King-Lincoln
A Vibrant African American Community Emerges

Historical Context and Overview

In the early 1800s, there were only 43 "free colored" citizens in Columbus. Within ten years, 1840-1850, the number of African-American citizens doubled from 805 to 1607 people. There are only glimpses of African-American life in Columbus in the 19th century, but it is clear that there were several small communities—some inside the present-day boundaries of Columbus and some that were outside the boundaries of the city. African Americans worked as farmers, domestic servants, and tradesmen or as construction workers for the National Road, the canal, and the railroads. Irish, Germans, and African Americans, (and by early 20th century), Italians might live in close proximity because of closeness to work or cheaper rent. Although these were not always truly integrated communities, there was no segregation by law.

By the late 19th century, African American families could be found in: parts of the Badlands (around Fort Hayes); by the Olentangy River and West Lane Avenue; by the Olentangy River and West 11th Avenue; Long Street and North High; the Hilltop (by the state institutions); Burnside Heights (Hilltop/Westgate area); Flytown (near North Side), and later Hanford Village and Teakwood Heights. African Americans lived in so many different areas that Columbus Schools actually desegregated 90 years before court-ordered desegregation.

Between 1900 and 1940, the African-American population grew from 9,000 to 39,000. By World War I and the Great Migration of African Americans seeking work and opportunity in the north, one neighborhood grew substantially larger—the East side—because it was practical to live near work near the railroads and companies dependent upon the railroads. The African American community moved eastward along Long Street, despite the efforts of some white businessmen to hold the commercial and housing line near what is now St. Paul's AME Church. By this time, housing, schools (with the building of Champion School in 1909), and social activities were increasingly segregated. As a result, the King-Lincoln neighborhoods grew increasingly inward and self-sufficient. Though people might shop and work downtown, they could also find what they needed between Long Street and Mt Vernon Avenue. The King-Lincoln area was home to an African-American community of diverse educational and cultural backgrounds—shopkeepers, doctors, barbers, lawyers, musicians, clerks, drycleaners, journalists, real estate people, beauticians, restaurant owners, and others made Long Street the center of African American commercial, social, and entertainment experience. Much like the origins of the Harlem Renaissance or the flowering of rich Jazz centers of St. Louis or Chicago, the King-Lincoln neighborhood (also called Bronzeville) was born of segregation.

Standards Alignment

Ohio's New Learning Standards, K-12 Social Studies

Grade 3, Content Statement 3, Local communities change over time.
Grade 3, Content Statement 8, Communities may include diverse cultural groups
Grade 3, Content Statement 10: Individuals make the community a better place by solving problems in a way that promotes the common good.

Grade 5, Content Statement 14: The choices people make have both present and future consequences
Grade 8, Content Statement 16, Cultural biases, stereotypes and prejudices had social, political, and economic consequences for minority groups and the population as a whole
Grade 8, Content Statement 22, Choices made by individuals, business, and governments have both present and future consequences.
HS American History, Content Statement 12: Immigration, internal migration and urbanization transformed American life.

Learning Objectives

• Analyze the changes in a community over time and analyze factors that created change.
• Describe and analyze the history of King-Lincoln as part of a larger picture of *de facto* segregation for African Americans in urban areas in the 20th century.
• Explain how push and pull factors of migration and immigration affected King-Lincoln.
• Analyze how individual choice and social/government factors play a part in shaping a community and the consequences of these choices—including both intended and unintended consequences—contribute to change.

Discussion Questions

1. What factors led to the growth and evolution of the King-Lincoln neighborhood as a predominately African-American community by the mid-20th century?

2. Which of these factors were the result of choices made by individuals, businesses, or government and which were the result of cultural biases and stereotypes?

3. How can change (as it relates to neighborhoods) be both positive and negative?

4. What does Wil Haygood, author of the *Haygoods of Columbus*, mean when he talks about the community as being "spiritually segregated?"

5. Did individuals make the community a better place by solving issues for the common good? Or did individuals only react to circumstances of the times?

6. How have the legacies of the past affected the present neighborhood?

Extension Activities

Have students make a list of factors as to why King-Lincoln was a thriving community in the early part of the 20th century and why it went into decline in the later years of the 20th century—according to those interviewed in the video. Using their lists, students make two Venn diagrams—one that tries to answer the question: What made the King-Lincoln Neighborhood a vibrant community in the early 20th century? The second question: What made the King-Lincoln Neighborhood begin to decline in the later 20th century? In each diagram, one circle represents the King-Lincoln neighborhood (thriving or decline) as the result of individual, business, or government choices and the other circle (thriving or decline) the result of cultural biases and stereotypes. Students can discuss if the factors can be in one circle of the other. What factors overlap of the circles? Let students speculate as to whether any factors could have been changed.

Using a county map and push pins, ask students to put a push pin onto the map to the closest elementary school near their house (do not ask them to identify their house). What is their neighborhood called? Are there a variety of names? How did they come about? King-Lincoln is just one name for the area—but there are others: Bronzeville, the Blackberry Patch, NoBo, and the Near East Side. Research how the different names have come about—are they governmental designations? Neighborhood development? Old Streetcar/bus lines? Historic references? Do they apply to the same areas or only to different streets? Would some older members of the community remember the area by a different name than members of a younger generation?

Additional Resources

Columbus Neighborhoods: King-Lincoln - http://www.columbusneighborhoods.org/king-lincoln

Bronzeville Neighborhood Association - http://bronzeville.wordpress.com/

Bishop, Anna. *The Blackberry Patch, Beyond the Blackberry Patch, and The Black Experience in Columbus, Ohio,* Black Studies Community Based Seminar for The Ohio State University.

McWilliams, Wm. (ed) *Columbus Illustrated Record, 1919-1920* (richly detailed in text, photos, and ads predominately of King Lincoln in the 1920s)

Allen, Wm Kenneth. *Historical Reflections: The Community and the Afro-American Pioneer Physicians of Columbus, Ohio*, 1988

Columbus Landmarks Foundation. *Live a Lifetime on Long Street: Walking Tour*. Ohio Humanities Grant. www.columbuslandmarks.org