



“A City Within A City”: Little Rock’s West Ninth Street

Introduction

The West Ninth Street business district served Little Rock’s black community for over 100 years. This “city within a city” provided services the black community did not have access to because of segregation laws. This lesson plan explores Little Rock’s black business community.

Background Information

In the early nineteenth century, Little Rock’s West Ninth Street emerged as an important place in the African American community, when slaves began worshipping independently of their white masters at Tenth and Spring Streets. With the Union Army’s occupation of Little Rock, slavery effectively ended in the city in September 1863. As a result, African Americans across the region flocked to the capital for protection, freedom, and the hope of a better life.

The city’s African American population expanded rapidly in the years following the Civil War. With the end of slavery, Arkansas’s black population sought the new opportunities available in the state’s capital. The living conditions in a city like Little Rock contrasted starkly with conditions in rural regions of Arkansas—the city offered a diverse population and job opportunities in lumber mills, railroads, and businesses. The abundance of working class and skilled labor jobs for African Americans during the late nineteenth century created the right conditions for black business development.

continue on page 2



Photograph of J.E. Henderson in his jewelry store located on West Ninth Street in Little Rock, Arkansas. This photograph was featured in *The Blue Book of Little Rock and Argenta Arkansas* written by E.M. Woods and published in 1907. (Courtesy of the Richard C. Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock, Arkansas.)

Resources

Clinton Cox. *African American Healers*. New York: John Wiley, 2000. (JUV)

Berna J. Love. *End of the Line: A History of Little Rock’s West Ninth Street*. Little Rock: Center for Arkansas Studies, 2003.

Thomas J. Ward, Jr. *Black Physicians in the Jim Crow South*. Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2003.

Elias McSails Woods. *Blue Book of Little Rock and Argenta, Arkansas*. Little Rock, AR: Central Printing Co., 1907.

from page 1

While African Americans began to take advantage of their newly won constitutional rights, the legalizing of Jim Crow segregation practices forced African Americans to create businesses and cooperative networks to make a living and meet the needs of their under-served black community.

By 1898 the number of black-owned establishments in Little Rock reached 142. Of that total 24 of those black-owned businesses were located along West Ninth Street. The businesses included seven grocery stores, four restaurants, two confectioners, a jeweler, seven barbers, two newspapers, two physicians, and a drug store. The types of black businesses in Little Rock mirrored businesses found in the black neighborhoods in other Southern cities like Nashville, Charleston, Atlanta, and Memphis.

Under the specter of Jim Crow, the West Ninth Street business district grew, attracted rural black Arkansans, and became a model for the state's other black communities. By 1910 the number of black-owned or black-operated establishments on West Ninth Street reached 38. Fifteen years later in 1925, West Ninth Street boasted 63 black businesses. In 1935, during the Great Depression, the total fell to 53 but rebounded to 55 by 1940. As the Great Depression spread from New York to California and the world, Arkansas's African Americans and Little Rock's black businesses felt the effects of the worldwide depression. Many West Ninth Street businesses struggled to survive while others closed.

For 11 years, from 1929 to 1941, bread lines grew as unemployment rates rose to record highs. It took World War II and the American war machine to reopen factories and breathe life back into the country's economy. World War II helped revitalize the West Ninth Street district in the 1940s and into the late 1950s.

In 1940 black-owned businesses on Ninth Street numbered 55, with 74 in 1951 and 102 by 1959. A 1946 survey of blacks in Little Rock reported "most numerous enterprises are found in restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and small neighborhood grocery stores."

From the 1950s into the 1980s, many forces contributed to the decline and demise of Little Rock's West Ninth Street business district. First, African Americans were mobile, locally and nationally. Locally, blacks were moving to new neighborhoods, and nationally blacks were moving out of the South to the North. Second, the low property values of many black businesses and homes made them a target of buy-outs from federally-sponsored Urban Renewal programs and the I-630 expressway. Finally, as some of the economic and social walls of segregation broke down, integration put black businesses in direct competition with white businesses. Many black businesses, dependent upon the wall of segregation and focused on small retail trade, were unable to compete with larger white-owned and financed businesses. Consequently, many black-owned businesses in the nation and Little Rock closed. According to the Arkansas Gazette in 1983, only five businesses remained on the once bustling West Ninth Street business corridor—two barber shops, a restaurant, a shoeshine parlor and a club named the Diplomat.

