An Unmarked Trail is based on the research of two groups of students from Asheville, Roberson, Reynolds, and Erwin High Schools who spent the summers of 2000 and 2003 in the archives and living rooms of our mountain home. Under the leadership of Torie Leslie, Dr. Dee James, and Deborah Miles the students researched old census records, newspaper files, deed room documents, and conducted oral interviews. Using their diligence, and that of the archivists who came before them, this previously “unmarked trail” with no monuments or memorial highways and few historical placards is becoming a well-traveled path of remembrance and appreciation. It is hoped that this documentation will continue as local citizens come forward to share the stories and photographs of their families and neighborhoods. The exhibit is particularly indebted to the Black Highlanders Collection at UNCA Special Collections and to the North Carolina Desk at Pack Library who have spent years collecting the photographs and testimonies from near and far.

2000 STUDENT RESEARCHERS, YMCC, LEFT TO RIGHT: FIRST ROW: DESTINY KINDELL, KELLY NORRIS, TORIE LESLIE. SECOND ROW: BRIAN BURTON, ERIN HUNTER III, ASHLAND THOMPSON, MARCUS WYATT. NOT PICTURED: ERIN BROWN, MAURICE MAYNARD, STACEY PHILLIPS AND CHERITY SCOTT

An Unmarked Trail was created for 8th and 11th grade students who follow the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCS). It relies on primary source documents, photographs, and eyewitness accounts to tell the story. Most often history text books examine time and events based on the majority community in places outside the local sphere. This work looks particularly at the NCSCS through the lenses of our mountain home and the diversity of African Americans. An effort was made to convey the everyday life along with that which distinguishes Black/White experience through a period of virulent racism.

It is hoped that the viewer will discover common bonds of time and place for mountain people. As the matriarch Mrs. Lucy Herring said, “There is something about the mountains that is satisfying and soothing.” Anyone who has ever come home to the Blue Ridge knows just what she means.

2003 STUDENT RESEARCHERS, PACK SQUARE, LEFT TO RIGHT: FIRST ROW: DARIUS EDGERTON, DAVID JONES, AMADAJAS KINDELL, SARENA LOVE. SECOND ROW: ANASTASIA SMITH, ASHLAND THOMPSON, TIFFANY ANDERSON, BRITTANY AUSTIN, NAYSHA COLLINGTON. NOT PICTURED: KEVINION

“We got sleeping accommodations [on the train], and as we were coming into western North Carolina, I raised the window and said to Wilma, ‘I’ve seen a lot of places…but WNC still looks good to me…’ I have found in these mountains a kind of beauty. There is something of the mountains that is satisfying and soothing.”

—Mrs. Lucy Saunders Herring on her return to Asheville from a European tour in 1953
Goal 3: The learner will identify key events and evaluate the impact of reform and expansion in North Carolina during the first half of the 19th century.

“In that [province] of Xalaque a comrade deserted who was named Rodriguez, a native of Pefialiel, and also a shrewd young Indian slave from Cuba, who belonged to a gentleman called Villegas, and a very shrewd slave of Don Carlos, a native of Barbary, and Gomez, a very shrewd black man of Vasco Gonzalez; Rodriguez was the first, and those others farther on from Xalaque” —Rodrigo Rangel, Hernando De Soto’s personal secretary, May 26, 1540.

In the Spring 1540 Hernando De Soto and his army of 600 men of Spanish, Portuguese and African heritage traveled on ancient aboriginal trails to reach and pass through the mountains of Western North Carolina. During their journey, they encountered the Xualla Nation—builders of mounds—who preceded the Cherokee. Rangel mentions the town Quaxalli, which some historians believe to be Asheville. Here the army was presented with 300 “dogs,” or perhaps opossums, for their dining pleasure. Rangel also chronicled the wide public path used for foot races—“6 men abreast could march.” Somewhere near here “Gomez, a shrewd black man,” and others along the way, left the group and formed the beginning of people of African heritage in Western North Carolina.

The Cherokee Nation signed treaties under duress that brought the expanding non-indigenous settlers across North Carolina. By the 1770s their land for villages and hunting had greatly diminished to a line at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains. When the cash strapped Continental Congress decided to give land grants to the veterans in lieu of payment, they broke the promise of sovereignty (made by the defeated British) and opened up Western North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and Kentucky to the settlers. The first recorded African-American, after Gomez, was a teenaged woman named Liza who settled in the Swannanoa Valley in 1884. According to an interview by Pat Beaver with Johnny Baxter, a descendent, Liza was enslaved by Samuel Davidson and his wife (name unknown) and helped Mrs. Davidson and her infant daughter, Ruth, flee to Old Fort when Samuel was killed by Cherokee hunters.

By 1800, the village on what is now called Pack Square numbered six households with 38 people, thirteen of whom were held in slavery. In 1850, the WNC regional presence of African-Americans stood at 10% of the population, while the Buncombe County presence was closer to 16%. A very small number were Free People of Color. The rest were held in bondage.

The 1860 census listed two registers for “Free Inhabitants” and “Slave Inhabitants.” Among the “Free Inhabitants” were ten “Free People of Color.” Among the 1,103 “Slave Inhabitants,” the records indicate 668 African-Americans were enslaved by fourteen slave owners. The largest slave owner was Nicholas Woodfin with 120 slaves living in fifteen houses. The other 435 enslaved people were divided among 114 slave owners.
Goal 3.04: Describe the Development of the institution of slavery in the State and nation, and assess its impact on the economic, social and political conditions.

The economy of the South was built on slave labor including the burgeoning tourist and mining industry in WNC. Slavery was perpetual, passing from mother to child. Slaves were considered property just as a tract of land, a wagon, or a farm animal as illustrated by the Bills of Sale at the Buncombe County Register of Deeds. Slave purchases and punishment took place at the Buncombe Court House on the site that is now the Vance Monument. The mountain region lacked the necessary flat lands for the large farm production of rice, tobacco, or cotton that was characteristic of the Piedmont and Coastal area. Slave labor in western North Carolina was more often used for:

Hotel management—Cooks, tour guides, stabling, cleaning, and entertainment at such places as the Eagle Hotel and Gudger Hotel in downtown Asheville

Skilled and factory labor—Blacksmithing, tailoring, wagon building, confederate armory

Mining—Mica and gold

Road Building—The Buncombe Turnpike was in part built with slave labor.

House and Farm Work—Families used slave labor for childcare, cooking, cleaning, planting, and animal care, etc.

The slave population in WNC was constantly renewed with news and cultures of the outside world by visitors and the slaves some brought with them. Of the social patterns of African-Americans in Buncombe County, North Carolina public historian Alice Eley Jones writes:

“In the homes of the wealthy and hotels and resorts of Asheville, the large slave work force of black cooks, laundry women, maids, nannies, butlers, nurses, carriage drivers, teamsters and guides probably exchanged cultural traditions with the most African inspired slaves on the eastern shores of North America, the slaves of Low Country Charleston and Savannah. Low Country slaves accompanied their masters’ households each year between May and October [especially to Flat Rock]. A heritage of rice, ring shouts, singing, dancing, and conjuration was in all probability shared between Asheville slaves and Low Country slaves.”

—Alice Eley Jones

She also notes that the banjo (a word and instrument from Ghana) probably found its way to the mountains through the slave routes to eventually become the quintessential bluegrass instrument. The roots of clogging are also to be found in the dances of Buck, Pigeon Wing, and Cake Walk, which were shared with work crews who were building roads and mining in the far mountain coves of Western North Carolina.

