



Early Black Boston Digital Almanac:
Connecting Boston's Early History & Our Contemporary World

Unit Summary: This unit draws connections between the eighteenth/nineteenth-century and present-day Boston through the use of different lenses (such as space, education, and media) that students can use to examine Boston's early history. This unit intends to draw parallels and connections between the past and present.

Learning Goals:

- Students will develop an understanding of the connections between Boston's past and present and consider the place or position of the Black community in this history
 - This will hopefully inspire an expanded appreciation for Black culture and community in Boston where students consider how is Black history memorialized in Boston
- Students will develop a more nuanced understanding of notions of historical progress by interrogating how we describe and define "progress" through the consideration of perspectives on narrative, space, education, and media.
- Students will gain historical context for what is happening in Boston today and grasp why the city has such a fragmented representation today
- Students will consider what these systems, spaces, and institutions have looked like in the past, as well as what they currently look like and imagine what they should look like embodying the inherent fact that they are the future.

Massachusetts State Standard:

[Note: Because teachers have autonomy to choose what activities and primary sources they engage with, these standards could apply 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

EBBDA Exhibits (featured on the EBBDA site and useful for this unit):

- From Freedom Schools to the #BPSwalkout Gentrification in Boston
- An Uneven Spread: Race, Space, and the Growth of the Modern University
- Shielding Slavery: The Removal of the Harvard Law School Seal
- Black Women's 19th-century Literary Organizations
- Early Black Boston & Music
- Early Black Boston & Visual Arts

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:

- 18th/19th Centuries
- Contemporary Moment
- Narrative

- Digital Humanities
- Decolonization
- Accessibility
- Diversity
- Collaboration
- Narrative
- Citation
- Social justice

Glossary Terms:

- **Colonialism:**
 - Setting up colonies in another country (government).¹
 - Example
 - Christopher Columbus claimed control over indigenous land
- **Imperialism:**
 - Assume control and domination of one country by another (trade).²
 - Political and economic control
 - Example
 - British control of the Caribbean
- **Redlining:**
 - an illegal practice that promoted racial segregation. In Boston, real estate agents and mortgage companies created a color-coded map to separate/create boundaries among areas based on race, socioeconomic class, and businesses. Each color represented which areas were “good” or “bad”, green for the “best,” blue for “still desirable,” yellow for “definitely declining,” and red for “hazardous” → represented where it safe to insure mortgages
- **The Federal Housing Administration:**
 - established in 1934 as a response to the Great Depression
 - Refused to insure mortgages and loans near Black communities to further perpetuate redlining and gentrification .
- **Desegregation:**
 - End of racial segregation
 - **White Flight**
 - Describes the movement of white populations in major US cities after world war 2, into the suburbs when people of color began moving into them.
 - **Busing Movement**
 - Describes Federal and State attempts to diversify public schools by literally “busing” students to schools within or outside of their district.
- **Gentrification**
 - Describes social displacement, whereby middle-class people start moving into underserved/low-income communities. Because the cost of rents also rises and the sense of community also changes, thereby displacing the people who were there beforehand.

¹ Ibid

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

Discussion Question:

- **Overview [broad questions]**
 - How have the narratives of Black Bostonians changed over time?
 - How would you describe the relationship between race, class, and power in Boston?
 - Do you think these relationships remain stagnant over time or has it evolved?
 - How is Black history memorialized in Boston?
 - How does the Black community build community and create space for themselves in Boston?
 - If you could reimagine Boston today, in regards to education, space, and media, what would it look like?
- **Education**
 - How do you define education?
 - How would you describe education in Boston?
 - How has the school system in Boston evolved over time? For example, you might think about:
 - What was education like in the early days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony?
 - What did the desegregation of Boston's schools during the 19th-century look like?
 - How have wars like WWI or WWII or Vietnam impacted the school system?
 - How did the Busing/Desegregation movement impact?
 - What about the recent Exam School Redesign?
 - What are the positives and negatives of the METCO program
- **Media**
 - How does news travel? How has this changed over time? [consider newspapers, social media, technology, "fake news," etc]
 - How did activists like Frederick Douglass, David Walker, Maria Stewart, etc. circulate their ideas? How do we circulate ideas now?
 - How can we use technology to tell more diverse stories?
 - What role does the media play in activism?
- **Space**
 - Consider the social geography of Boston:
 - Who owns buildings/houses and where in Boston?
 - Where are significant social/gathering spaces? How are spaces racialized in Boston?
 - What does it mean to claim and reclaim spaces?