Related Activities

Grades K-4

Objective: Define savings and entrepreneur.

From the 1890s to the 1950s, black business enterprises in Arkansas included pharmacies, grocery stores, restaurants, and barber and beauty shops. These types of businesses operated within Little Rock's West Ninth Street Business District. As an entrepreneurial undertaking requiring very little capital, black barber and beauty parlors consistently experienced high levels of economic success.

Introduce the concept of savings and entrepreneurship to your class using *Uncle Jed's Barbershop* by Margaree King Mitchell. Before reading the book to the class, explain that Sarah Jean's Uncle Jed had a dream of owning a barbershop, so he saved money to open a shop. Ask your students to help you define "saving" and give you examples of how they saved money or other items. After reading the story, ask the students the following questions to check for understanding.

- What was Uncle Jed's dream?
- What service did he provide?
- How did he plan to achieve his dream?
- What setbacks did Uncle Jed face?
- What did Uncle Jed buy with his savings?

PDSC.1.9. Explores the kinds of work that people do and how that work benefits their family and community.

PDC.1.10. Identifies and defines ways of spending and saving money.

Grades 5-8

Objectives: Define mass and volume; conduct a scientific investigation; measure the mass and volume of solids and liquids; and understand the skills necessary to become a pharmacist.

Materials: balance or a scale, small beaker, 25 ml graduated cylinder, 10 ml graduated cylinder, nine items to be measured (harmless liquids, harmless powders, and assorted objects), metric ruler, 20 ml of water, and data sheets (page 7).

Teacher Prep: Assign the readings and discussion questions on pages 5 and 6 to provide students with background information. Label each item to be measured with an identification number. Be sure that all items to be measured are completely harmless, such as talcum powder, powdered drink mix, and colored water.

In the era of Jim Crow, limited access to professional health care and other services for blacks created a strong demand for trained black professionals. West Ninth Street was home to several black-owned drug stores all within a short distance from the city's black physicians, including Children's Drug Store, Foster's Drug Store, Gem Pharmacy, Floyd Drug Company, and DeLuxe Pharmacy.

The accurate measurement of liquids and powders is essential to the pharmacist for concocting medicines and dispensing prescriptions. Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 and provide each group with various objects and harmless powders and liquids to measure. Ask the students to first estimate how much each item weighs or how much volume it occupies and to write their guesses on their data sheets. After they have completed their guesswork, ask the students to measure the items to determine its accurate weight or volume using scales and graduates and to record these amounts in the second column of their data sheets.

Mass of liquids/powder: Weigh the graduated cylinder, then add the liquid or powder to the cylinder. Subtract the weight of the cylinder from this value.

Volume of liquids/powder: Pour the liquid into the graduated cylinder and record the volume.

Mass of objects: Weigh the objects using a balance or a scale.

Volume of objects: For regular shaped objects (like cubes), measure the Length x Width x Height =cm³; For irregular shaped objects, place water in a container and record the volume of the water. Then place the object in the water and record the change in volume. This change is the volume of the solid.

Assess the differences between the estimates and accurate measurements. Consider asking the following discussion question: Why would it be necessary to have a means of measuring liquids and powders in a pharmacy?

PS.3.4. Uses appropriate equipment, tools, techniques, technology, and mathematics in scientific investigation.

NS.1.6.1. Verifies accuracy of observations.

Answer Key

Answers to page 6 discussion questions.

1. During Jim Crow Little Rock was segregated and even offered two business districts: one for white customers and another for black customers. Jim Crow influenced the development of West Ninth Street because Jim Crow placed limitations on the black community by denying members of the community access to certain services.
2. Examples might include grocery stores, restaurants, bakeries, newspapers, doctor's offices, drug stores (pharmacies), and barber shops.
3. The migration of African Americans locally and nationally, Urban Renewal programs, and integration may have all influenced the demise of the West Ninth Street business district.
4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary.

