

Change in Asheville, N.C. and the U.S. (1880-1920s)

Objective: Students will understand how late nineteenth and early twentieth century technological innovations altered the physical and social circumstances in a local urban area. By reading primary and secondary sources relevant to the lesson, they will develop critical reading skills. In order to grasp the colossal population and demographic changes during the Progressive era in Asheville, they will also analyze numerical data.

Standard Comp Goals: (*NCSCOS/ Eleventh Grade/ United States History*)

Comp Goal:

7.02- Analyze how different groups of Americans made economic and political gains in the Progressive Period.

7.03- Evaluate the effects of racial segregation on different regions and segments of the United States society.

7.04- Examine the impact of technological changes on economic, social, and cultural life in the United States.

Length: 1.5 hours

Resources/Materials: (All provided in the traveling trunk, in packets, and on a jump drive.)

- 1880, 1900, and 1920 Census Chart and 1900 document sample
- Basic informational reading on Asheville and the coming of the train
- Pictures of a modernizing and tourist-industry dominated Asheville including photos of the train traversing the mountains, local hotel and boardinghouse photos, and a busy Pack Square
- Copy of the Cell Phone Tour Script that students will dial in and listen to
- Letter excerpts from Thomas Wolfe to his mother regarding Asheville during the Progressive Period
- Quiz

Procedures:

1. Have the class split themselves up into groups of five or six. Hand each group a copy of the Buncombe County Census document. Ask the class to spend five minutes amongst their groups analyzing the census data provided. This activity requires the students to do simple math— they should notice that Asheville’s population doubled by 1900 and almost tripled by 1920. They will also notice the city’s growing African American population.
2. After five minutes, regain the students’ attention and begin to facilitate a class discussion. Ask several questions that will engage their critical thinking skills:
 - What technological innovations during the period facilitated the growth of other cities throughout the U.S.?
 - Consider the World’s Fair in Chicago in 1893: Unprecedented displays of electricity and large magnificent buildings symbolized American progress.

- What things could have spurred Asheville's growth during the period?
 - Railroad construction, electricity, indoor plumbing, new infrastructure capabilities, and the growing popularity of leisurely travel for the rich.
 - Why would African Americans have immigrated to Asheville?
 - The railroad and Asheville's booming tourist industry offered blacks jobs outside of the agricultural sector.
3. After student discussion, hand each student a copy of "A Changing America Equals a Booming Asheville," and have the students read it independently for five minutes. If a smart board or projector is available, save paper by projecting a copy of the text onto the board. Then ask the students to volunteer reading a paragraph of the text aloud.
4. After the reading is complete, once again commence a class discussion. Ask:
- What industry or industries in Asheville played a major role in the growth and development of Asheville?
 - The arrival of the railroad, the tourist industry (and health tourism), and the timber industry.
 - What groups of people were coming to Asheville and what various motivations pushed them here?
 - The wealthy came to vacation and expand their business ventures, those with respiratory illnesses came for treatment and healing, immigrant groups came to forge a new life within the city's bustling economy, and African Americans came for new job possibilities.
- At this point, allow students to take a few minutes to look through the collection of photographs which includes the WNC Railroad and old hotels and boardinghouses in Asheville from the period. Ask:
- What was going on at the national level during this period that was also evident at the local level?
 - Industrialization and the changing circumstances for women, African Americans, and immigrants.
5. Have one student from each group dial the number of the Thomas Wolfe Memorial cell phone tour and a put it on speaker phone. The groups will listen to the #4 cell phone stop, which discusses African Americans in Asheville society and their work at the Old Kentucky Home. After the recording is over, ask:
- What was the status of African Americans during this period in terms of their freedoms?
 - See Teacher Resources for more information on Jim Crow.
6. For the final in-class activity, have the students read two excerpts from Thomas Wolfe's letters to his mother during the early 1920s. They are a culmination of Wolfe's personal critiques of Progressivism. Although the actual Progressive Movement was from 1890 to 1914, Wolfe and his contemporaries were living with the results of the movement during the 1920s, witnessing daily the changes that it brought about. After they're done reading, ask:

- What were the major components of Progressivism? Lead them to look to Wolfe's letters for guidance:
 - Infrastructure and construction advances, technology improvements such as the automobile, a movement toward high culture and higher education.
 Also, lead the students to see the advancements females witnessed during the period. Finally, be sure that the students understand that despite numerous advancements in America's infrastructure, technological capabilities, and improvements for some women, African Americans and many immigrants were still treated as unequals.

Assessment/ Evaluation:

Have the students make a **brochure advertising Asheville as a tourist destination**. It does not need to be spectacular in appearance. Instead, this activity is meant for the instructor to figure out how well each student grasped the major changes at the macro-level of U.S. society from the 1880s until the 1920s (the railroad and other technology innovations, improved infrastructure, and the changing social and economic circumstances for different groups of people), and how those changes became evident at a local level.

