
2. Why would it be important to have an entertainment venue like the Hippodrome in a Black Community?

BHMVA Object Number: BHM.0312

Because segregation was not just legal but widely followed in the South, traveling could be extremely dangerous for African Americans. It was imperative to know what businesses were friendly towards Black customers. The Negro Motorist Green Book became the go-to travel guide for those traveling south. One of the entries in the 1950 edition was the Eggleston Hotel. Built by William “Buck” Miller in 1904, the Miller’s Hotel was one of just a few places in Richmond that allowed African American customers. Even rarer for the Jim Crow South, was that Miller’s Hotel was upscale and offered fine accommodations to its patrons. Later the Miller Hotel was bought by Neverett Eggleston and renamed the Eggleston Hotel. It became one of the most popular hotels for African Americans. Famous Black entertainers like Louis Armstrong, Redd Foxx and Duke Ellington would stay here before and after performing at the Hippodrome.

1. Why do you think the phrase, “Carry your Green Book with you, you may need it” was included on the cover? Why would the Green Book be needed?
2. What would be the significance of having a business listed in The Green Book?
3. What types of businesses might a person be looking for inside this travel guide? Think about what someone would need access to while traveling.

Program, Sid Graham presents Bill Robinson, “Born Happy”
VMHC Object Number: 2001.753.3

Bill “Bojangles” Robinson was born in Richmond, VA on May 15, 1878. He started dancing to earn money when he was just 5 years old. He had his breakthrough moment when he starred in the hugely successful Broadway revue, Blackbirds of 1928. A revue is a show that includes multiple songs, dances, and short skits. Blackbirds was a revue starring African Americans but was meant for white audiences. “Bojangles” became well known for his unique tap-dancing routines and his cheerful disposition. Bill Robinson also starred in 14 Hollywood motion pictures, including multiple movies with the child star Shirley Temple. Achieving this level of fame in Hollywood was not easy for a Black man in the 1930s. There were not many roles available to Black men during this time and those that were available often portrayed
black men as negative stereotypes. Therefore, Black actors, like Bill Robinson, who took those jobs often faced backlash from the Black community.

1. Research the film roles that Bill “Bojangles” Robinson had. What are the similarities and differences in his roles?
2. Think about the roles available to Black actors today. Would Bill Robinson have had those same opportunities in the early 20th century? Why or Why not?
3. How is Bill Robinson portrayed on the front of the program? How do you think he felt about how he was portrayed? How do you think others in the Black community felt about how he was portrayed?
4. On the inside of the program, read the language describing “Whitey’s Jitterbugs.” Based on the description, what type of people are in this dancing group?

**Matchbook, Ella Fitzgerald**
VMHC Object Number: 1997.82.4

Born in Newport News, VA, Ella Fitzgerald was one of the most popular female jazz singers in the United States and was well loved around the world. Ella won the amateur performing competition at Harlem’s famed Apollo Theater when she was just 17 years old. The win launched her music career. During her lifetime, Ella won 13 Grammy awards and sold over 40 million albums. She worked with many famous musicians including Duke Ellington, Nat King Cole, and Frank Sinatra. She performed all over America and the world for diverse audiences. In the 1940’s she often performed at the Hippodrome Theatre in Jackson Ward and other African American theaters in Virginia.

1. What would be the significance of having a matchbook with her image on it?
2. The words inside the matchbook are Portuguese, what does that suggest about the fame of Ella Fitzgerald?
3. What does it say about the Hippodrome Theatre, that someone as famous as Ella Fitzgerald would perform there?
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward
Lithograph, The Fifteenth Amendment, Celebrated May 19, 1870
VMHC Call Number: 2003.435
AN ACT TO PRESERVE RACIAL INTEGRITY

1. Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia, that the State Registrar of Vital Statistics may, as soon as practicable after the taking of the United States Census for any particular year, compile a form wherein the racial composition of any individual or of any mixture thereof, or any other non-Caucasian, may be shown.

2. Every local registrar shall keep on file in his office a registration certificate for each person, as soon as practicable, who shall have registered; and if the certificates of any person have been registered by a registrar, he shall register the same in his office, and shall make a certificate of the same and shall file it in his office.

3. Every registration certificate shall be signed by the person named in the certificate.

4. No marriage license shall be granted to a person who is not a citizen of the United States, or who is not a resident of the State of Virginia.

5. No person shall be admitted to the practice of medicine, surgery, or any other profession, without having obtained a certificate from the State Registrar of Vital Statistics, attesting to his qualifications.

6. Every registration certificate shall be signed by the person named in the certificate.

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APPENDIX

consistency, hereby repealed.

2. All acts of parts or acts inconsistent

with this act are to be construed

in accordance with this Act.

3. The Clerk of the County Court shall use the

terms "estates" and "estatements" as

they relate to the County Court of

every County in the State of Georgia.
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward
Photographic Print, Grand Fountain, United Order of True Reformers (U.O.T.R),
early 20th c.
VMHC Object Number: 1997.59
Photographic Print, Book Illustration of Rev. John Jasper
VMHC Object Number: 2007.5.74
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward
Photographic Print, Maggie Walker and Staffs of the Independent Order and St. Luke Penny Savings Bank
Image Courtesy of Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, MAWA 7231
T. O. of St. Luke

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Dr. Booker T. Washington

CITY AUDITORIUM,
FRIDAY, NOV. 7TH, 1913

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Council of Colored Women

Local Committee:
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Mrs. Orab Stokes, Secretary
John H. Braxton, Manager

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J. C. BARTON, President

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Richmond, Va.

February 25, 1912
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward

Photographic Print, Leonie Helen Holmes

VMHC Object Number: 2003.298.29.A
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward

Microscope, Dr. Zenobia Gilpin, 1938

BMHVA Object Number: BHM.0100
The Green Book
An International Travel Guide

Carry Your Green Book With You. You May Need It.

1950 Edition

Price $1.00
YPAH ZROB

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Mabel Scott
Delia Rhythm Boys
Holmes & Jean
Velia Holmes & Jean
Jimmy Anderson
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Judy Carol
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A Born Happy Chaos of
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Presents
In His Hilarious Variety Revue

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Entire Production Supervised By
MARTY FORKINS
Black Wall Street: The Legacy of Jackson Ward

Matchbook, Ella Fitzgerald
VMHC Object Number: 1997.82.4