HISTORICAL INQUIRY QUESTION

In what ways did the entertainment industry impact African Americans in Los Angeles during the early 1900s?

LOST LA EPISODE

Dream Factory
In what ways did the entertainment industry impact African Americans in Los Angeles during the early 1900s?

Author of Lesson
Mercedes Robbins-Butler
Johnnie L. Cochran Middle School
mercedes.robbins@lasud.net

Content Standards
8.8: Students analyze the divergent paths of the American people in the West from 1800 to the mid-1800s and the challenges they faced.
   2. Describe the purpose, challenges and economic incentives associated with westward expansion, including the concept of Manifest Destiny (e.g., the Lewis and Clark expedition, accounts of the removal of Indians, the Cherokees’ “Trail of Tears,” settlement of the Great Plains) and the territorial acquisitions that spanned numerous decades.

11.5: Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological and cultural developments of the 1920s.
   6. Trace the growth and effects of radio and movies and their role in the worldwide diffusion of popular culture.
   7. Discuss the rise of mass production techniques, the growth of cities, the impact of new technologies (e.g., the automobile, electricity) and the resulting prosperity and effect on the American landscape.

CCSS Standards
Reading (8th grade)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY IN HISTORY.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY IN HISTORY.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY IN HISTORY.RH.6-8.7: Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

Writing (8th grade)
CCSS.ELA-WRITING IN HISTORY. WHST.6-8.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Speaking and Listening (8th grade)
CCSS.ELA-SPEAKING AND LISTENING.SL.8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

Reading (11th grade)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.READING IN HISTORY. 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.READING IN HISTORY.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.READING IN HISTORY.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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.READING IN HISTORY.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.

Writing (11th grade)
CCSS.ELA-WRITING IN HISTORY.WHST.11-12.2
Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments or technical processes.

CCSS.ELA-WRITING IN HISTORY.WHST.11-12.4: Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Speaking and Listening (11th grade)
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on
grades 11-12 topics, texts and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Lost LA Episode
“Dream Factory,” specifically the segment on Central Casting Agency. The primary focus being on clips associated with the entertainment industry and the impact of African Americans on those industries and vice-versa. This lesson can also be tied to the topics of Westward Expansion and rapid population growth of cities, particularly Los Angeles. Students will primarily question the African American relationship with the entertainment industry during the early 1900s.

Dream Factory. (Start at minute 13:00 and play until the end.)

Overview of Lesson
Students will explore various ways the entertainment industry in Los Angeles impacted African Americans. Students will evaluate multiple primary and secondary source documents in order to understand why African Americans looked at the entertainment industry as an opportunity for economic and social status. Students will also view and analyze video clips that support the information presented in the written documents. Finally, students will be assessed by their ability to write a letter from the perspective of an African American migrant hearing of job opportunities in Los Angeles.

Sources

Procedures
Objective: The primary goal of this lesson is for students to develop a better understanding of how the entertainment industry impacted the African American community in Los Angeles.
Angeles. Through analyzing portions of “Dream Factory,” and the sources in this lesson, students will get the opportunity to analyze the complexities facing African Americans who were able to leverage the industry for employment by acting in roles that were often stereotypical and racist. Ultimately, this lesson will help students better understand the experiences of African Americans working in the entertainment industries and how the industry impacted their lives.

1. **First**, the teacher helps students become familiar with the content of the lesson by accessing prior knowledge. The teacher asks students to consider the following question: **When you think of African American actresses and actors, who comes to mind? What are some of your favorite movie characters that have been played by African American actors?** The teacher asks students to engage in a **Pair Share** for 3-5 minutes.

2. Next the teacher asks 3-5 students to share their answers and charts student responses.

3. The teacher then explains to students that the experiences of African American actors in Hollywood was much different in the early 1900s than it is today. In order to give students a sense of what it was like, the teacher will show the Lost LA episode “**Dream Factory**.” It is recommended that the teacher start the episode at 13:00. It is also recommended that the teacher define a key term for students before showing the video:
   a. **Central Casting Bureau.** Was established in 1925 as a way to cast “extras” in Hollywood films. An “extra” is an actor who acts in the background of a scene.
   b. Please note that the video focuses mostly on the experiences of Chinese-Americans in Central Casting but there are also portions of the video that feature the experiences of African Americans.

4. Once students watch “Dream Factory,” the teacher asks them to work in pairs or in small groups. In these collaborate groups, students will engage in a discussion using the **3-2-1 strategy (Handout 1)**. Each students should:
   a. Share 3 new things they learned about the movie industry and race
   b. Share 2 facts they found interesting about the topic
   c. Share 1 question they still have about the topic

5. As students discuss they also fill out the **3-2-1 worksheet (Handout 1)**. Please note that students should keep the 3-2-1 worksheet in order to complete the **Assessment**.