Sarah Gudger was born into slavery in 1815. She recalls her life in slavery in Reems Creek and Oteen in a six-page narrative from an interview for the Federal Writers Project at her home in Kenilworth in 1939. She had this to say about slavery in the mountains:

“Den de specalater he see who he want. He talk to Old Marse, den dey slaps de han’cuffs on him an’ tak him away to de cotton country. Oh, dem wah awful times! When de specalater wah ready to go wif de slaves, effen dey wha enny why didn’t wanta go, he trash em, den tie em ‘hind de waggin an mek em run till dey fall on de groun’, den he thrash em till dey say dey go ‘thout no trubble. Sometime some of dem run ‘way an cum back t’ de plantation, den it was hardah on dem den befoah…. Den de teahs roll down huh cheeks, cause mebbe it huh son o’ husban’ an’ she know she nebbah see ‘em again. Mebbe dey leaves babies t’ home, mebe jes’ pappy an’ mammy. Oh, mah Lawdy, mah old Boss wah mean, out de nebbah sen’ us to de cotton country.”

—Portion of an interview conducted by Marjorie Jones for the Slave Narratives in 1939, Library of Congress
Western North Carolina, with its remote topography, was known to be a hiding place for a variety of groups, including Confederate deserters and captured Union soldiers, who used the routes to leave the South. Slaves were known to be quite knowledgeable of whose sympathies lay with the North or the South and shared information to aid escaping Union Soldiers and Slaves.

Silver: What are some of the stories you remember your grandmother telling you?

Baxter: She says that these two fellows came there in the middle of the night. Their owners were hot on their trail.... Well, what actually happened, see, when they came in and told their story briefly. Well, they went right to work, see, and then this house that they had this station, it has a dungeon. It was really set up for this type of thing.... They could slide it back. It had a door there that led to the dungeon, and the dungeon had an outside exit. Oh, I guess fifty feet from the house, and this exit came out around cluster of trees and all of that sort of thing....They sent them into the dungeon right away because they knew that their owners would be there in a short while as a general rule.

—Interview with John Baxter whose grandparents were enslaved in Chunn’s Cove, Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

In November 1864, Alonzo Cooper was a captured Union soldier being marched back to Union held territory. He chronicled his journey, and later had this to say about his time in jail in Asheville in November 1864:

“We occupied a front room in the north-west corner of the jail, and in the room back of us were twenty-nine more rebel deserters and a large, powerful Negro, who had been placed there by his master as a punishment of some alleged misdemeanor.... It was all arranged that the large, powerful Negro would seize the Sergeant from behind and hold him, while his companions secured his pistol and the keys.... As he entered, the Negro, who stood behind the door, caught him from behind, securely pinning his arms and the keys and revolver were taken from him and all passed out except the Negro, who was holding the Sergeant as securely as though he was in a vice.... When they had all got out the Sergeant was pushed into the cell and the door locked. The guard at the head of the stairs shouted, loud enough for the sergeant to hear him: “Go back, or I’ll shoot—go back!” all the time expecting they would rush up and disarm him; but the cowards, fearing he was in earnest, fell back and unlocked the door, released the Sergeant, and gave him back the pistol without unlocking the door to our room. Not knowing the prisoners in our room were in the plot, the Sergeant paid no attention to us, but calling the officer of the guard, told him what had occurred. They took the Negro out into the hall, and bringing up a plank, proceeded to lash him securely to it, with his face down, after having stripped him. They then took a strap something like a tug to a single harness, and gave him one hundred lashes with it upon his bare back, the blood flowing every blow.... After this exhibition of fiendish cruelty, I am ready to believe that the system of human slavery was capable of developing total depravity into the hearts of slaveholders.

—In and Out of Rebel Prisons, Lt. Alonzo Cooper, pp. 196-199
Goal 4.03: Assess North Carolina’s role in the Civil War and analyze the social and economic impact of the war on the state.

Hunger was the most commonly shared condition for the people of Western North Carolina during the Civil War years. The poor felt it more, and slaves worse still. “One day dear old Mammy came up and said ‘Mistis, we have only a little meal in the house and all this large family of white and black to feed what shall we do?’ Mother replied ‘Betsy I have done my best, I can do no more, the Lord will provide.’ ...My Mother said she could not now possibly feed the Negroes who were not absolutely necessary to the comfort of the family; they should go to their emancipators for help.” —Katherine Polk Gale, “Recollections of Life in the Southern Confederacy, 1861-1865,” in the Gale and Polk Family Papers #266, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, UNC Chapel Hill.

General Gilliam with Stoneman’s Army of 3,000 Union troops entered Buncombe County on April 23, 1865 approaching from the South along the Drover’s Road, having been initially rebuffed by the home guard at Swannanoa Gap. The townspeople lined Main Street (now Biltmore Avenue) to watch the soldiers march through. At the end of the line were a large number of Blacks who used the protection of Stoneman’s Army to leave the area.

According to historian John Inscoe in The Heart of Confederate Appalachia: Western North Carolina and the Civil War:

“Stoneman’s Raid had proved the single most liberating event of the war for mountain slaves, and even the slave holders not directly in the path of Union forces had found that they had lost much control of the slaves still with them.”

Of the march through Buncombe County Katherine Polk Gale wrote:

...In a remote corner of the place was a large frame house which had been set apart of the use of the wives and little children of some of the Negro men who had been hired to neighboring farmers; their payments [to the writer’s family] were paid in produce—bacon, wheat, corn, potatoes.... There were about twenty of them in all I think who were looked after, clothed, fed and nursed when ill; they had plenty of firewood and were made as comfortable as was possible. I think none of this body of Negroes left, as the Yankees passed through; whether they would not forsake their husbands; we could not tell; they at all events remained.

The following day the troops began to file by; they passed just in front of our lawn; you, with the rest of the children accompanied by your nurses, went to a point where you could have a view of them in passing...It took a long while for these troops to pass. After they had all gone, it was discovered that your Aunt Emily’s two nurses, with several other Negroes in the neighborhood, had joined forces and gone off with the Yankees. Poor old Mammy and Altimore were terribly mortified and grieved at the evidence of ingratitude; but we realized it was the beginning of the general emancipation which would cause a complete revolution in our lives. —Katherine Polk Gale, “Recollections of Life in the Southern Confederacy, 1861-1865,” in the Gale and Polk Family Papers #266, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

All of Mrs. J. W. Patton’s servants left her and went with the Yankees, not a single one of all she had remained to do a thing in the house or in the kitchen. They even took her beautiful carriage and, crowding into it, drove off in full possession.

—Mary Taylor Brown to John Evans Brown, June 20, 1865, pp. 18-19, W. Vance Brown Collection at Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville.
Goal 4.05: Analyze the political, economic, and social impact of Reconstruction on the state and identify why Reconstruction came to an end.

Asheville became a garrisoned town with the march of Stoneman’s Army through Buncombe County. A company of Union Black enlisted men were left to hold the area. Research from this project revealed the application used to list the Confederate Armory as a historical marker on the Courthouse Square. The application included the story of the court-martial and execution of members of the same Black Union troops on highly questionable evidence.