Grades 9-12

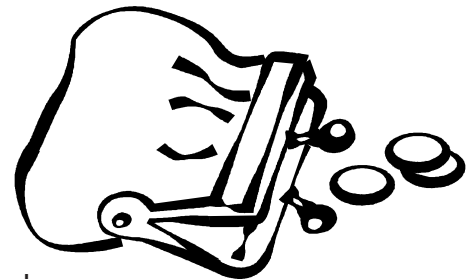
Objective: Develop ideas and write business plans for a hypothetical small business.

In 1940 black-owned businesses on Ninth Street numbered 55, with 74 in 1951 and 102 by 1959. A 1946 survey of blacks in Little Rock reported "most numerous enterprises are found in restaurants, beauty shops, barber shops and small neighborhood grocery stores." Because the majority of the businesses located on Little Rock's West Ninth Street were locally-owned and operated small businesses, allow your students to design a small business and create a business plan for their store.

Students may work in pairs or small groups to brainstorm on ideas for a small business. After choosing one idea they will develop a business plan. The worksheet on page 8 can help guide them through the process. When students have completed their business plans, allow groups to present their plans to the class for feedback.

PDC.1.4. Analyzes the roles of choice and opportunity cost in decision making.

PDC.1.2. Explores and explains how changes affect economic activity.



West Ninth Street Businesses

In the early twentieth century, an African American business district thrived in Little Rock along West Ninth Street. The successful businesses and entrepreneurs in this area influenced African American culture and their communities.

The West Ninth Street Corridor was “a city within a city” providing services that the black community did not have access to because of Jim Crow practices. These Jim Crow practices encouraged racial segregation and prevented black people from doing things that white people could do. Later these practices were transformed into laws. The legalizing of Jim Crow laws forced African Americans to find ways to make a living and meet the needs of their community.

The West Ninth Street Business District grew! By 1898 the number of black-owned establishments in Little Rock totaled 142, which included grocery

stores, restaurants, meat markets, jewelers, barbers shops, doctors’ offices, and pharmacies.

However, West Ninth Street had two sides. By day, the atmosphere was calm and professional, but once the sun went down, the street took on another life. Nightlife on West Ninth Street centered around venues, or nightclubs, such as the Gem Theater, the Dreamland Ballroom, and Flamingo Club. Little Rock’s West Ninth Street was even a hot stop on the “chitlin’ circuit,” which was a string of small black clubs in the south, where big name performers like Ella Fitzgerald, Louis Armstrong, and Count Bassie performed.

Black businesses on West Ninth Street began to suffer in the 1960s when several factors including integration, Urban Renewal, and the construction of Interstate 630 caused the decline of the area.

Black-Owned Pharmacies

Because of Jim Crow segregation, African Americans had limited access to professional health care. This limited access created a strong demand for trained black professionals in southern cities and communities. Little Rock’s West Ninth Street attracted its share of health care professionals.

In 1895, Frank B. Coffin became the first black druggist trained in pharmacology to practice in Little Rock. Coffin, along with a popular black undertaker George E. Jones, started the city’s first full-service, black-owned drugstore at West Ninth and Gaines Streets. By 1923, Coffin gained total ownership of the drugstore and renamed his store “Children’s Drug Store” with the catchy tagline “Follow the Children to Children’s Drug Store.”