Additional Activities :

- **Site Visits:**
 - **Goal:** Site visits allow students to physically engage with the spaces listed below:
 - Phillis Wheatley Statue
 - Harriet Tubman Memorial
 - William Nell's House (Beacon House - oldest structure)
 - Ruggles Station
 - David Walker/Maria's House
 - Copp's Hill Burying Ground
 - Faneuil Hall

- Black Heritage Trail
 - African Meeting House
 - Abiel School -- Boston Latin School
 - 54th regiment statue
- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, writing, analyzing comparison, and contextualization
- **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?
- **Equitable Access to Education:**
 - **Goal:** Students will engage with how Boston schooling has changed and/or remained stagnant over time.
 - **Activity:** Students will reflect on their own experience of school choice in Boston. Students will examine the evolution of teaching in the Massachusetts Bay Colony to the contemporary movement where exam schools are being reimagined.
 - Consider schooling for Black students during this time period
 - Look at examples in the 18th/19th century
 - Like Sarah Roberts → desegregation movement in Boston
 - Read the following article “Searching for Sarah: Black Girlhood, Education, and the Archive”
 - What parallels do you see between the past and present? What is this narrative illustrating?
 - Consider the Abiel School
 - Research the school’s foundation – its purpose, who created it, who was it for, how it was funded, and accessibility/resources
 - When doing this research, consider time, place, space, resources, and demographics
 - Consider Boston Public Schools today. Are there any parallels in the ways resources are distributed, school reputation, and accessibility
 - Think about the following
 - Exam schools
 - Resources/funding
 - School population
 - YOUR perspective as a BPS student matters → it can be used as a source!
 - Write a 5- 7 page reflection piece on the ways in which accessibility in BPS has evolved or remained static today.
 - Please reference the reflection questions below for inspiration, but feel free to write beyond that
 - Use at least 2 primary sources [[Smith Court Stories](#) is a great resource that includes primary sources]
 - **Skills:** critical thinking, research, creativity, analysis
 - **Questions to consider:**
 - What did you learn about the Abiel School?
 - How have the school systems changed?
 - How has school demographics changed?
 - How are programs like METCO both positive and harmful?

- How is the past manifested in the present?
 - Does the past define the present?
- How would you reimagine schooling in Boston?
- As you do research, try to be conscientious about your sources
 - Consider who wrote the source, where it appears, and how it appears

● **Mapping Space in Boston:**

- **Goal:** Students will engage with Boston's geographical histories and document the number of resources within each area/neighborhood – through the process of mapping
 - Students will also consider the act of mapping itself – what does it mean to map something? Who has the right to map things? When one creates a map, what do they have to consider?
 - Recommended Readings: *The Four Voyages of Christopher Columbus*, Christopher Columbus, and *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast*, Lisa Brooks
 - Additional: [How to Lie with Maps](#) by Mark Monmonier
- **Activity:** Create their own Story-maps of the resources distributed across Boston neighbors (Dorchester, Roxbury, Mattapan, Hyde Park, South Boston, Roslindale, West Roxbury, North End, South End) in terms of schools, transportations, food, hospitals, community spaces, libraries, and so forth inevitably comparing and contrasting the past and the present social geographies.
 - Begin by focusing on a theme or aspect of that neighborhood you would like to look at such as schools, transportation, food, hospitals, community spaces, libraries, and research its evolution over time.
 - Remember you are documenting aspects of these areas (if any) from early Boston (18th/19th century) to the contemporary moment (20th/21st century)
 - You are ONLY choosing one of the following to focus on: schools, transportation, food, hospitals, community spaces, libraries, and research its evolution over time.
 - Use at least 2 primary sources
 - When using these sources consider the purpose of the site, intended audience, information being reflected, reliability, and so forth
 - Choose text and images that you feel best represent this dynamic you are trying to present.
 - Watch this [tutorial on Story-maps](#)
 - Reference [this page](#) for any additional quest
 - This is an example of a [story map created about Phillis Wheatley](#)
 - Write a brief reflection of the process afterward.
 - Please reference the reflection questions below for inspiration, but feel free to write beyond that
- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, creativity, analysis, primary source engagement
- **Questions to consider:**
 - What was your experience mapping Boston?
 - Did you notice anything you haven't noticed before?
 - How has space in Boston changed?
 - What relationship does space have with race?

● **Investigating Notions of Home and Space:**

- **Goal:** Students will engage with the question of “who lives where and why” in Boston
- **Activity:** Students will research the changes in Boston's residential areas over time.

