



Early Black Boston Digital Almanac: **Boston's Historical Background**

Unit Summary: This unit provides an introduction to early Boston's foundation with a particular focus on its Black community. This unit documents different aspects of Boston's foundation and early history including Black spirituality, patriotism, roots of early activism, etc. This unit gives an interdisciplinary overview of Black history in Boston.

Learning Goals:

- Students will develop an understanding of Boston's early history and the place or position of the Black community in that history.
 - Students will be able to track particular elements of community, opposition, and disempowerment within Boston's historical context
 - This will hopefully inspire an expanded appreciation for Black culture and community in Boston
- Students will be able to identify early Black spaces, figures, concepts, and places through research and engagement with primary sources.
 - Students will gain historical context for Boston's contemporary moment, recognizing that much of our foundation is based upon the past
- Students will learn and engage with lost narratives that intend to articulate a more inclusive understanding of Boston's early histories

Massachusetts State Standards:

[Note: Because teachers have autonomy to choose what activities and primary sources they engage with, these standards could also be based on the area you chose to focus on]

- WCA (Writing Standards)
- USI.T1: specifically point 5
- USI.T3: specifically points 3 & 4
- USI.T4: specifically point 2
- USI.T5: specifically points 5, 7, & 8
- USI.T7: specifically points 3 & 4

Exhibits (featured on the EBBDA site and these exhibits are focused on this unit):

- Early Black Boston and the Fight for Women's Rights
- Early Black Christian Spirituality in Boston
- Black Patriotism/Revolutionary War
- 54th Mass Volunteer Infantry Regiment

Below we include a range of themes, discussion questions, tools, exhibits, and activities. Please pick and choose what works for your classroom as this curriculum is designed and built upon flexibility and accessibility. There are multiple points of entry for educators.

Possible Themes & Curricular Concepts:

- Enslavement
- Colonialism
- Imperialism
- Patriotism
- Activism
- Spirituality

- Community
- Perception
- History
- Race

Glossary Terms:

- **Colonialism:**
 - Setting up colonies in another country (government).¹
- **Imperialism:**
 - Assume control and domination of one country by another (trade).²
 - Political and economic control
 - Example
- **Patriotism:**
 - Stephen Nathanson (1993, 34–35) defines patriotism as involving:³
 - Special affection for one's own country
 - A sense of personal identification with the country
 - Special concern for the well-being of the country
 - Willingness to sacrifice to promote the country's good
- **Nationalism:**
 - The attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their national identity, and the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve (or sustain) self-determination.⁴
- **Spirituality:**
 - Belief in a higher power, something beyond oneself
- **Activism:**
 - Working, advocating, and practicing social, political, or economic reforms
 - The practice of collective liberation, and freedom

Discussion Questions:

- What place, physical object, or person defines your perception of early Boston?
- Why is researching marginalized narrative so difficult?
- How would you change the memorabilia of historical moments for the Boston Massacre and the Boston tea party?
- What role does spirituality play in Boston's early history?
 - How is spirituality used in both a positive and negative light?
 - What type of language is used to emphasize this idea of spirituality?
- How would you define patriotism?
- What is the relationship between race and patriotism?
 - Think about how this is shown in the revolutionary war in particular
 - How does this relate to the relationship between Blackness and property? If you see the two being connected?
- Why is it necessary to understand the past?

¹ Ibid

² Dr. Nicole Aljoe Postcolonial Women Writer's PPT slide

³ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/patriotism/>

⁴ <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/>

Activities:

- **Site Visits:**
 - **Goal:** Site visits allow students to physically engage with the spaces listed below:
 - The following local site(s) resonate and connect to the topic:
 - Boston Athenaeum
 - Museum of African American History
 - David Walker and Maria Stewart's House
 - Copps Burial Ground
 - Map located in Ruggles of Early Roxbury
 - African Meeting House
 - Faneuil Hall
 - Black Heritage Trail
 - Slave ship Desire
 - Slave Auctions/Sales in Boston -- Chinatown
 - The 54th Regiment Statue
 - Plymouth -- [Bodies of Liberty \(document article 91\)](#)
 - Phillis Wheatley
 - David Walker and Maria Stewart's House
 - Harriet Tubman
 - **Consider the following questions:**
 - How do these site visits change our understanding of these places?
 - What do these touristy atmospheres tell us?
 - Which locations are given more attention than others?
 - What historical significance do these places hold?
- **Initial perceptions of Early Boston:**
 - **Goal:** Students will recognize gaps in information about Boston's early history and acknowledge the racial aspect of Boston's early histories (specifically Black Boston)
 - **Activity:**
 - Students will consider what places, physical objects, or person defines their perception of early Boston?
 - Please find 1-2 sources that shed light on these perceptions
 - List examples, facts (if any), and images
 - Consider how this narrative is portraying Boston
 - Think about your own positionality and intersection identities
 - Students will write 3-5 pages (double spaced) about what they perceive **early** Boston looks like versus the common narrative often told.
 - What is this saying about knowledge? What does this say about our history textbooks?
 - **Skills:** critical thinking, creativity, agency, comparison, interpretation, communication
 - **Questions to consider:**
 - What place, physical object, or person defines your perception of early Boston?
 - How does this compare with the narratives often told about early Boston?
 - What figures *come* to mind when you think of early Boston?
 - What figures do you think *should* come to mind?
 - **Potential Follow-up Activity:** Create a podcast on the Black community's role in early Boston!
 - Why is this history so hard to find?
 - Reframe some of the Boston monuments like Paul Revere and Columbus