“We passed through an immense crowd of a few citizens, a great many proud and insolent Negroes in U.S. uniforms. One of these Negroes called out to my father, [Judge John L. Bailey], “How do you like this, old man?”.... I have loathed the uniform ever since.” —Sarah Bailey Cain, “Last Days of the War,” (one of few accounts that mentions the Black regiment).

The Heart of Confederate Appalachia,


The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned lands was commonly referred to as “The Freedman’s Bureau.” It was located at the southwest corner of Pack Square in the Thomas Building and operated by Oscar Eastmond. The Bureau supervised all relief and educational activities relating to refugees and freedmen, including issuing rations, clothing and medicine and the care of orphaned children. Eastmond was from the Piedmont and was one of 3,000 North Carolinians who signed up for the Union rather than the Confederate Army (including over 300 from Buncombe County). Evidence of his advocating for the rights of freedmen is found in the “Joint Select

VANCE COMPANY CONFEDERATE REUNION IN LATE 1800s.

“A MEMORABLE RIOT. During the Seymour and Blair campaign of 1868 a riot occurred on the public square at Asheville in which one Negro was killed and two others seriously wounded. Trouble had been expected, and when a Negro knocked a young Mississippian down, twenty or more pistols were discharged into the crowd of Negroes, while from several store doors and second-story windows shotguns and rifles were discharged into the fleeing blacks. That night a drum was beaten in the woods where now is Aston Park and a crowd of Negroes assembled there, and reports spread that they would burn the town. Messengers were sent to surrounding towns, and by daylight three hundred armed white men from adjoining counties arrived. For two weeks the streets were patrolled at night. Oscar Eastman, in charge of the Freedman’s Bureau, had an office in the Thomas building on the southwest corner of the square; but after the riot Eastman could not be found for several days, as it was thought he had incited the Negroes to arm themselves with stout hickory sticks and shout for Grant and Colfax, the immediate causes belle. Giles McDowell, a large, bushy-headed Negro and a Democrat, came up South Main street and shouted “Hurrah for Seymour and Blair,” whereupon the other Negroes made a rush for him, during which the young Mississippian was knocked down. Giles fled; but another darkly by the name of Jim Greenlee fell on his face at the first shot, groaning and hollering. After the shooting was over it developed that Jim was unhurt, but had wisely pretended to be hurt in order to keep anyone from firing at him.”

—A History of Western North Carolina, John Preston Arthur, 1920
Goal 5.02: Examine the changing role of educational, religious, and social institutions in the state and examine their impact.

One of those newcomers in the late 1860s was Isaac Dickson. Born a slave in 1839, his Dutch immigrant father was the slave owner of his mother. Unusual for its time, Dickson arrived in Buncombe County in the 1860s with a letter of recommendation which read:

“We the undersigned citizens have bin acquainted with Isaac Dixon [sic] for years past and have ever found him to be an honest and upright man.”

—Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

It was signed by five men including the mayor of Cleveland County. In 1886, Dickson purchased the former Eagle Hotel’s slave quarters of Thomas Walton Patton along Valley Street that was soon known as “Dickstontown.” This historic area was directly behind “The Henrietta,” the Patton home, on Main Street (now Biltmore Avenue). Dickson also owned stores that sold coal and groceries and eventually accumulated enough wealth that he could afford a $500 loan to W.C. Campbell.

Public Schooling was not offered to most North Carolinians until after the Civil War. In 1875, the North Carolina General Assembly passed legislation that allowed the taxation of property for the funding of public schools. Three times the vote came before the citizens of Buncombe County—three times it was defeated. In 1886, the White working class proponents of public schools went to Isaac Dickson and asked him to organize the Black male property owners (at the time, only property owning males could vote—Black or White). With Dickson’s influence, the vote for public schools passed by a margin of two.

Mountain Street School was opened 1887 and Catholic Hill School in 1892.

Robert and Harriet White moved to the mountains showing up in the Census of 1880. Family history indicates that they had come from Rutherfordton in the early 1870s and settled in Shiloh. Robert bought land on either side of a dirt path that led to Harriet’s laundry where she took in washing for White families who lived in the surrounding area. This path is now known as White Avenue.

Goal 5: The learner will evaluate the impact of political, economic, social, and technological changes on life in North Carolina from 1870-1930.

The completion of the railroad in 1880, up the Swannanoa Gap and over Old Fort Mountain, was a monumental task connecting remote Western North Carolina with the rest of industrializing America. The majority of the labor to build the railroad came from prisoners who were often African-American. There were numerous tragic accidents in the dangerous work to build the tunnels and lay the tracks on steep terrain in part to the use of untrained men forced to work with nitroglycerin. Their efforts are important as they opened the western region to a whole new prosperity. Up the steep mountain grade came influential people from all over the world and with them the working class Blacks and Whites.

“The gorge is swarmed with hundreds of wretched blacks in the striped convict garb. after their supper was cooked (over open fires) and eaten, they were driven into a row of cars, where they were tightly boxed in for the night with no possible chance for heat or light.”

—Rebecca Harding Davis, Cory F. Poole, *History of Railroading in Western North Carolina*, p. 6

A History of Burials

Before and after 1865 African Americans were buried in separate cemeteries.

Southside Cemetery in Kenilworth was a cemetery for Blacks long before 1865. It was established on land owned (and later donated) by the Smith-McDowell family and continued to be a burial ground until its closing in the 1930s. There are over 6,000 graves in the two-acre site, including that of George Avery who had been enslaved by the McDowell family and was the primary caretaker of the cemetery. Oral traditions state that Mr. Avery was encouraged by the McDowell family to join Stoneman’s Army when they marched through town and reach the Union forces in Tennessee so he would be able to receive a Union pension.

Riverside Cemetery was established as a cemetery in 1885, its original charter states that it is a cemetery for White Christians. Consequently, burial plots for African

Americans and Jews are on the periphery of the main area.

Racial Stereotyping

Public racial stereotyping was a common image across much of the South for several centuries. These images were meant to demean and humiliate and were essential ingredients to the maintenance of oppression of one group by another, including the use of dehumanizing humor. These postcards are part of a collection that was manufactured in Asheville and sold nationally.

African

humor. These postcards are part of a collection that was manufactured in Asheville and sold nationally.

Postcard photographed near the Swannanoa Tunnel—a “set image” as a “humorous” postcard entitled “Stripes but no Stars”

North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

Mountaineer Family in WNC—a “set image” as a “humorous” postcard entitled “Uncle Tom’s Cabin”

North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

“White Man’s Bar”—a “set photography” made into a postcard for sale to tourists. The pairing of two dissimilar sized animals, wheels askew and a Black man drinking moonshine in front of the “White Man’s Bar” (near Eagle and Main Streets) was meant to ridicule Blacks.

North Carolina Collection, Pack Library, Asheville, NC
Goal 5: The learner will evaluate the impact of political, economic, social, and technological changes on life in North Carolina from 1870-1930.

When the railroad made it up the Swannanoa Gap in 1880, Buncombe County grew from a population of 21,909 to 35,266 by 1890. The African American segment of the population grew from 3,483 to 6,630. The railroad was soon followed by a water reservoir in 1884, with electric streetlights and trolley lines in 1888. Only the wealthiest could afford electricity and plumbing in their homes. All others, Black and White, continued to depend on wells, outdoor toilets, and fire for cooking, washing, and illumination well into the 1900s. However, servants who were employed by these families would have come to use these conveniences during the workday. By the late 1880s, George Vanderbilt was beginning the Biltmore Estate and employed a significant number of African Americans on the construction staff and later on the Estate.