- Find a map of 18th/19th century Boston – Divide it into several sections
- Once you pinpoint a certain area, physically highlight the spaces Black settlements existed
 - Helpful Reference: *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton
- Consider the following:
 - pin-pointing demographics
 - Homeownership
 - the changing of wards
 - street names on maps,
 - movements of people across Boston’s early communities to the present.
- Find a map of 21st century Boston and research where Black settlements are in contemporary Boston and who the homeowners are in these areas.
- Have students present their results in an essay, infographic, digital map, video blog, art response
- **Skills:** critical thinking, research, creativity, analysis
- **Questions to consider:**
 - Has the ownership of space in Boston changed?
 - Who has more access to space? How is space used?
 - Where are Black settlements in Boston today? How does it compare to where they were in the past?
 - Where are you in this space?
 - What role do systems like gentrification and redlining?
 - As you do research, try to be conscientious about your sources
 - Consider who wrote the source, where it appears, and how it appears
- **Media in the 18th or 19th Century vs. Now:**
 - **Goal:** Students will look at the progression of media over time.
 - **Activity:** Students will research the relationship between technology and media by looking at the evolution of how news has traveled/changed over time, primarily through the lens of activism.
 - Begin by reading an excerpt of David Walker’s Appeal and researching the print culture of David Walker’s Appeal
 - Research 18th- or 19th-century print and material culture.
 - Consider the desire and need for methodologies like Walker’s
 - Are there any systems or movements today that resembles Walker’s distributions of the appel [consider social media and activism movements]
 - Write a reflection piece on the ways in which print culture has evolved today.
 - Please reference the reflection questions below for inspiration, but feel free to write beyond that
 - Use at least 2 primary sources [feel free to reference other sources in addition to Walker]
 - **Preliminary Activity:** If you could create a social media post for Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter capturing the essence of Walker’s appeal, what would it say and why?
 - Would you include an image? What would the image be? Why or why not?
 - **Skills:** critical thinking, research, creativity, analysis, primary source engagement
 - **Questions to consider:**
 - How does news travel? How has this changed over time?

- How do we use technology in similar ways as activists did use technology?
 - How can we use technology to tell more diverse stories?
- What role does the media play in activism?
 - Would you consider fake news to be propaganda?
- As you do research, try to be conscientious about your sources
 - Consider who wrote the source, where it appears, and how it appears

Text Pairings:

- **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:**
 - [Royall House](#): 191 Main St, Medford, MA 02155
 - William Nell's House (Beacon House - oldest structure): 3 Smith Court Boston, Massachusetts
 - [Boston's Black Heritage Trail](#)
 - [William C. Nell House, 3 Smith Court, Boston, Suffolk County, MA](#)
 - 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”](#)
- **18th and 19th School Resources**
 - [Smith Court Stories Interactive Site](#)
 - Massachusetts Bay Colony
 - [Massachusetts Passes First Education Law](#)

- In Pursuit of Knowledge Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America, Kabria Baumgartner
- [City of Boston Archives](#)
- [NPS Abiel School](#)
- Sarah Roberts
 - [NPS Article](#)
 - [Black Past](#)
 - [Brown vs. Board](#)
- [Developing a black meritocracy: a history of black graduates of the Boston Latin School Cromwell, Adelaide M. \(1985\)](#)
- **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](#)
- **Mapping Resources**
 - [Boston Planning and Development Agencies](#)
 - [Boston Public Library](#)
 - [Leventhal Maps](#)
- **Space/Place**
 - *African-Americans in Boston: More than 350 Years*, Robert C. Hayden
 - *The Color of Law A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, Richard Rothstein
 - Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North, James Oliver Horton, and Lois E. Horton
 - *Mapping Boston*, Alex Krieger
 - Literary Books that engage with Space
 - *The Living is Easy*, Dorothy West
 - *Black Marks*, Kirsten Dinnall Hoyte
 - [Camila Domonoske Interactive Redlining Map Zooms In On America's History Of Discrimination](#)
 - [Terry Gross A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America](#)
 - [National Housing Act 1934](#)
 - [Civil Rights Teaching - Segregation](#)
 - [Busing & Desegregation Forty Years Later](#)
 - [Zebulon Miletsky and Tomas Gonzalez How Gentrification and Displacement Are Remaking Boston](#)
 - [Boston Globe Spotlight Series](#)
- **Media**
 - Census Data
 - <https://www.census.gov/prod/www/decennial.html>
 - <https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/web/ICPSR/series/180>
 - <https://www.census.gov/library/working-papers/2005/demo/POP-twps0076.html>
 - [Eighteenth-Century American Newspapers in the Library of Congress](#)
 - [Mayor's Office of Race/Resiliency](#)
- **Other Useful 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](#)