6. **Second**, the teacher transitions the class to the analysis of the sources. The teacher presents the historical inquiry question for students: **In what ways did the entertainment industry impact African Americans in Los Angeles during the early 1900s?**
7. At this point, the teacher can ask students to stay in the groups they were in during the 3-2-1 discussion, or they can form new groups.

8. The teacher passes out the Document Analysis Organizer (Handout 2) to students and models how to use it with Source A.
   a. The teacher points out the author and year. Note that Zelda Roland is a historian of film and movies. Ask students if this is a primary or secondary source. The fact that the article was written in 2017 should be the big hint. Consider engaging students in the differences between secondary and primary sources and how they reflect certain biases and points of view.
   b. Next, the teacher reads Source A with students. The teacher summarizes the main idea and points out that Roland is making a claim about the experiences of African Americans who worked as extras. In the “Main Idea/Argument” column, the teacher records how Source A helps us answer the historical inquiry question, Roland states that African Americans were not considered for lead roles but were instead cast as “extras.”
   c. Finally, the teacher pulls a quote from Source A and records it in the final column.

9. After the teacher checks for understanding, the students work in groups to analyze Sources B-F. The teacher circulates the room and continually reminds students that each source is evidence for the historical inquiry question. Please note that Source C requires interpretation by students. The lobby card does not make an argument, but the image of African American extras portrayed as “savages” is compelling evidence.

10. Finally, have students review the Historical Perspectives Writing Activity (Handout 3). Clarify the assignment for them if needed.

11. The teacher asks students to engage in a discussion related to Step 1 on Handout 3. This is important as you want students to begin to understand the complexities of the African American experience of being an aspiring actress/actor during the early 1900s.

12. Once students have discussed the complexities and determined their fictional identity and whom they are writing to, they will review the evidence from the sources.

13. The teacher gives students time to write a rough draft of their letter.

14. Please note that this letter should be written from the perspective of an African American working in the entertainment industry.

Assessment
Historical Perspectives Writing Activity (Handout 3).
Bibliography

• KCET site video: Dream Factory, https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/episodes/dream-factory
How Central Casting Found “Racial types” for classical Hollywood Films,
Zelda Roland, “Lost LA”, November 7, 2017

“Now, practically everyone within a radius of ten miles of Hollywood has registered his photograph, at one time or another, for “Extra” work in the films," wrote Anita Loos in 1931. “Some as a means of making a living, some to pick up a bit of spending money, some (such as high school boys and girls) in a spirit of fun, some (such as pampered society folk) out of boredom, and some because of a physical peculiarity which might make them valuable as ‘types.”

While Loos might be talking about types such as “giants, dwarfs, twins, triplets...” there is one type she overlooks: racial types, who were frequently called upon by Central Casting to fill roles in Hollywood’s backgrounds.

Hollywood studios founded the Central Casting Bureau in 1925 as a way to regularize the casting of extras in Hollywood. Extras – largely unseen background actors, by definition exiled from close-ups, speaking parts, or screen credit – had become an unwieldy population in Los Angeles. Many aspiring actors flocked to California with hopes of walking onto the silver screen, but studio heads and producers quickly realized that far too many contenders were vying to occupy the space behind the stars.

To hire extras, studios and productions would place requests for extras with Central Casting to find the types needed on set. Casting agents at Central would then search for the right fit from a roster of available extras, who were catalogued by type, physical features, and skills. (Some examples: “Blonde”; “Beautiful”; “Jewish”; “Latin”; “Nurses”; “Swimmers”; “Toothless.”) A studio could make a call for any kind of person or group of people, including calls “specifically for “Orientals, Negroes, or other ‘racials.’”

**DEFINITIONS**

- **pampered**: having been spoiled
- **peculiarity**: odd or unusual
- **Central Casting Bureau**: established in 1925 as a way to cast “extras” in Hollywood films
- **exile**: expel or banish
- **unwieldy**: difficult because of size, shape or weight
- **vying**: to compete with another in order to achieve similar goals.
While there were a few African Americans who had contracts with motion picture studios, there were many more who functioned as extras. In 1926, the leading motion picture studios formed the Central Casting Corporation of Hollywood. Central Casting employed several African Americans who were responsible for recruiting extras from the community. In the mid-1930s, extras were paid an average of $7.50 per day, while the scale for actors under studio contracts ranged from $25.00 per day to $500.00 per week.
SOURCE C

Lobby Card for “Tarzan finds a Son!”, 1939

Note: Lobby Cards were postcards that were used to promote movies.

https://www.kcet.org/shows/lost-la/how-central-casting-found-racial-types-for-classical-hollywood-films#_ftn12
“Mammy for the Masses: Hattie McDaniel worked as a maid, and played one on the screen”, Hilton Als, The New Yorker, September 18, 2005

Note: Hattie McDaniel was an extra who typically portrayed a house maid in films. She played “Mammy” in the 1939 film “Gone with the Wind” for which she won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress.