Edward Stephens, a Black immigrant from the West Indies, came to Asheville to be the first principal of the Mountain Street School in 1889. A year after his arrival, he became a central figure in the establishment of the Young Men’s Institute in Asheville and its first director. The YMI was opened in 1891 with a loan from George Vanderbilt, and became the fulcrum of the Black community. Designed by the working architect of the Biltmore House, Richard Sharp Smith, it exhibited structural beauty and some of the modern conveniences of the day such as running water and electricity. Records indicate it was used for classes in vocations.

Character development, socializing, and presentation of noted speakers of the day, as well as offering public bathing facilities.

Stephens began to make connections in the community when he encountered the violent force of the growing segregation just before Jim Crow laws were enacted. The presence of the Ku Klux Klan in the mountain region was real and deadly as the letter to Mr. McNamee indicates:

“Some time ago the white ladies of the Northern Methodist Mission School were warned late one night by a white crowd that ‘if they didn’t clear out in two days they would swing on the same tree where the nigger was lynched.’ Next day the ladies appealed for protection to the mayor and chief of police who spurred them and their request. In terror they packed their trunks at night and early started to leave when, at the Square, some ‘leading citizens,’ realizing the seriousness of this step, urged them not to depart. Miss Dole, principal of the school, which is on College Street, recently told me of this and other persecutions by white persons because she and her friends persisted in teaching ‘niggers.’

—Handwritten letter from Edward Stephens to Charles McNamee in an appeal to help establish a place where African Americans could safely gather, Biltmore House Collections.
Goal 5.02: Examine the changing role of educational, religious and social institutions in the state and analyze their impact.

The Progressive Movement highlighted education for both practical and enlightenment purposes and was an integral part of late 19th-century America. Fueled in part by the education of women who had few job opportunities due to sexism in the workplace and culture, a number of these educated women made their way to Western North Carolina to begin various social service programs.

In the 1870s, Mr. and Mrs. L.M. Pease, a White couple from New York City, started a school for Black children in an abandoned livery stable on Beaucatcher Mountain. In 1887 it was gifted to the Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church and sent the first Superintendent, Miss Aisle Dole. Thus began Allen School which continued to teach Black youth (later only women) through 1973. It is likely that the women that Edward Stephens referred to in his letter to Mr. McNamee were teachers at the school.

With the growing numbers of Blacks in Buncombe County came the increased diversity of the community. Churches from a variety of theological viewpoints were primary socializing organizations, along with fraternal groups such as the Masons. Ministers held respected positions of leadership.

Hopkins Chapel CME was formed in 1867 when Reverend Tillery came to Asheville and asked to speak to the freedmen of Central Methodist Church. Refused permission by the White church leadership, the freedmen met in front of the church the next Sunday and marched to a gathering place in Montford singing We are Marching to Zion where they listened to Reverend Tillery preach.

St. Matthias Episcopal, originally known as Freedmen’s Chapel, was formed with leadership of Trinity Episcopal (General James Martin) in 1865. Land was donated by Thomas Patton on Valley Street “where the colored people live” at the current site on South Charlotte Street. The first African-American minister, Reverend S.V. Berry, was sent in 1874 to minister and begin a school.

Calvary Presbyterian was formed in 1884 when Dr. Charles Dusenberry, sent by the Board of Missions for Freedmen of the Presbyterian Church, established Calvary Parochial School.

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist, led by Reverend Robert Parker Rumley, famous for his sermon “De Dry Bones in De Valley,” began a new congregation on Patton Avenue in 1880, and later went on to build the current facility on Eagle Street.
Goal 5.5: Assess the influence of the political, legal and social movements on the political system and life in North Carolina

The right for women to vote gained steam following the organizing success of the Women’s Pavilion at the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893. Locally, Helen Morris Lewis returned from that exhibition and began the North Carolina Equal Rights Association. Her stump speaking efforts stirred letters to the editor such as in the Asheville Daily Citizen on December 11, 1894:

“Some of our men are only opposed to women’s suffrage on the grounds that in our Southern country it would put great power in the hands of the Negro woman. This seems a most illogical conclusion. Why is it presumed that White women would permit Negro women to dominate them in politics, any more than white men allow themselves to be governed by Negro men?”

Throughout the South, the steam for women’s suffrage blew out when Jim Crow laws prohibited or made voting difficult for Blacks. White men no longer needed the enfranchisement of women to balance “the Black vote.”

The newspapers of the day kept the community connected with the news of the state legislature and others across the South. From 1873 to 1957 North Carolina passed 23 laws that established the Jim Crow Color Line of the State such as:

1875—The law to prohibit marriage between Whites to Blacks or Indians or persons of descent to the third generation
1879—Steamboats and Rail Cars were to provide separate seating
1899—Steamboats and Rail Cars were to provide separate seating
1907—Street Cars were to provide separate seating
1931—State libraries were to provide separate accommodations

Throughout this increasingly difficult time the local Black community continued to build strong businesses, social institutions, and social networks throughout the state. Miller Construction Company, owned by James Vester Miller, built numerous still prominent buildings including the downtown police station, the YM, and St. Matthias Episcopal. James and his wife Violet owned a large farm in West Asheville now known as Emma. James Wilson, nephew to Isaac Dickson, operated an undertaking and upholstery business. By 1895, businesses began to sprout along Eagle Street with the YMI as the cornerstone as evidenced by a page from the Asheville City Directory. Still, the majority of the Black population were involved in many of the same types of service sector work such as maids.

South Carolina voting for Jim Crow street cars
Asheville Democrat, January 8, 1891, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN AND CHILD
North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC

BILLS FOR SEPARATE CARS

The proposition to establish the Jim Crow Car for the separate accommodation of White and colored passengers came up before the Legislature of South Carolina. It is now being discussed. Capt. V. E. McBe, of this city, an important official of North and South Carolina railways made a very able address to the railroad committee of South Carolina against the passage of the bill. He urges that it is an effort to force the railroads at vast expense and inconvenience to settle the difficulties of the race question, which have puzzled the wisest of our statesmen. After citing the expense and impracticability of such a law exists in Georgia, dwelling upon the absurdities involved which the law would involve, the different laws of different States through which the railway lines run, Capt. McBe urges that the true course would be to adopt the conclusion which the best statesmen have reached. “The best of them,” he says, have reached the conclusion that the only thing to be done is to leave the question alone to settle and adjust itself by the common sense adaptability of the people and that is now universally accepted.”

The speech is full of practical common sense and we regret that we have not the space to publish it in full.
Goal 7: The learner will analyze the economic, political and social reforms of the Progressive Period (1880-1914)

The Progressive Period is characterized by rapid change brought on by industrialization, immigration, and urbanization spurred by the movement of people. This move upended traditional family structures that met the needs of food, shelter and social fabric of a community. The rising middle and the ruling upper class were challenged by this shift. A multitude of fraternal and civic organizations were formed to address these needs both for altruism (helping the needy) and for self-interest (protection and separation from those who were living on the margins of the modern age).

Western North Carolina felt the impact of the Progressive Period with the development of a number of significant educational and communal institutions. Allen Home School continued to attract students from well-to-do families from throughout the South, including Buncombe County. The Young Mens Institute, built in 1892, was at the heart of the social life and the headquarters for most community events including a Sunday afternoon Song Service that would attract hundreds of people. Church and Masonic organizations, The Colored Betterment League and other political committees all saw a dramatic jump in membership during this time period. These organizations also imbued the social life of the community with entertainment and networking opportunities.

