

LESSON 10: LEGACY

TOPIC: Celebration: The Legacy of the Hall of Negro Life on Race Relations

OBJECTIVES: Students will:

Continue their evaluation of celebrations by examining the influence of the Hall of Negro Life on race relations.

Define and explore the term “legacy” as it relates to the Hall of Negro Life.

Recognize bias in the comments of the visitors to the Hall of Negro Life.

SYNOPSIS:

The Hall of Negro Life was visited by African Americans and Whites alike. African Americans were very proud of their accomplishments and pleased to be able to tell their own story. Whites were often surprised by what they learned about the vast accomplishments of African Americans. Comments from visitors were positive and surprising. The Hall had a major impact on segregation in Dallas for a while. Sadly, it ended by the demolishing of the building 10 months after it was erected.

INFORMATION:

The Hall of Negro Life was visited by more than 400,000 people with at least 275,000 being white. Many came because of ads in their local newspapers, some due to word of mouth from the attendees, others as self-appointed publicity agents for the exhibits on display. Many came to learn of the accomplishments of African Americans. One visitor said his wife had visited the Hall of Negro Life 38 times and insisted on sharing it with anyone she met. Most of the visitors were from the South and knew very little about African American culture outside of the Southern African American culture.

The Hall was the “largest, most representative, and most artistically displayed exhibit of Negro achievements ever assembled.” Whites coming to the building imagined they would see agricultural products, canned goods and “Black Mammy” pictures. They were shocked at the exhibits and left with a greater appreciation of the African American’s contribution to American culture and a more tolerant attitude toward their efforts.

The pamphlets created by W.E.B. Dubois and Charles E. Hall handed out in the hall, continued to be sought out by whites, teachers, ministers, and interracial committees.

One of the positive events held on the opening day of the Hall of Negro Life was the first interracial track meet in the history of the South. Whites and Blacks participated and sat together in the stadium. It occurred with no friction or intolerance exercised or expressed by any person in the grandstand or on the track.

Pullman Cars on trains, which previously did not allow African Americans to ride, began allowing them African Americans to ride in them. While it only lasted for 10 months, this was considered the beginning of change in the Negro’s traveling.

The Amphitheater produced daily programs by well-trained African American singers from a college or an African American group gathered by local musicians. This showed, to many people, the improvements African

Americans were making to general citizenship and race relations. An interracial Coordinating Committee was organized to calm any interracial conflict that might have previously been insurmountable.

Since the city of Dallas had no African American policemen, on October 19, 19XX under the leadership of a Negro mayor (A. Boswell) a parade was held in which Negro policemen from many cities were featured in the parade. Dallas was so embarrassed that they had no Negro police, they dressed up two Negro orderlies in police uniforms and had them ride on motorcycles in the parade. As a result, within thirty days, several candidates running for offices in Dallas City Government, pledged to secure Negro policemen if elected. It took until 1947 for this to become a reality.

Comments from Visitors to the Hall

"Had never come in contact with the type of Negro who does this kind of work. I am greatly impressed."-Miss S. Goodwin, Pecos, Texas.

"The Hall of Negro Life is one of the most interesting parts of the Centennial Exposition and deserves the support and encouragement of every fair-minded person."- Miss Regina D. Garner.

"This building with its excellent exhibits certainly proves that the Negro has made a marvelous advance in agriculture, mechanics, fine arts and in all departments of cultural and religious life which will be an incentive to the White American to encourage the Negro race and at all times lend a helping hand where needed."-Mrs. J. W. Baird, Burleson, Texas.

Comments about the Hall overheard by Miss Earline Carson, a Negro Librarian at the Information Desk:

One White lady after she had inspected the building, returned to Miss Carson to say: "You are way ahead of white folk and there's no telling where you will go. We must be careful what we do because you are too far ahead now."

A White lady from Corsicana, Tx said to herself, "No! No! N____s did not do this."

One White lady who drifted in one morning and bubbled over said, "Well, I'm just surprised and shocked. Why if you were to give African Americans an equal chance, they would surpass white people."

Another White woman said, "'Well, it's the finest display I ever saw. Of course, there's one thing you leaders must do. You must guard against allowing your people to assume they are not inferior to white people." "Do you think they are?" Mr. Thomas asked. "Why the Bible says so," concluded the puzzled white lady."

Legacy

One definition of Legacy is the long-lasting impact of events or actions that took place in the past, or in a person's life.

The impact of the Hall of Negro Life extended beyond 1936. It was the first time African Americans had told their own story instead of someone else creating the narrative for them. It was the recognition that blacks and whites could be equal in achievements. It created the hope that the races could coexist and share the same space in stadiums and travel accommodations. It gave the Negro confidence and a sense of self-worth. It led to revisiting voting rights for blacks and eventually to the Voting Rights Act in 1964. It also reminded them to embrace their rights and privileges of citizenship. All in all, it was "the spark that lit the fire that helped ignite the Civil Rights Movement" in Texas and the United States.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What generalizations or stereotypes did people expect to encounter in the Hall of Negro Life? What did they find? What generalizations and stereotypes do people make today about different ethnic groups?
2. The Hall of Negro Life seemed to be creating a turning point for race relations. After 1936, what was the status of race relations in the 1950's and 1960's?
3. What are Jim Crow Laws? How did Jim Crow Laws affect race relations?
4. How did the success of the Hall of Negro Life affect the White visitor's attitudes? What comments reflect bias against the Negro race? Do any of these attitudes continue today? If so, how do they manifest themselves?
5. Who do you believe celebrated the accomplishments of the Negro the most? City of Dallas? Whites? African Americans? Who did not celebrate?
6. How would you feel if you were not invited back to a celebration that you believed would be an annual established tradition?

ASSESSMENTS/ACTIVITY:

1. Even though you are young, you have a legacy. It involves expressing what is important to you. This could include good and bad experiences you have had and what you have learned from them. It can include what character traits are important to you and how you would like to be remembered when you pass away. Write a minimum one-page paper that expresses what you want your legacy to be and what you would like for people to remember.
2. Using religious texts that were popular during 1936 like the Holy Bible, find passages to support the White woman's comment that the Negro was **inferior** to Whites. Find passages that support the idea that all people are equal. Fill in the chart below. What was your conclusion of the religious texts?

RELIGIOUS TEXTS ABOUT AFRICAN AMERICANS

TEXT (Text and where found)	INFERIOR	EQUAL

REFERENCES:

Thomas, Jesse O. (1938). *Negro Participation in the Texas Centennial Exposition*. Christopher Publishing House, Boston, USA.

Podcasts; Rising: The Hall of Negro Life
<https://soundcloud.com/gigi-gonzalez-584367364/sets/rising-the-hall-of-negro-life>