- How would you change the marker for the Boston Massacre and Boston tea party?
- **Spirituality as a sense of Freedom, Oppression, or Both:**
 - **Goal:** Students will learn the important role spirituality played in early Boston and recognize how it manifested itself in early texts.
 - **Activity:**
 - Students will research the role spirituality played in early Boston through the work of one of the following: Maria Stewart, Phillis Wheatley, Pauline Hopkins, and David Walker.
 - Chose a piece of their (primary source) and do a close reading of it
 - Consider the purpose, time, place, space, meaning, language, rhetorical device, and message
 - Think about its foundations in spirituality
 - Based on this document, is it advocating for or against enslavement?
 - Please present your research in a 3-5 page paper (double spaced) or in a creative any medium of your choosing alongside a reflection detailing your choices
 - Use at least 2 primary sources
 - Consider the questions below
 - **Skills:** critical thinking, agency, comparison, interpretation, communication
 - **Questions to consider:**
 - What role does spirituality play in Boston's early history?
 - How is spirituality used in both a positive and negative light?
 - What language is used to emphasize this idea of spirituality?
 - **Potential Follow-up Activity:** Debate the pros and cons of using spirituality as a means of freedom or oppression.
- **Black Patriotism: A Wasted Fight?**
 - **Goal:** Students will investigate the meaning of patriotism and gain an understanding of how race impacts one's patriotism.
 - **Activity:**
 - Define Patriotism (go beyond the glossary sheet)
 - Consider what patriotism meant in the 18th/19th century. How has the word evolved today (if it did)?
 - Examine one of the following or both in conjunction with each other:
 - Role Black soldiers in the American revolution
 - What was the root of their desire to be in the war?
 - Intersections of race, freedom, and military
 - Find an example of a primary source that does this work (ex. Image of Crispus Attucks)
 - Consider the purpose, time, place, space, meaning, language, rhetorical device and message
 - Primary sources can encompass images, videos, etc
 - Please present your research in a 3-5 page paper (double spaced) or in a creative any medium of your choosing alongside a reflection detailing your choices
 - Use at least 2 primary sources
 - Consider the questions below
 - **Skills:** research, analytical, communication, synthesis
 - **Questions to consider:**
 - How would you define patriotism?
 - Think about the revolutionary war.

- What is the relationship between race and patriotism?
 - How does this relate to the relationship between Blackness and property? If you see the two being connected?
 - How does this manifest itself in more of a contemporary setting?
- **Your Own Boston Textbook:**
 - **Goal:** Students will consider the importance of story and perspective as they create their narrative of the history of Boston
 - **Activity:**
 - Consider what constitutes as knowledge and the sources it coming from
 - Recommended reading: Venus in Two Acts, Saidiya Hartman → violence of the archive
 - Think about what stories you seek to learn and root it in a particular time frame.
 - Consider 3-5 events to root your chapter in.
 - Students will write a 2-4 page proposal for their own textbook chapter on early Black Boston.
 - Consider how you will present this information
 - Consider the purpose, time, place, space, meaning, and message
 - Consider its importance
 - Consider your own learning techniques
 - **Skills:** historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, autonomy, perspective, creativity
 - **Questions to Consider**
 - Why is it important to consider what is missing from our textbooks?
 - How would you like to present this to folks?
 - How do you learn best? Make sure to implement those methodologies in your unit.

