

LP-MTP-1

SOUTH CAROLINA'S AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: "LIFTING AS WE CLIMB"

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Kelly Mill Middle School, Richland School District 2

Time Periods: ANTE MAJC CRM

Properties: Alston House (Richland)
Mann-Simons Cottage (Richland)
Modjeska Monteith Simkins House
(Richland)

Standard Indicators: 3-5.6; 8-5.1

Literacy Elements: O, P, S, V

Essential Questions

1. What does the motto "Lifting As We Climb" mean?
2. Why did women of color feel it was necessary for them to form an organization to help their gender and their race when few women were politically empowered after the Reconstruction Period?
3. In what ways has the National Association of Colored Women's Club been beneficial?
4. How did the personal involvement of South Carolina's African American women contribute to the social and political success of African Americans after the Reconstruction period?

Historic Content

South Carolina's African American Women: "Lifting As We Climb" tells the story of how South Carolina's African American women used their education, leadership, and possessions as a means to lift their race from social and political inequality as they themselves climbed to higher positions in society. The empowerment of African American women became most evident as early as 1896 when women of color made the decision to merge two prominent women's organizations to create the National Association of Colored Women's Club (NACWC), the oldest African American secular organization designed to combat the social and political issues most important to African American women; issues such as education for women and children, women's suffrage, anti-lynching and Jim Crow laws.

South Carolina native Modjeska Monteith Simkins and the founders and well-known members of the NACWC like Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, Ida Barnett Wells, and Mary Church Terrell, were examples of women of color who desired to "promote interracial understanding so that justice may prevail among all people."

In addition to this objective, they promoted the education of women. With an education, women were in a position to take a stand for women's equality and "secure and enforce civil and political rights for the African American race." Attending college and choosing a career would help women of color advance themselves and their race. Education and leadership allowed women of color to contribute to the cause of equality and "work

for the moral, economic, social, and religious" welfare of all women. Women of color were able to accomplish this goal by offering their possessions to help African American political leaders and their race. For example, during the Antebellum period, Celia Mann, a free African American woman, opened the basement of her home to three prominent black churches for members to come and worship. During Jim Crow segregation, Carolina Alston acquired property to start her own dry goods business, which allowed her to be in a position to serve African American customers. Modjeska Monteith Simkins invited prominent African American political leaders to lodge and carry out political business at her home during the Civil Rights Movement.

South Carolina women of color offered their services by opening their homes and their hearts. They welcomed opportunities to help social and political leaders fight for justice and equality in areas of health-care, education, voting, and ending Jim Crow laws and lynching practices. The "aims and interests [of women of color] are identical with those of all good and aspiring women." Lifting As We Climb symbolizes the dedication of women of color who gave what they had to help their race and themselves.

Sources Needed

Primary Sources (in addition to the historic sites)

National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, Inc.

www.nacwc.org. Primary source selected to understand the objectives of the organization and its influences on women of color in South Carolina.

Simkins, Modjeska, to *The State* (Columbia, SC), 18 May 1981. Modjeska Monteith Simkins Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Primary source selected to capture the voice and political and social perspectives of Simkins.

"Un-American Activity Group Exhibits List Mrs. Simkins." *News and Courier* (Charleston, SC), 23 October 1953. Modjeska Monteith Simkins Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC. Primary sources selected to analyze the life and work of Modjeska Monteith Simkins.

Secondary Sources

Peterson, Carla. "Lifting as We Climb: African American Women and Social Activism: 1880-1920," in Beth Savage, ed., *African American Historic Places*. Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1994. Secondary source used to understand how women's political and social roles developed over the course of the Reconstruction period and how women became political and social leaders.

“Simkins, Modjeska Monteith.” In *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*, ed. Walter Edgar, 866-867. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. Secondary source provided background information about the life and work of Simkins.

South Carolina State Historic Preservation Office. “Alston House, Richland County.” National Register of Historic Places nomination, www.nationalregister.sc.gov/richland/S10817740048/pages/S1081774004801.htm. Secondary source selected to provide an understanding of the significance of the historical site.

_____. “Mann-Simons Cottage, Richland County.” National Register of Historic Places nomination, www.nationalregister.sc.gov/richland/S10817740026/index.htm. Secondary source selected to provide an understanding of the significance of the historical site.

_____. “Modjeska Monteith Simkins House, Richland County.” National Register of Historic Places nomination, www.nationalregister.sc.gov/richland/S10817740102/index.htm. Secondary source selected to provide an understanding of the significance of the historical site.

Lesson Procedures

Day 1

1. Ask students what does the motto “Lifting As We Climb” mean to them.
2. Introduce students to women of color organizations — National Federation of Afro-American Women, National League of Colored Women, and National Association of Colored Women — and compare these organizations to other women’s organizations established during the same time period using a graphic organizer.
3. Discuss the meaning of the colors and symbols chosen by organizations to represent their goals and objectives. Discuss the National Association of Colored Women’s Club colors and symbols.

Day 2

1. Students will read the seven objectives of NACWC and discuss why members of NACWC included each objective.
2. Identify key women of color who were involved in the NACWC and compare their efforts to gain suffrage for women with the efforts of other women’s organizations of the period. Determine how their efforts were alike and how their efforts were different using the organization’s documents and a Venn Diagram to illustrate findings.

Day 3

1. Preview a photograph of Modjeska Montieth Simkins’ historical house and discuss how women of color contributed their possessions to help in the fight for equality.
2. Study other South Carolina historical sites that were instrumental in the fight for equality in areas of health care, education, voting, ending Jim Crow and lynching practices.

Assessment Ideas

1. Written and oral responses to essential questions.
2. Informal and formal lecture quizzes and tests.
3. Create a portfolio of African American Women’s Organizations and their key leaders and prominent members. List the organizations that were set up for and by women, give dates of organizations and goals of each — include primary sources collected (maps, letters, governmental documents, photographs, newspaper clippings).

Lesson Activities

1. Visit the Mann-Simons Cottage and Modjeska Monteith Simkins House. Take notes, pictures, and study the grounds. Imagine the traffic of people coming in and out of the houses. Draft an analytical poem describing your perspective of one of the houses.
2. Visit the Richland County Public Library Local History Room. Research newspaper clippings on the life and work of Simkins to determine the life Simkins lived in South Carolina.
3. Have students design a collage of South Carolina African American women who were instrumental in the fight for equality and justice in South Carolina. Explain how their contributions impacted South Carolina and African American history.
4. Students can create a Tour Guide Brochure of Simkins’ home. Include in the brochure the history of the home, key people, rooms of significance, a map of the home, directions to the home, and any other interesting facts from primary and secondary sources you have researched.
5. After reading letters to the editor written by and about Simkins, have students write a letter to an editor explaining their views about women activists. Ask if they agree or disagree that African American women should be involved in the fight for equality and justice for African Americans and most importantly for African American women? Have the students explain their responses using information learned from primary and secondary sources.