State and national meetings were regularly held in Asheville due to its scenic location. Dr. John Holt’s maternal grandfather, Plummer Austin Richardson of Nashville, NC, was a wealthy tobacco farmer in the early 1900s when he became national treasurer of the Masons. During one of their conventions Dr. Holt reports the following family story:

“The Masons had this big convention here. It was the time it was at Hopkins Chapel Church over on College Street and my mother came as her father’s secretary. That was when my father and mother met, and then a year or two later they got married.”

—Ramsey Library, Special Collections, UNC Asheville

**Colored People**

*Local Dots*

Mrs. Julia McLean had a stroke of paralysis yesterday morning while on Poplar Street while going to work.

Mr. H.S. McDuffey and her three daughters Miss Ellen, Little Mary and (unreadable) of New York were the guests of Dr. R.H. Bryant.

The Newberry “Sluggers” and the Swannanoa’s baseball teams will play at Lincoln Park Wednesday and Thursday afternoons.

Miss Laura T. Frierson, the noted lady evangelist is in the city the guest of Mrs. Summers of Davidson St.

St. James A.M. E. Sunday school picnic train will leave the city for Morganton Wednesday morning.

Mr. Fannie Thomas of Raleigh is visiting her sister. Mrs. Thomas Morris on Pine Street.

Mrs. Moses Lord has returned to the city after spending several weeks in Raleigh.

The ladies of St. Matthias’ Church, under the auspices of the Woman’s Auxiliary will have an “Old Maids” auction sale Thursday night, July 10 at the Y.M.I.

A.D. Wallace left yesterday for Statesville on a business trip.

Thomas Morris who has been quite ill at his home on Pine Street is convalescent.

The Thurman W.C.T.U. will meet at the Y.M.I. this afternoon.

Grand Opera House

**Wednesday Night**

**July 20, 1904 at 8:30**

The Black Rhododendrons

Presenting the Most Unique of America’s Colorful flowers, in a Musical and Dancing Program, including a grand Café Waltz, Black and White Dancing, Shorty Waits Walking, etc.

**Prices: 25c., 35c. and 50c.**

**The First Floor Will Be Reserved for White People.**

An entire evening of fun, elimination for all genders. All Local Talent.

Advertisement for the Black Rhododendrons from the Asheville Citizen, July 1904

**North Carolina Desk, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC**

Young Mens Institute at 44 Market Street circa 1915

Left to right: unidentified; Mrs. Maggie Jones; unidentified; E.W. Pearson; Dr. L.O. Miller; Stanley Mc Dowell; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified; unidentified.
Lynching, the brutal murder of mostly African American men by vigilante mobs through hanging, shooting, stabbing, etc., was a violent tool of racists who used it as a weapon of fear against the entire Black population throughout the US. In his book *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*, James Allen, writes, “the Tuskegee Institute recorded the lynching of 4,742 Blacks between 1882 and 1968 which was probably a small percentage of these murders which were seldom reported.” Ida B. Wells and W.E. Dubois worked with other activists to establish the National Association of Colored People (NAACP) to address these life and death issues for the Blacks. Close to home, Spruce Pine and Salisbury both reported lynchings of African Americans.

This growing hostility, promoted by the Red Shirts and the Ku Klux Klan and the general population, quickened the pace of Blacks moving away from the rural regions of WNC. Throughout this use of violence, threat of violence, ridicule and intimidation the local Black community continued to build strong institutions, neighborhoods and family structures.

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**Color Line on the Square**

**Negroes Baited for Using Wrong Fountain**

For several years, all fountains on the square have been indiscriminately used by both races. Recently the commissioners, in line with the policy of segregating the colors on the square reserved the bubbling stream on the eastern side of the square, that nearest the city hall, for the blacks. The water columns on the western side, nearest the trolley dispatching yard, are set aside for the sole use of the white people. The new arrangement is expected to relieve much of the congestion on the eastern side and to keep the color lines more closely drawn on the square...The signs setting forth the uses to which the fountains are hereafter to be adapted are printed on flexible cardboard and wrapped about the supports of the fountains. Had it been the idea of their poster to hide them, it is doubtful if he could have found more effective place of concealment. Not one person out of 10 thinks to look beneath the stream. The result is that Negroes, following the custom for years, are bending over the rivulets daily only to be yelled at, abused and driven away. In the majority of instances they are not told that there are fountains for them across the floral area. What difference does it make?

Those who are getting such genuine satisfaction from “driving the dinges on” are as a rule, white men who occupy the stone seats overlooking the foundations. Rare delight comes to them every time an unobservant black walks up to the stream and stoops. It’s a good time to put him in his place. The Negro generally accepts the reprimand silently, strolls off and probably bemoans the possession of a thrite. A Times reporter who watched the daily drama discovered that the only Negro who replied to a loitering white’s screamed correction courteously mentioned that he pays taxes and thought he had a right to drink. That was a dreadfully unfortunate remark. It convicted him of being a smart Alex. The white, judging form his appearance is not bothered by the payment of taxes...A properly displayed sign might do much more good than save the feelings of an unimportant Negro.  

[article abridged]
Goal 7.04: Examine the impact of technological changes on economic, social and cultural life in the US.

At the turn of the century western North Carolina was at the dawn of a new age. While WNC still retained a rural quality, many citizens were moving off the farms to begin work in factories, hotels, hospitals, etc. Ernest Mckissick was witness to a changing landscape when his family moved to the mountains from Kelton, SC:

“In [1901 or 1902] they left me down in the country to nurse my sister’s baby while my sister worked in the field. They put a tag on me and put me on the train that brought me to Asheville [at age 7 or 8]…. They came here to make a living. It was better than being down there in the country…. That was the old days of the horse and wagon, and the buggy. That’s when they drove wagons from the country with oxen. The farmers would come to Valley Street to drive behind the distillery and get all the sour mash and take it back to the farm and feed it to their hogs.”

—Ernest Mckissick, UNCA Special Collections

Many citizens of that era recall their initial experiences with the “horseless carriage.” In 1904, The Asheville Cycle Company became the Asheville Cycle and Automobile Company. Erline Logan McQueen was born in 1914 and raised on a farm in Uree, now known as Lake Lure. During the growing season, her father would regularly take the wagon over Hickory Nut Gap to the markets on Lexington Avenue. She recalls his telling Lilly Bell, her mother, of his first drive in their hard-tired truck to Asheville:

“He didn’t let us come with him on that because he didn’t know how to drive…folks told him how to drive the truck but they never gave him any lesson—it was just talking…he thought that this person was going to drive for him and he didn’t come so Daddy said I am going to drive myself.”…So he used a [letter] to show him how to change the gears and after he saw it wouldn’t help…he started learning how to change the gears on his own and he drove that truck to Asheville with no teaching. no more than what he’d taught himself as he was coming up the mountain…. Now later when Daddy let us come, he brought us on into Asheville. That was a little treat for us [Erline and her brother]—to go into a city. Daddy would leave us there [in apartments over the Lexington stalls] until he sold his vegetables. He would take us to Eagle and Market Street where there were restaurants [and] cafés where we Blacks could eat.”