Guidelines For Brochure:

1. It must be clear what demographic of people the brochure is advertising Asheville as a tourist destination to.
2. The brochure must advertise Asheville's perceived attributes during the time period studied. (A scenic tourist and health destination and a city complete with modern amenities and infrastructure.)
3. The brochure must include mention of the modes of transportation tourists could take to get to the city. It must also include transportation options once visitors made it into the city as well.
4. The brochure must offer examples of the accommodations in Asheville where short-term and long-term visitors could stay. (Boardinghouses, hotels, health resorts, etc.)

* Remember, this activity is not meant to see who can make the most savvy looking brochure. Computer-designed or hand-made is fine. Content matters, not appearance. Make sure it is clear that the student understands what groups of people could afford to travel for leisure during the period and what the major technological innovations were, especially in transportation.

Alternative Assessment:

If time does not allow for implementation of the brochure assignment and its necessary grading, have the students complete the following quiz:

** Developed by Sarah Beth Lee. Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site. Summer, 2011.*

Quiz- Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century U.S./Asheville, NC

***Each Question is worth 20 points. Answer the questions in 1 to 4 sentences.**

- 1. What major event in 1880 spurred Asheville's tremendous population growth in the decades that came to follow?**

- 2. What did Asheville have to offer that various groups of people found attractive in the late nineteenth century? Give at least 2 examples—2 groups and why they came.**

- 3. How did Asheville's thriving tourist industry in the early 1900s offer some white women new options and lifestyles?**

- 4. In the time period covered in this lesson (1880-1920s), how did the lives of African Americans differ from the lives of their white neighbors?**

- 5. Wolfe critiques the Progressive Period (1890-1914) in his letters to his mother. What aspects of the Progressive Movement did he mention?**

Buncombe County Census Data¹

1880

Total Population: 21,909

Colored Persons: 3,476

White Persons: 18,422

1900

Total Population: 44, 288

Colored Persons: 8, 121

Other Persons: 36,167

1920

Total Population: 64,148

Colored Persons: 9, 618

Other Persons: 54, 530

¹ Historical Census Browser, retrieved July 8, 2011 from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>.

A Changing America Equals a Booming Asheville

(Asheville from 1880 through the 1920s)

On October 3, 1880, the Western North Carolina Railroad made its debut in Asheville, NC.² In the coming decades, the train would change the face of this mountain urban area. Although wealthy tourists had been traveling to the Asheville since the Civil War, the train allowed them to make the trip more quickly and conveniently. Many visitors chose to take up residence in the area after their arrival for several reasons. Asheville offered numerous tracts of scenic land for wealthy investors to purchase and to either develop or resell. The city's architectural growth and development was expanding exponentially as technological innovations allowed for the construction of bigger and better structures. Just as in other major developing cities throughout the U.S. at the time such as Chicago, St. Louis, and numerous others, Asheville equipped itself with modern amenities like electricity and indoor plumbing. In 1889, Asheville became the second city in the world to feature electric street cars as a means of transportation.³ The mountain city's cool and pleasant summer climate also attracted new residents. Doctors actually encouraged people afflicted with tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases to take up residence in the area because of the climate-associated health benefits.

Northerners, Jews, Greeks, and other groups moved into Asheville in the years after the railroad's arrival to also take part in the city's bustling economy and expansion. African Americans, who still worked largely in agricultural jobs throughout the rest of the South, found the area's tourist-related job opportunities attractive. Numerous black men took up jobs as railroad workers and porters, hotel bellmen and servants, and restaurant waiters. Black women worked in hotels and boardinghouses serving visitors, and also as waitresses and cooks. Most of these jobs required employees to work long hours doing difficult tasks, usually for low pay.⁴

Oftentimes, middle-class white women found Asheville's Progressive-Period advancements personally beneficial. In 1906 Julia Wolfe, mother of the famous author and novelist Thomas Wolfe, purchased a boardinghouse to own and operate. For years Julia independently and successfully ran her boardinghouse, the Old Kentucky Home, relying heavily on Asheville's various passersbys for her main patronage. By the 1920s, middle-class white women actually owned the majority of boardinghouses in Asheville.⁵ Because of the city's tourism industry, women who had previously been restricted to the home and domestic life were finally able to enter the workforce as hotel and boardinghouse owners and operators, clerks, maids, waitresses, and cooks.

² Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2007), 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴ Richard D. Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 172-176.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

African Americans in Asheville and the Old Kentucky Home

DIAL: (865) 563-3501, then press number 4

Much like today, early twentieth century Asheville revolved around the tourism industry. Accordingly, numerous African Americans found employment in service jobs offered by the city's boardinghouses, restaurants, and hotels. In 1920, there were over 200 black women employed as chambermaids, maids, boardinghouse workers, cooks, and hotel servants in Asheville.

As in cities around the country during the early 1900s, African Americans in Asheville, who made up roughly a fifth of the population, were segregated from their white neighbors in terms of work, residence, and education by the city's Jim Crow laws. Thomas Wolfe dared to write about racial conflict in this mountain urban area when other Southern writers ignored the controversial topic. Especially in his play *Welcome to Our City*, Wolfe depicts an Asheville wrought with race riots and even bloodshed. Although no major race riots actually occurred in Asheville, it nonetheless was a city full of racial tension and stark segregation along the color line. Wolfe's racial stereotypes and crude vernacular in regards to race depict the thoughts and beliefs of many during the era.

Here at Julia Wolfe's Old Kentucky Home, the daily tasks of preparing food and providing clean rooms for up to 30 boarders required her to seek outside help. Sometimes Julia would send young Thomas into local African American neighborhoods to recruit workers for her boardinghouse. African American workers could only enter the kitchen area of the Old Kentucky Home via these back steps. At times, some of Julia's labor force even rented the rooms located in the basement area of the home.

Wolfe fictionalized his mother and her treatment of the African American help in his novel *Look Homeward Angel*. Describing the start of a typical day at the boardinghouse, he wrote, quote, "The negress arrived, coming under the built-up house and climbing lazily the steep tunnel of back steps." Wolfe went on to illustrate his mother's demeanor toward the African American workers, writing, "She nagged and berated the sullen girls constantly, tortured by the thought that they were stealing her supplies and her furnishings, and dawdling away the time for which she paid them."

The Thomas Wolfe Memorial State Historic Site is open Tuesday through Saturday 9 to 5 and Sunday 1 to 5, offering an exhibit hall, audio-visual program and tours of the historic "Old Kentucky Home". For More information, visit our website: www.wolfememorial.com. Thank you.

Letters From Thomas Wolfe to His Mother

May 1923

“Dear Mama: ...I will step on toes, I will not hesitate to say what I think of those people who shout “Progress, Progress, Progress”—when what they mean is more Ford Automobiles, more Rotary Clubs, more Baptist Ladies Social unions. I will say that “Greater Asheville” does not necessarily mean “100,000 by 1930,” that we are not necessarily 4 times as civilized as our grandfathers because we go four times as fast in automobiles, because our buildings are four times as tall. What I shall try to get into their dusty little pint-measured minds is that a full belly, a good automobile, paved streets, and so on, do not make them one whit better or finer....”⁶

June 1924

“Dear Mama:

—Written in haste and therefore short. Thanks for news of Koch. Called him yesterday: had breakfast with him this morning. He wants to put one of my old Carolina one act plays in a new book—Return of Buck Gavin. It was hastily written in three hours at one sitting when I was 18. Honestly, I don’t think I can afford to let my name go out over it. But we shall see.

Pained at the implication in your letter that I was ashamed of North Carolina—only what is N.C. willing to do for me? I don’t think there is a place there now for anyone who cares for anything besides Rotary and Lions and Booster Clubs, real-estate speculation, “heap much” money, social fawning, good roads, new mills,—what, in a word, they choose to call “Progress, Progress, Progress.” The only progress is spiritual; the only

⁶ John Skally Terry, ed., *Thomas Wolfe’s Letters to His Mother Julia Elizabeth Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 50.

lasting thing is Beauty— created by an artist. And N.C. has forgotten such as I.

N.C. needs honest criticism—rather than the false, shallow, “we are-the-finest-state-and-greatest-people-in-the-country” – kind of thing. An artist who refuses to accept fair criticism of his work will never go far. What of a state?

I love N.C. more than any other place in the country! But what has it to feed my spirit, my mind. Last week I saw plays written by an Englishman, a German, an Italian, and an American. This is universal culture. I’m not crazy about New York, but I love the theatre. This, I hope, makes it plain.

N.C. will be ready to welcome me with trumpets if my plays are acted on Broadway— above all, if they make money, money. You know that is quite true. Look Around you in Asheville. Are the most prominent people there the finest— by education, personality, culture, and general character. By no means. After all, haven’t you all worshipped the long bankroll too much. Grove is a great man because he sells more pills than anyone else; Mrs. Vanderbilt is a great woman because of Biltmore house and twenty millions.