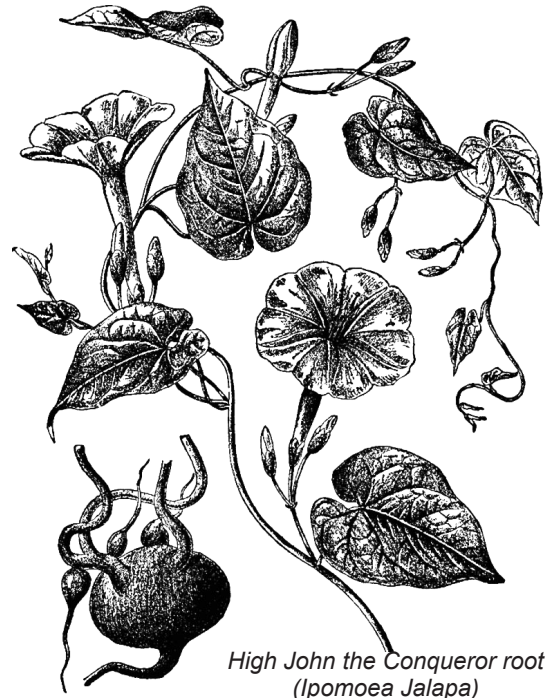
By 1930, West Ninth Street was home to several black-owned drug stores, including Children’s Drug Store, Foster’s Drug Store, Gem Pharmacy, Floyd Drug Company, and DeLuxe Pharmacy.



The local drug stores also served other functions besides dispensing medicines; the stores also became dispensers of sweets like ice cream and syrupy soda treats. For example, a Gem Pharmacy advertisement read “We Carry a Complete line of Stationery and School Supplies. We serve the best lunch, chocolate candies and ice cream in the city.” Because segregation banned blacks from enjoying the soda fountains and lunch counters in white drug stores, black drug stores quickly became a social and economic center of the black community.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Little Rock during the Jim Crow segregation. How did the Jim Crow laws influence the development of Little Rock's West Ninth Street?
2. What types of businesses operated on West Ninth Street?
3. What factors may have led to the demise of Little Rock's black business district?
4. *Thinking Critically:* What types of skills do you think would be necessary in order to become a successful entrepreneur?
5. *Thinking Critically:* In what ways do the locations of businesses affect your daily life?



did you
know...

Drug stores, especially in the South, sold commercial versions of home and folk remedies, like “John the Conqueror” (also known as “High John the Conqueror” and “Little John the Conqueror”). High John the Conqueror root grew wild in the southeastern part of the United States and became a popular remedy for coughs, sore throats, upset stomachs, and other ailments. It is also known as a good-luck charm.

Data Sheet Determining Mass and Volume

Directions: Write the identification number for each item. With your group estimate the mass and volume of each item, then determine the accurate mass and volume of each item. Record your findings on the data sheet.

Identification Number	Estimated Mass	Estimated Volume	Exact Mass	Exact Volume

How to Find the Mass and Volume

Mass of liquids or powders:

Weigh the graduated cylinder, then add the liquid or powder to the cylinder. Subtract the weight of the cylinder from this value.

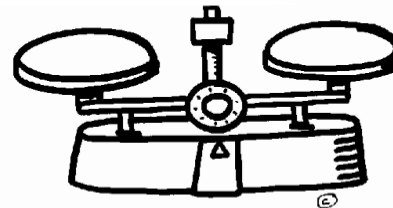


Volume of liquids or powders:

Pour the liquid into the graduated cylinder and record the volume.

Mass of objects:

Weigh the objects using a balance or a scale.



Volume of objects:

For regular shaped objects (like cubes), measure the Length x Width x Height = cm^3 ;
For irregular shaped objects, place water in a container and record the volume of the water. Then place the object in the water and record the change in volume. This change is the volume of the solid.

Writing A Business Plan

Developing your business plan is your road map to success in the business world. A business plan is a written document that outlines measures and actions to define where you want to go and how you will get there.

What is your business idea? _____

(write it here)

Next, follow the outline below to develop your business plan.

Front Cover: It should include the name of the business, address, and owner(s).

Table of Contents

Business Description/Summary: Describe the product or service offered, its location, and target market.

Start-Up Tasks and Timelines: Identify the time frame of necessary tasks; this should include acquiring or making the product, testing the product, marketing the product to potential customers or clients, etc.

The Competition: Who else is selling the same product or service?

Operating procedures: How do you plan to run your business daily?

Personnel: List all employees and their job descriptions.

Financial Data: Describe your loan agreement (if any); list of needed equipment and supplies; include an analysis of how long it will take for you to start making money based on the money that you make minus what you owe.

Income and cash flow projections: How much profit will you make and how much will you pay out over time?

Supplies: What supplies will you need to run your business? For example, technology, paper, etc.