—Erline Logan McQueen, Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Downtown Asheville was the regional center for all of WNC and was often the only source for certain types of medical care, shopping, entertainment, and educational opportunities. Citizens would come from throughout neighboring counties, particularly on Saturday, the main shopping day. It was also said that on Friday nights “the Eagle will fly,” referring to what happens to money after pay day and describing the rich social life on Eagle Street, heart of the Black shopping district in Asheville.

When the Bee Tree Dam was completed and 24’ water mains began to widen the distribution system. Indoor toilets in schools, homes and the workplace became common. As late as 1929 some schools in Buncombe County were still without indoor facilities. Mr. Karl Jones was instructed by Buncombe County School Board to:

“...take the proposition of providing suitable sanitary toilet accommodations [for Stoney Fork and Rose Hill Districts] up with the county commissioners to provide the money necessary to do the work. Mr. Jones was also requested to try to provide suitable toilets for the South Asheville Colored School.”

—Buncombe County School Board minutes, October 22, 1929

Many citizens were instructed by Buncombe County School Board to:
Goal 8.03: Assess the political, economic, social, and cultural effects of WWI on the United States and other nations

The United States entered WWI in 1917 three years after Germany began the war in Europe. Eventually the draft placed 4 million men in the armed services including 350,000 African Americans who largely served in support services. The NAACP, founded in 1909, was still in its first decade of political activism and won a significant victory to equalize the treatment of soldiers in the armed services. Due to their efforts, the first Blacks became commissioned officers as captains, and first and second lieutenants including Second Lt. James Bryant Dickson of Asheville and First Lt. George Greenlee of Marion. Locally, Ernest McKissick recalls his fellow mountain soldiers who left Asheville from the depot in the spring of 1918 in six to seven coaches for Fort Dix. He later ended up on the front lines in Xon, France.

“Now there’s one thing about this that people didn’t know we were doing. This battery of artillery was the first in the history of the United States that was Negro manned. 349th, 350th was field artillery... that was our heavy artillery. That’s 351st. We served in that...and stayed on the front, I think, six months...[while defending in trench warfare]. One shell hit in front of a dugout and killed four men, and we thought how fortunate we were. One of them was an old friend of mine that I met in camp, and another friend of mine was gassed.”

—Ernest McKissick, Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNCA Asheville

In Europe, a marching military band accompanied most Black units. The 15th Regiment was one of the best-known bands. Made up with draftees from Harlem they were sent to Spartanburg, SC to Camp Wadsworth to train. Though initially maligned by White citizens they soon became the most requested entertainment in town. Once the soldiers made it to France, they received an even warmer welcome. These musicians introduced the French to jazz, ragtime and other syncopated rhythms beginning the admiration of the French for African American culture. This absence of a “color line” in France kicked off the migration of African American expatriates to France, eventually including such notables as Ralph Ellison and Nina Simone.

George Gash of Hendersonville recalls the Black WWI veteran he met at a café on VE Day during his service in France in WWII. He had married a French woman and stayed in France following the Great War.

Soldiers had different experiences being in a foreign land for the first time and were only too glad to see the mountains of WNC once again:

“...we went and fought for America regardless of that [prejudice and discrimination], and we said, “That's home!” Even that, after we saw the poor conditions over there, that those people were in, eating and sleeping and begging for food and supplies all the things they needed, I said, “My God, I'd rather live at home, regardless of this prejudice and all.”

—Ernest McKissick, Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Virginia Dickerson Summey (1920’s) moved from Spindale to Hendersonville to Asheville. Courtesy of Trevor Summey Chavis
Goal 9: The learner will appraise the economic, social and political changes of the decade of the '20s and '30s and the extent of prosperity for different segment of society.

In 1915, NC Public Schools spent $7.40 per White pupil compared to $2.30 per Black student. The national average was $30. Despite these conditions, community members placed a high value on education as seen by the number of times that citizens petitioned the Buncombe County School Board for better services—desks, bus drivers, new schools, repairs, etc. By 1924, Stephens-Lee High School was opened. Smaller elementary schools, many of them meeting in churches, operated throughout the county.

Local educators made every attempt to improve the quality of education despite the fact that they were barred from attending area colleges. Lucy Saunders

Herring recalls the summer school established by Professor Michaels at 77 Hill Street:

“Professor Michael is responsible for much of the educational progress that black teacher had been able to make here. Because in the 30s when things were so very hard for everyone, and money was so scarce, and banks were failing, this summer school was available. You see, the Black teachers couldn’t have gone all the way to Winston-Salem. In fact, they didn’t have the money, but they could stay here at home and get their college credits or get their certificates renewed.” —Lucy Herring, Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Ms. Herring became a teacher at a one-room schoolhouse in Swannanoa, later becoming a principal and administrator for Asheville City Schools. Community leaders in Shiloh (1927) and Black Mountain (1932) petitioned Buncombe County Schools to build new schools with matching funds from the Rosenwald Fund, a private foundation that worked to improve the “brick-and-mortar” institutions of the southern Black community.

“Lucius Williams was awarded the contract to construct a school house in the Shiloh district in accordance with plans and specifications of the Julius Rosenwald Six Room Community School. Plan No. 6A. It is understood that three stools be placed in basement for boys and three for girls”

—Minutes from the Buncombe County Schools Board Meeting, October 17, 1927

Each school district in Buncombe County had committees including the “Colored Committee” with the following assignments in the early 1930s:

- Arden—Haskel Fletcher, Frank Underwood, Edward Hemphill
- Black Mountain—Mark Hooper, Ed Stepp, Hayes Summery
- Concord—James Lanning, George W. Lynch, John Shorter
- Elk Mountain—C.E. Carter, Harold Bell, John E. Thayer
- Leicester—C.B. Brown, W. H. Gillespie, Claude Wells
- Shiloh—L.W. Williams, Arthur Moore, W.T. Payne
- South Asheville—Thomas, F. Smathers, Van Wasson, II, L. Fullwood
- Lower Swannanoa—Frank Laycock, Mr. McLeod
- Patton, S.T. Lewis
- Weaverville—M.F. Yost, A.M. Deltz, Pierce Roberts

In Asheville, elementary schools such as Burton Street, Mountain Street, Catholic Hill (which burned in 1917), Hill Street, Livingston Street, and Southside served the neighborhoods of the townspeople. In particular, Stephens-Lee, named for Edward Stephens (first director of the YM) and Hester Lee, a beloved teacher at Mountain Street School, was the center of educational and social life for the community. Stephens-Lee was located in East End on a hill overlooking downtown Asheville.
Goal 9: The learner will appraise the economic, social and political changes of the '20s and '30s and the extent of prosperity for different segments of society

Employment

Blacks in Buncombe County used every opportunity to push the doors to advancement, despite segregation, including preparing for the professions. In 1922, Blue Ridge Hospital on Clingman Avenue was opened where the seven local Black doctors had privileges—something denied them at most White-run hospitals. Blue Ridge Hospital was also the first training facility for nurses. The establishment of Asheville as a national center for the cure of tuberculosis brought Blacks from throughout the South to convalesce in Asheville requiring a host of skilled care to treat them. Dr. John Holt recalls that his father was the only doctor who had hospital privileges in Aston Park Hospital, a White private hospital established by Dr. Pritchard. Dr. Holt was one of the earliest physicians trained in anesthesiology.

