

Colored Conventions Project Teaching Guide for K-12
EXHIBIT:
Black Women’s Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s

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EXHIBIT:

[*Black Women’s Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s*](#), curated by Samantha de Vera

A. RESOURCES

Keyword Definitions (minimum 2 to 5)

Black Boarding Houses---Black-run residences where conventions delegates would lodge, eat, discuss, and network with each other.

Black Press---daily, weekly, monthly newspapers and magazines published by and for Black people.

Friendship Albums---books that allowed friends if the owner to leave messages, poems, or artwork that expressed their esteem for the owner. These books were shared primarily among white women, however, they had a special significance among the circle of elite African-American women of Philadelphia who frequently included ideas about abolition and women’s equality alongside moral platitudes.

Reading Rooms---Gathering places where Black people would read and discuss literature, politics, and other cultural topics. They functioned to solidify Black intellectual communities and encourage improvement of individual minds and character on behalf of racial uplift. Tickets were sometimes required for attendance.

Milliner---A designer or manufacturer of hats.

People (minimum 2 to 5)

Grace Bustill Douglass---A daughter of Philadelphia’s Black elite who was an entrepreneur and activist. She ran a successful millinery, passing on her skills to apprentices and her children.

Serena Gardiner---Ran a highly regarded “genteel private” boarding house in Philadelphia.

Elizabeth and Jacob Gilmore---This couple ran a bakery and were an important node in the social network consisting of Black intellectuals and Colored Conventions delegates.

Amelia Shad---A widow who supported herself by taking in lodgers. Her boarding house is evidence of the networks of mutual benefit among older Black people at this time, as people like Charles Perret depended on houses like Shad’s for survival.

Places (minimum 2 to 5)

Mother Bethel AME Church---Site of the first Colored Convention, located in Philadelphia, PA.

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Union Hotel---Tavern owned by Rebecca and Charles Short. Like the Gilmores' bakery, the Union Hotel was a part of Philadelphia's Black intellectual community, as it served as a gathering place for Colored Conventions delegates and sold tickets to Whipper's Reading Room.

Washington Square West, Philadelphia, PA---neighborhood where most of the Colored Conventions of the 1830s were held; a center of Black community, with numerous gathering places, boarding houses, and Black-run businesses.

Whipper's Reading Room---A literary society ran by William Whipper. A place for Blacks to gather to learn and discuss literature, art, politics, and other elements of culture.

Predominant Themes (minimum 2 to 5)

Black Women's Economic Power---This exhibit profiles the ways that Black women generated their own wealth through labor, craft, and business ownership. Through enterprises like dress manufacturers and bakeries, women were able to claim some degree of independence and influence during the 1830s despite discrimination in other spheres of life, including participation in the Colored Conventions.

Self-improvement and Intellectual Community---Reading societies like the one headquartered at Whipper's Reading Room were widespread in Black communities during the nineteenth century. These societies were formally dedicated to facilitating self-improvement, or the intellectual and moral refinement of individuals through literature and discussion. Through the improvement of individuals, the whole race could eventually be elevated. Reading societies also functioned as intellectual communities and activist networks.

Skilled Trades---Numerous figures in this exhibit possessed exemplary artistic skill. From clothing design to baking and painting, Black artists achieved commercial success in the 1830s through their craft.

Black Middle Class---This exhibit discusses the practices and values of middle-class African Americans. Hard work, business ownership, and intellectual refinement were all important elements of the morality system of this class of Black people in the northern U.S. in the years before the Civil War.

Points of Interactivity

Exhibit Page Name + Link	Data Visualization Name	Visualization Type
Interactive Map of the Community	African American Institutions in the 1830s	Interactive map
Traveling Delegates	Circuits of Delegates: Origins and Convention Destination	Interactive map
Interactive Visualization: Places and Women Participants	Women in the Conventions	Map

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Interactive Visualization: Places and Women Participants	Boarders and their Attendance at Philadelphia Conventions Held in the 1830s	Interactive graph
Interactive Visualization: Places and Women Participants	Hall and Churches where Philadelphia Conventions Were Held	Interactive map
Interactive Visualization: Places and Women Participants	Occupations Dominated by Women	Interactive graph

Further Reading

[African American Literary Societies \(Case Western Reserve University\)](#)

[Grace Bustill Douglass \(African American Registry\)](#)

[Whipper's Reading Room \(African American Library History\)](#)

[LCP Album Project \(The Library Company\)](#)

B. METHODS

To successfully teach these exhibits we strongly encourage teachers to explicitly teach the following methods used to tell more complete stories of African American, African Diaspora, and American history:

Historiography

1. What is [historiography](#)?

Historiography can be understood as the history of history. A historiographical piece or essay discusses how history has been written over time and tracks the debates historians grappled with in a certain field.