Text Pairings

- **Goal:** Use literature to engage in Boston's past and present histories
- **Skills:** Close readings, literary analysis,
- **Pairing #1**
 - *I Shimmer Sometimes Too*, Porsha Olayiwola
 - *Collection of Phillis Wheatley Poems*, Phillis Wheatley
 - *The Age of Phillis*, Honorée Fanonne Jeffers
- **Pairing #2**
 - David Walker's Appeal
 - Choose between the following: Declaration of Independence, Declaration of Sentiments, or Declaration of Peace
 - The Combahee River Collective
 - 13th Netflix Documentary
- **Pairing #3**
 - Black Panther Archives
 - Black Lives Matter Movement
- **Pairing #4**
 - Speeches by Maria Stewart
 - Speeches Martin Luther King Jr
 - Autobiography of Malcolm X

Resources:

- **Site Visit Sources:**

- Boston Athenaeum: 10-1/2 Beacon St, Boston, MA 02108
 - [Hayden Collection](#)
- [Museum of African American History](#): 46 Joy St, Boston, MA 02114
- [David Walker and Maria Stewart's House](#): 81 Joy Street (originally 8, then 4 Belknap Street)
- [Copp's Burial Ground](#): 45 Hull St, Boston, MA 02113
- African Meeting House: 8 Smith Ct, Boston, MA 02114
 - [MAAH Description](#)
 - [African Meeting House](#)
 - [Mass Historical Society Context about African Meeting House](#)
- Faneuil Hall: 4 S Market St, Boston, MA 02109
- Slave ship Desire: China Town
 - **Additional Readings:**
 - ["Ship Desire, William Peirce, Master – The First Ship to Traffic Enslaved Africans into the Massachusetts Bay Colony"](#)
 - Zong, Nourbese Philips
 - ["Slave Ship \(Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming On\)"](#)
- Maps of early Boston in Ruggles: 1150 Tremont St, Roxbury, MA 02120
- Wheatley Statue: 256 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 02116
- Harriet Tubman Memorial: Harriet Tubman Square, Boston, MA 02118
 - **Additional Readings:**
 - [Harriet Tubman Site](#)
- Slave Auctions/Sales in Boston: Faneuil Hall & Charleston
 - **Additional Readings:**
 - ["Slave Auction Memorial Outside Faneuil Hall Is One Step Closer To Becoming Reality"](#)
 - [Early Newspaper Archive in Boston](#)
 - Contained ["slave-for-sale advertisements ended in The Gazette, the newspaper had 1,103 different "slaves for sale" ads with over 2,500 individuals being sold"](#)
- Black Heritage Trail
 - [Tufts Project Maps The Landmarks Of Black Boston](#)
 - [Upon the Hill: The Beacon Hill Community](#)
 - Includes the following:
 - Robert Gould Shaw Memorial
 - George Middleton House
 - Phillips School

- John J Smith House
 - Charles Street Meeting House
 - Lewis and Harriet Hayden House
 - John Coburn House
 - African Meeting House
 - John Abiel Smith School
 - Smith Court Residences
- [The 54th Regiment Statue](#)
- Phillis Wheatley
 - [Boston Women's Heritage Trail: Phillis Wheatley](#)
 - [Women's History: Phillis Wheatley](#)
 - Used for mapping her experience in Boston
 - Contemporary Connections to Wheatley
 - [Kevin Young "Homage to Phillis Wheatley"](#)
 - [June Jordan "Something Like a Sonnet for Phillis Wheatley"](#)
- **Racial Aspect of early Black Boston**
 - [Winthrop had enslaved people// natives dressing up// 1633 mention of a Black person in the colony account of Indians](#)
 - [MA and the Abolition of Slavery](#)
 - Salem Witch Trials
 - Indian John and the Northern Tawnies, John McWilliams
- **Spirituality**
 - [African American Churches](#)
 - [Christianity in Boston](#)
 - The Governmentality of Slavery in Colonial Boston, 1690-1760, Dominik Nag
 - [American Abolitionism and Religion](#)
 - [Maria W. Stewart \(NPS\)](#)
- **Patriotism**
 - [The Revolutionary War](#)
 - [Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War](#)
 - The Black Phalanx: a history of the Negro soldiers of the United States in the war of 1775-1812, 1861-'65 Wilson, Joseph T. (Joseph Thomas), 1836-1891.
 - Without Representation, No Taxation: Free Blacks, Taxes, and Tax Exemptions between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars
 - NMAAH [Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War](#)
- **Boston Busing/Desegregation**
 - Boston Against Busing: Race, Class, and Ethnicity in the 1960s and 1970s, Ronald P. Formisano
 - [Not Little Rock But New Orleans](#)
 - [\(1974\) Boston Busing Case](#)
- **Other Important Resources:**
 - [Black Digital Humanities Projects & Resources](#)
 - [Teaching Hard Histories](#)
 - [White Spaces by Tobin Miller Shearer](#)
 - [The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House by Audre Lorde](#)
 - [Colored Conventions Project](#)