Be honest: You know I have never been a snob. And it is because I respect my family so much, knowing you were as good as any, to see you bend a supple knee at any time to the Asheville Goulds and Astors. If any of them patronize me— telling you I am a “bright boy”— for God’s sake, don’t look grateful or humble. Tell them I am pleased to hear of their interest and that I should be glad to give them a few moments of my time when they’re in New York. The last is meant humorously— none the less seriously...”⁷

Tom

⁷ John Skally Terry, ed., *Thomas Wolfe’s Letters to His Mother Julia Elizabeth Wolfe* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 75-77.

Teacher’s Resource: The History of Jim Crow

It is difficult to give a concrete date of the enactment of the Jim Crow laws in the United States. This is because several states issued Jim Crow laws at different times throughout the years following Reconstruction. Who exactly was Jim Crow? According to Dr. David Pilgrim, Professor of Sociology at Ferris State University, a white man by the name of Thomas “Daddy” Rice stumbled upon a black man singing a song about Jim Crow at a New York theater in the 1820s. At the time Rice was a struggling entertainer and took this song and used it for his own benefit. In 1828 he began to appear on stage as “a highly stereotypical black character” and he would proceed to do a “Jim Crow song-and-dance routine.” Rice’s routine became highly popular throughout the U.S., and from the 1820s onward “Jim Crow” gradually evolved into a common reference for all blacks. Following the end of Reconstruction in 1877, Jim Crow once again was applied to blacks, but this time it came to label the laws which several states enforced upon African Americans. These discriminatory Jim Crow rules and regulations sadly persisted until the mid 1960s.⁸

Richard Wormser, author of *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, maintains that Jim Crow customs first began in the North, but that as time progressed the laws “manifested their most virulent form in the south...where institutionalized segregation and disenfranchisement by law, custom, and violence” became the common place.⁹ The 1896 Supreme Court case Plessy vs. Ferguson upheld the “separate but equal” principle, and this doctrine was not overturned until 1954 with the Brown vs. Board of Education case in Topeka, Kansas. For the 58 years between these two cases several states enforced Jim Crow laws using the Supreme Court ruling as their justification and backing.

Teacher’s Resource: The Progressive Movement

(1889 to 1920)

A broad-based campaign for economic, political, and social reforms. The movement addressed the power of big business and advocated aid for farmers and protection for consumers. The reforms included passage of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Amendments, the Pure Food and Drug Act, the Meat Inspection Act, and the Sherman and Clayton Anti-Trust Acts. Progressives supported initiative, recall, referendum, and direct primary laws. Also during this time, attacks were made on child labor, sweatshops, slum conditions, and women working excessive hours. Leading figures in the Progressive Era included the [muckrakers](#), [Theodore Roosevelt](#), [Woodrow Wilson](#), [Robert La Follette](#), [Eugene V. Debs](#), [John Peter Altgeld](#), Hiram Johnson, [William James](#), [John Dewey](#), and [George Norris](#).¹⁰

⁸ David Pilgrim, “Who was Jim Crow?,” Museum of Racist Memorabilia: Ferris State University, <http://www.ferris.edu/JIMCROW/who.htm> (accessed Nov. 12, 2009).

⁹ Richard Wormser, *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), xii.

¹⁰ See http://0-www.credoreference.com.wncln.wncln.org/entry/hmgahff/progressive_movement. Accessed July 12, 2011.

Timeline: The "Progressive Era"

- 1901 Vice President Theodore Roosevelt (Rep) assumes presidency following assassination of McKinley
- 1902 Federal government sues the Northern Security Company for anti-trust violations; first major "trust-busting" case
- 1903 First power-driven airplane flown by Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, NC
- 1905 Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) founded
- 1906 Upton Sinclair's novel, The Jungle, published
- 1906 Regulatory laws enacted by federal government: Hepburn Act (strengthening Interstate Commerce Commission); Pure Food and Drug Act; Meat Inspection Act
- 1908 Ford Motor Company manufactures first Model T car
- 1908 William Howard Taft (Rep) elected president; defeats William Jennings Bryan (Dem) in Bryan's third run for the presidency
- 1910 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded
- 1912 *Titanic* sinks
- 1912 Children's Bureau established by federal government
- 1912 Presidential election: Woodrow Wilson (D) wins with 42 percent of vote, defeating President William Howard Taft, who polled only 23 percent; Theodore Roosevelt returns from retirement, splits Republican party by forming Progressive (Bull Moose) party, & finishes second (27 percent of vote); Socialist Eugene V. Debs finishes strong fourth with 900,000 votes (6 percent; best showing ever for Socialist candidate)
- 1913 Ford Motor Co. installs first moving assembly line
- 1913 Federal Reserve Act restructures US banking & currency
- 1913 Income tax established by 16th Amendment
- 1914 World War I begins in Europe
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1914 Panama Canal is completed¹¹

¹¹ See <http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/course/79-204/Timeline.html#Prog%20Era>. Accessed July 12, 2011.