(Included is a link to video by Study.com; the first two [2] minutes of the video are free.)

2. How can students practice historiography as they study this exhibit?
3. How does historiography get written? Who gets to write history?

***Suggested Exercise:** Have students discuss the historiographical contributions of each section of the exhibit.*

Primary Documents

1. What are [primary documents](#)?
2. How do we [research and analyze](#) primary documents?
3. Is there a [tool](#) that we can use to help us think about primary documents?
4. What is the proper MLA [citation](#) practice for primary documents?

Suggested Exercise: Students must locate, review and use the following primary documents:

- [E.G Clay's Political Cartoon](#)
- [Boarding House Advertisements](#)

Data Visualization

1. What is data visualization?

The act of showing data (information) using images such as pictures, maps, graphs, drawings. This [infographic](#) is a good example. (Source: Simon Rogers. *The Guardian* newspaper, International Edition. Friday, March 7th, 2014)

2. What does digital data visualization allow you to see and analyze differently than data presented in textbooks?

Suggested Exercise: Have students choose one data visualization in the exhibit and narrate the story it tells, or teachers may encourage students to create their own visualizations based on their own research or the data provided.

Attribution and Citation

1. Why is it important to cite sources?

2. What information does citation communicate?

Suggested Exercise: Students will learn to accurately and appropriately cite this exhibit and the works referenced within, including:

- Primary documents within the exhibit (eg. [Advertisement and review](#) of Serena Gardiner's boarding house)
- [Secondary documents](#) within the exhibit (eg. Text in exhibit that discusses the work of Black dressmakers and milliners as a means of achieving independence.)

C. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the argument or main idea of the exhibit?

The main idea of [Black Women's Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s](#) is that some African American women were economically independent as early as the 1830s. The wealth they gained through their labor, craft, and business ownership made them influential community members even if they could not participate in many activities of Black public life, including the Colored Conventions. This exhibit also details the practices and values of the Black middle class, providing a cultural picture of literary societies, fine clothes, and elevated culinary tastes.

2. Who are the subjects of the exhibit?

Businesswomen such as Serina Gardiner, Grace Bustill Douglass, Amelia Shad, and Elizabeth Gilmore.

3. What are the topics of the exhibit?

Women's labor and business ownership, Black middle-class culture, self-improvement, social networks

4. What is the timeline of the exhibit?

The exhibit focuses on the 1830s decade, but extends to the “later generation” of intellectuals and activists who would experience the Civil War.

5. What are the major events of the exhibit?

The first Colored Convention in 1830, the four subsequent conventions that took place in Philadelphia during the 1830s

6. Where do these major events take place?

These events take place in Philadelphia, PA, particularly in the locations clustered in the Washington Square West Neighborhood.

7. What are other places/things of significance discussed in this exhibit?

Elizabeth's Gilmore's bakery, Serina Gardiner's boarding house, upward mobility

D. QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

8. Now that you have learned more about these events, why does this exhibit matter?

This exhibit demonstrates that Black women made economic gains much earlier than is popularly supposed. The exhibit takes a close look at how African Americans achieved upward mobility in the early nineteenth century and the cultural practices and values they engaged once they entered the middle class.

9. Why do these events matter?

These events matter because they show that, despite extreme discrimination, Black people gained independence and wealth decades before the Civil War. The success that these women earned in industry, art, and literature emphasizes the injustice of the attacks on Black wealth and community that occurred during this era. While racist narratives blame African Americans for poverty, the events of this exhibit make clear that African Americans made material progress before, and in spite of, the hatred directed at them by white supremacy.

E. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The prompts below in purple are from the Exhibit, [*Black Women's Economic Power: Visualizing Domestic Spaces in the 1830s*](#).

1. How does this exhibit help fill gaps in the following?
 - Black women's history
 - Black women's labor and entrepreneurship
 - Black women's political participation and activism
 - The Colored Conventions Movement
2. How does this exhibit create a richer context for the following?
 - The Black Press
 - The Black Middle Class
 - Black Boarding Houses and Intellectual Production
3. How does this exhibit address or intervene in the historiography of the following themes?
 - Women's participation in the Colored Conventions movement
 - Black women's economic independence
 - Domestic spaces as sites of activism and uplift

F. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What stood out for you the most in reviewing and studying this exhibit?
2. What did you find most exciting about what you learned from this exhibit?
3. Why does this exhibit matter?
4. How does this exhibit challenge notions about Black women's economic and social identities during the 19th Century?

G. STANDARDS

Standards are taken from the [Common Core State Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies](#) and [Writing](#) in grades 11 and 12. Note: *Teachers should use these standards as a guide and align their lessons with the specific standards for their individual state.*

Key Ideas and Details:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

Craft and Structure:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.5

Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.