“He [Holt’s father] and Dr. Pritchard worked together on the railroad, and became very good friends. Pritchard later came back to Asheville and became an outstanding surgeon. There was an understanding, he [Pritchard] was going to have his own hospital, and...Papa was going to be a member.” —Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Teachers, ministers and undertakers were also highly respected professions requiring skill and training in the segregated south. The railroad was another major employer. Mac McQueen was a Pullman porter, one of the best jobs on the railroad. His wife, Erlene McQueen [owner of the Ritz Restaurant] recalls:

“They worked very hard to get Mac on the railroad and that was my brother Phillip and Harold Burton.... The Pullman porter had to take care of the customers that had a sleeping car and had to do whatever they were asked to do for the comfort of their transportation....” —Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Booker T. Sherrill (named for Booker T. Washington) had a “hotel reputation.” In 1933 he worked at the Langren Hotel under a famous bellman, Charles Sisney. His father had been employed at the Grove Park Inn. The work of the home was another area of employment for Blacks. Ernest McKissick recalls:

“Ms. Maggie Jones, she was a graduate of Tuskegee and a seamstress, and she did all the sewing for the high falutin’ people here in Asheville...she formed what you would call an industrial girl’s club.... Every Thursday when the “help” was off cooks, maids, butlers...they would meet up there [Y.M.I] and they would have classes.” —Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

Of the Depression Ernest McKissick reports:

“I was buying a home on Magnolia Avenue. I couldn’t make ends meet. I’ve seen the time I’d go to the man, and pay the man two, three, four, five or eight dollars, like that, a and he would accept it. But I had established a reputation. Mr. Westall held my mortgage.... His sons told me later on, ‘My Daddy told us you would be at the door at a certain time...and you were right here.’ We tried to have a good reputation living here in Asheville, to set a good example for our children to see....” —Ramsey Library Special Collections, UNC Asheville

The New Deal operated a number of projects including the construction of the Blue Ridge Parkway but it is unclear to what degree Blacks benefited. In 1938, Marjorie Jones interviewed four former slaves for the Federal Writer’s Project Slave Narratives including Sarah Gudger, Lizzie Williams, Fannie Moore, and W.L. Bost. Mr. Bost moved to Asheville in the late 1800s with his wife Maminie.

“We came here and both of us went to work...we bought this little piece of ground ’bout forty-four years ago [63 Curve Street]. We have two daughters and one adopted son.... He was part White. I remember one time when he was a small child I took him to town and the conductor made me—put him in the front of the street car ’cause he thought I was just caring for him and that he was a white boy.... The last letter I got from him [in the Navy] he say he ain’t spoke to a colored girl since he has been there. This made me mad so I took his insurance policy and cashed it. I didn’t want nothin’ to do with him if he deny his own color.” —W.L. Bost, Slave Narratives, September 27, 1937
Goal 10.03: Describe and analyze the effects of the war on American economic, social, political and cultural life.

Just prior to the beginning of WWII, the tax assessor’s office in Buncombe described the distribution of wealth of personal and land holdings this way:


— Asheville Citizen, December 18, 1941

This distribution of wealth had little changed since Reconstruction when the majority of Blacks in the nation were first able to own property. Despite this, America as a nation put aside the differences of race and class to win the war against the Axis Powers. William Grafton Young recalls, “We were all united behind one cause—there was no separation in how we felt about the war.” But for African Americans the “V for Victory” became the call of the NAACP for the “Double V”—Victory overseas and Victory at home.

In 1941 there were 4,000 African American servicemen and women in the military. That number would grow to 1.2 million by the end of the war. In Buncombe County new enlistees and draftees would leave on buses for boot camp—Blacks on one day and Whites on another. Julia Ray recalls:

“The new troops would leave from the front of the Courthouse early in the morning. Our community would be organized to meet them there with donuts and coffee—so they would not leave feeling like they were on their own. Our daughter, Wilma, was 5 or so and she wanted to do something to make a contribution…. We took a basket and filled it with donuts. She would be with us at 6 AM to pass the food out to the soldiers.”

Until late in the war, African Americans in the segregated army were placed in units for service-related work as cooks, drivers, servants, and laborers. Later they were desperately needed for the infantry and color did not matter any more. “The Red Ball Express” (Quartermasters) operated the entire supply line and was 80% run by Black servicemen.

Charles McAdams graduated in the Class of 1943 from Stephens-Lee, 6 months after Pearl Harbor. He worked at Biltmore Hardware, so the Quartermasters made sense. As a driver in the Red Ball Express in Europe, he recalls the difficulty of not sleeping or eating and the constant danger of being shot. “It was no pleasure trip. We had a job to do and we did it.”

Frederick Littlejohn found himself in Liege, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge, guarding the supplies for the entire invasion. “The supply dump was stacked up along a Boulevard for five miles with a fence all around it. I remember that it was so cold that icicles were hanging from my helmet.”

George Gash, of Hendersonville, enlisted in the Army as soon as he got out of high school. As he said of the Engineers, “Our motto was first ones in; last ones out. I trained to operate a bulldozer. We crossed over at Le Havre, France soon after D-Day. Our job was keeping up with the Army. We built bridges, laid railroad track, and sometimes built airstrips. The shooting was going on all around us. The guy behind you—at your side—he held your life in his hands. And his in yours.”

Black leadership across the US continued to advocate for the right to serve in the most prestigious branches of the military. The 99th Fighter Squadron was comprised of the first African American pilots to serve in the Army Air Corps and became known as the Tuskegee Airmen. They held the unprecedented record of escorting 200 missions without a single loss. Sixty-six Tuskegee pilots were killed in action while another 32 were captured as Prisoners of War. George B. Greenlee, Jr., brother of Julia Ray was a member of the Tuskegee Airmen.
Goal 10.03 Describe and analyze the effects of the WWII on American economic, social, political and cultural life.

As the nation was building the manufacturing base necessary for the war effort Blacks found themselves shut out of many factories that received defense contracts. In May 1941, the national leadership, led by Philip Randolf, issued a “Call to Negro America to March on Washington for Jobs and Equal Participation in National Defense on July 1, 1941.” This was the first massive protest in Washington with an expected 100,000 participants, a big deal for the children with no swimming pools open to them. Nate Bowman recalls that Aston Park on South French Broad was completely closed to the Black community.

The Black community was active in all aspects in support of the war effort. The Jr. Red Cross signed students up to help with the war effort. Elementary classes were asked to give 50 cents and high schools $1. According to the Asheville Citizen of November 13, 1943, “Allen Home and Black Mountain Negro Schools [were the] first to report enrollement of 100%.” Entertaining the troops home on leave was also important. The YMI opened a USO with the following announcement in the Asheville Citizen on December 4, 1943:

“The USO Lounge for Negro service men and women, located at the YMI building on Eagle Street, will observe its initial opening this afternoon at 5 o’clock. The Rev. J.M. Cole pastor of St. Mathias Episcopal church will be in charge.”

Carolyn Durant Crouch was a child in the early 1940s and recalls, “During the war, I remember rationing coupons. Also, there was lard in a block with yellow coloring in a packet that you opened, poured in and mixed it to make margarine.”

Barbara Durant Jones would travel with her sister and brother each June from Atlanta to spend the summer with her grandparents on Ritchie Street in Stumptown. The summer would be spent going to the movies at the Strand and making doll clothes out of flour sacks. She recalls the watermelon pickles her grandmother made and the herbalist skills of her grandfather. “If we got sick, he knew what every herb did. He made tonics. They also gave us castor oil. You had a choice of having it with orange juice or Coca-Cola.”