Before her death, in 1952, at the age of fifty-nine, McDaniel played a hundred or so saucy maids, slaves, and cooks, ...Born in Wichita, Kansas, on June 10, 1893, McDaniel was the youngest of Henry and Susan McDaniel’s ten children. Henry and Susan had both been slaves. (Henry was the property of John McDaniel, a farmer in Lincoln County, Tennessee.) When the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, in 1863, Henry, who was around twenty-five, joined Company C, the 12th United States Colored Infantry Regiment, at the Elk River....

[McDaniel’s family moves west and ultimately she finds herself on Los Angeles where she meets Charles Butler]

...One of the few blacks working behind the scenes in Hollywood, [Charles] Butler had been a casting director since 1926, when the Central Casting Corporation—which was overseen by the Motion Pictures Producers Association—hired him to scout for black actors in films. Sometimes, for a crowd scene, he would gather blacks from Central Avenue, in South Central, the black area of Los Angeles where McDaniel settled shortly after her arrival. Black actors grumbled about Butler’s close ties to, and seeming identification with, the white power structure that perpetuated the stereotypes they were forced to play. That didn’t stop McDaniel from presenting herself to Butler...

...McDaniel was a type that Butler could cast: as a servant. Her starting salary was seven dollars and fifty cents a day, an income that she supplemented with work as a laundress...By the mid-nineteen-thirties, McDaniel was finally able to support herself solely through her screen work, and it was then that she

DEFINITIONS

Charles Butler: the head “all Negro employment” at Central Casting

perpetuated: continued in order to promote a lie, story or myth

laundress: a woman who is employed to launder clothes or linens

Curriculum Project
delivered what is probably her best remembered punch line: “I would rather make seven hundred dollars a week playing a maid than be one.”

...McDaniel managed to make Mammy a character and a characterization: she was a portrait of a time long past. It was not an image that appealed to everyone. When [Gone with the Wind] was released, Walter White, then the head of the N.A.A.C.P., protested its depiction of black life in the antebellum South. As a black, McDaniel was not allowed to attend the première in Atlanta, though Martin Luther King, Jr., who was then nine years old, did. He was in the all-black chorus that sang in the movie theatre before the lights went down and the curtains went up on Tara.
...Between the 1890s and 1910, large groups of Black Americans migrated to Los Angeles from Texas, Shreveport, New Orleans and Atlanta to escape the racial violence and bigotry of the South with hopes for better access to wealth. Job opportunities were plentiful, including hauling lumber, digging ditches, cleaning toilets, laying brick, scrubbing laundry and shining shoes. Black migrants quickly laid claim to Central Avenue between 8th and 20th Streets in Downtown Los Angeles, and the area became known as "Brick Block"—with clubs, churches black-owned businesses and newspapers like the California Eagle supplying community needs.

**DEFINITIONS**

**bigotry:** intolerance for those different from oneself  
**California Eagle:** was an African-American newspaper in Los Angeles. It ran from 1879-1964.
Note: This photo is of an African American attending a nightclub on Central Avenue. The Central Casting Agency often visited various jazz clubs to find talent for films. Many African-American locals knew that if you wanted to mingle with black Hollywood talent then Central Avenue was the place to go.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inquiry</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Things I Learned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Important Facts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Question I Still Have</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Handout 2: Document Analysis Organizer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Year &amp; Author</th>
<th>Main Idea or Argument</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HANDOUT 3: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

You will use the information gathered from “Dream Factory” and your analysis of the sources to write a letter from the perspective of an African-American who lives in South Central Los Angeles and works in the entertainment industry during the early 1900s.

Step 1
Consider what you learned from both the Lost LA episode of “Dream Factory” and your analysis of the sources. Then begin listing the pros and cons of African Americans working in the entertainment industry.

Step 2
Decide which evidence (quotes, paraphrases, images, etc.) are the most valuable for your letter. You must use evidence from three sources.

Step 3
Create a name and scenario for the person’s perspective you will write from. Give them an age and a hometown they are coming from.

Step 4
Decide who you are writing to. This letter can be written to your fictional family from your hometown, or it can be written to future African American actors as a letter of advice and inspiration.

Step 5
Writing: Each letter should have a salutations/greeting. The letter should be at least three paragraphs in length and must include some evidence from the documents analyzed. Rough draft first by writing your ideas down on paper then taking time to perfect it during the final drafting process.