Trevor Chavis’ family was living in Southside near Nasty Branch when a flood sent her family to the hilly part of East End. She recalls that her family purchased a piano from Dunhams for her lessons with Mrs. William John Bowman. Lots of friends in the neighborhood would come practice on her family’s piano. She always wanted to be like her teachers.

“You looked up to them and wanted to be like them. Shiloh wasn’t developed then so most of the teachers and other professionals lived on the Northside near Broad, Magnolia, Madison Streets.”

In the 1940s the City Parks and Recreation operated a “Negro Recreation Park” in Shiloh (opened in 1932). Jean Bowman recalls the wading pool that was at the park—a big deal for the children with no swimming pools open to them. Nate Bowman recalls that Aston Park on South French Broad was completely closed to the Black community.

There was also the daily life of the home front. An article in the Asheville Citizen Times on January 21, 1943 reported a dance in observance of President Roosevelt’s birthday at the Phyllis Wheatley YWCA on College Street.

“Dancing will begin at 9:30 PM. Music will be furnished by the Rhythm Masters, an eight-piece orchestra. Spectator seats will be reserved for white persons. The dance will be sponsored by the Paco Club of Asheville. Tickets for the dance are on sale at Palace Grill, East End Café and Wilson’s Tavern. Fitzhugh Popes is general chairman of arrangements.”

—North Carolina Desk, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville, NC
Goal 11: Recovery, Prosperity and Turmoil (1945-1950)—The learner will trace economic, political and social development and access their significance for the lives of Americans.

With the war over, soldiers began to return home in shifts. Their first priority was to take up the lives they had left a few years before. Charles McAdams came home on January 1, 1946. He recalls his happiness: “I married Bertha just a few days later.”

Carolyn Crouch recalls that her Uncle Harvey fell in love with a girl from Germany during the war. Later “The young woman would write letters to my grandmother [Mama Mary] who would go to the Red Cross to get them read to her. She never came to the US and Uncle Harvey never married.” Of another uncle, William, she recalls that he came home shell-shocked. “He had seen a lot of Germans kill babies.” He spent most of his life after discharge in a VA hospital for this trauma.

Julia Ray ran the Ray Funeral Home while her husband Jesse was overseas with the Graves Registration Program just after the war. This program allowed families to have the bodies of their family members returned to. Mrs. Ray recalls:

‘He often said to me [of life for the British and Europeans] you have no idea how hard life has been for these folks’. Jesse was gone for one year. [He returned many fallen soldiers to their family], during that time he only came across one grave from Asheville which he made sure was carefully returned home.”

Having paid the same price for freedom as every other American, the returning soldiers reiterated their demand for the “Double Victory.” Their actions contributed to the beginnings of the modern day Civil Rights Movement.

Barnie Gray was 20 and he recalls his discharge in Ft. Smith, Arkansas:

“We had all these medals and badges on our uniforms. But back in the US, it was just the same. I walked into the bus station and was going to buy me a ticket to Virginia. I did not look for signs—I thought all that was settled now.... I was hungry but couldn’t go to the restaurant on the other side: ‘whites only’ the sign said. A lady said, ‘I’ll help you,’ and got me a ham sandwich. Then I went on the bus and sat right behind the driver. He stood up and put his hand on the seat ‘Don’t you ever park your black ass here again or I’ll kick the living daylights out of you.’”

On returning from war, all veterans were told they were entitled to the benefits of the GI Bill. Many Black veterans faced enormous obstacles when they attempted to apply for the four provisions of the GI Bill: job location, unemployment benefits, housing loans, and educational training. Employers would not hire skilled Blacks, most accredited colleges were closed to Blacks and many of Historic Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were either overwhelmed by enrollment or unaccredited. Most African Americans did not benefit from the democratizing benefits of the GI Bill that entitled young White male soldiers. Once again the NAACP began to push for the rights of Black citizens.

A rich life in the church sustained many members of the Black community throughout the difficulties.
Goal 11: Recovery, Prosperity and Turmoil (1945-1950)—The learner will trace economic, political and social development and access their significance for the lives of Americans.

Eunice Waymon was born in Tryon, NC where her father was a Methodist minister. Her dream while she was a student at Allen High School on College Street was to become a classical pianist, according to her teacher Ruth Walther. In 1950, after graduating as class valedictorian, she moved to New York to attend the Julliard School of Music. She played jazz at bars to support her family back home. Her unique style of using silence as a musical element became a trademark once she changed her name to Nina Simone.

Others stayed in the South and challenged the “peculiar institution” of Jim Crow laws, making an enormous impact on the future of NC. In the late 1940’s, Floyd McKissick, son of Ernest (a WWI veteran) and Magnolia McKissick, was enrolled in law school at NC Central University in Greensboro. In 1950, he and Harold Epps were denied admission to the UNC Law School. He filed suit but a federal court denied the request, finding that “the best interests of the plaintiff will be served by denying this relief sought.” The decision was reversed by the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals in McKissick v. Carmichael, prompting McKissick and five other black law students to enroll at UNC’s law school in the summer of 1950.

WNC was a destination for political and social leaders of the time. Marian Anderson, the great opera singer, was in Asheville in 1945 to sing at the City Auditorium. Due to the segregation of the area hotels, most dignitaries stayed in local homes. Of Ms. Anderson, Trevor Chavis reports, “She stayed at the home of Reverend and Mrs. E. W. Dickson who was the minister at Hill Street Baptist.” Ms.

Chavis remembers the visits of dignitaries for “Negro History Week” including Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of the Council of Negro Women, Dr. Mordecai Johnson, President of Howard University, and Dr. Charlotte Hawkins Brown, head of the Palmer Institute.

The Black Mountain College was at its zenith in 1946 when artists Jacob and Gwendolyn King Lawrence visited to teach a summer course there. Jacob Lawrence’s parents had been part of the great migration to the north in 1919 leaving Charlotte, NC behind. His art form made vibrant use of the visual narrative as he spoke about life in the Black community. Josef Albers, noted visual artist and refugee from the Bauhaus Movement in Germany, hired a private coach to transport the Lawrences to Black Mountain so they would not be required to move to the back of the train when they crossed the “Mason-Dixon Line.” During the 10-week stay the Lawrences never left the college campus.

In 1950, the population of Buncombe County was 124,000 with Blacks comprising 12% of the total. Asheville city population was 53,000 with Blacks totaling 23% of the citizens. Throughout the United States, Blacks comprised 12% of the population.

In the 1940s, Gilbert Sugh was the first Black police officer hired in Asheville. Here he is pictured with the safety patrol group at Mountain Street School in 1946.

Undenited students protesting against segregation of UNC Law School in Raleigh, 1950. North Carolina Archives

Unidentified students protesting against segregation of UNC Law School in Raleigh, 1950. North Carolina Archives

Black Mountain College Summer Arts Institute Faculty, 1946. Left to right: Leo Amino, Jacob Lawrence, Leo Lionni, Ted Dreier, Nora Lionni, Beaumont Newhall, Gwendolyn Lawrence, Isi Gropius, Jean Varda (in tree), Nancy Newhall (sitting), Walter Gropius, “Molly” Gregory, Josef Albers, Anni Albers. North Carolina Archives