

# AFRICAN AMERICANS AT WORK IN POST-WWII LOS ANGELES

Lesson Plan



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CALIFORNIA  
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# 1. OVERVIEW

## California Curriculum Content Standard, History/Social Science, 11th Grade

11.8 – Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post-World War II America.

1. Trace the growth of service sector, white collar, and professional sector jobs in business and government.



## 2. CENTRAL HISTORICAL QUESTION

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To what extent were African Americans marginal workers needed in times of economic prosperity, and to what extent were they an integral part of the Los Angeles economy, laying the basis for complete social and political integration?

**Blue and White Collar Work:** What is the difference between the two? What is the difference between jobs, occupations, careers and professions?

**Business and Financial Services:** How did some African Americans achieve an above-average level of economic prosperity in post-WWII Los Angeles?

**Law and Government:** How did some African Americans participate in law and government in post-WWII Los Angeles?

**Service to Community and Self-Reliance:** How did prosperous African Americans balance the ethics of charity and community?



PLEASE DRIVE  
TO FORWARD  
PUMPS  
THANK YOU

RICHFIELD  
BORON  
100  
REGULAR  
GASOLINE

RICHFIELD

Anco  
SERVICE

GRAND NATIONAL  
SERVICE

## 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

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### *Before WWII*

- Immediately before World War II, African Americans in Los Angeles had mixed feelings about their status in a city that had promised to be a paradise for them. On the one hand, many owned homes, lived in interracial neighborhoods, sent their children to decent public schools, and lived largely free from fear of physical violence.
- However, racially-restrictive housing covenants and outright white resistance limited their residential mobility. With virtually no political representation, they also struggled to survive poverty during the Great Depression.

## 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.)

### *During WWII*

- During World War II, industrial activity, fueled by wartime needs, contributed to ending the Great Depression.
- On the one hand, WWII served to advance movements for equality, as wartime factory work created new and higher-paying job opportunities for women, African Americans, and other minorities.
- The opening up of the wage-labor force to women and minorities helped them to raise their expectations for what they should be able to achieve.
- The defense-related industries, especially critical to California's economy, helped drive other sorts of development including the manufacturing sector and the science-technology establishment. Los Angeles became a center for the defense and aerospace industries.

### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.)

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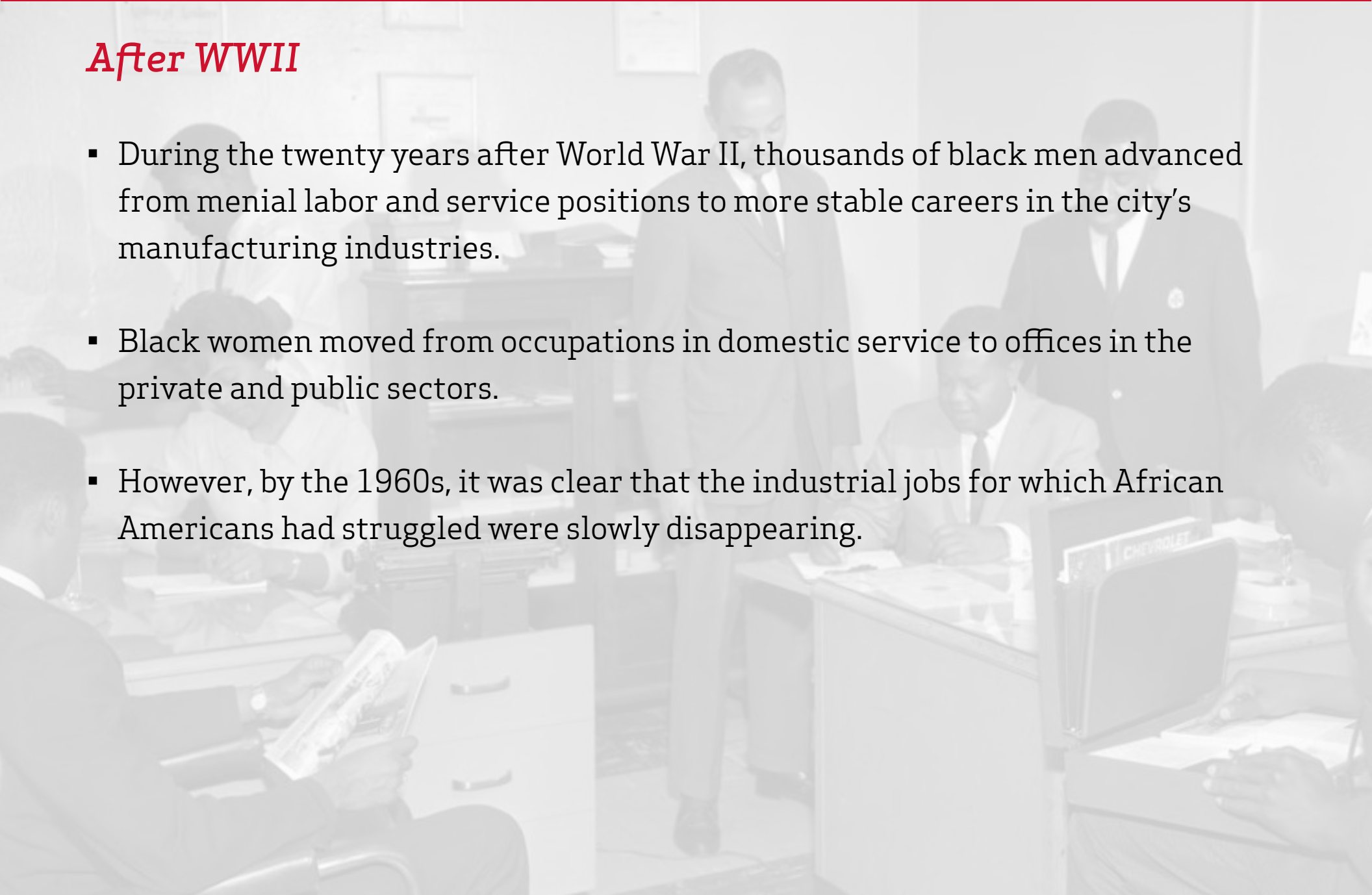
- These jobs drew enormous numbers of migrants from other parts of the country and eventually spurred the creation of expansive suburbs, highways, and shopping complexes.
- The economic growth produced a Great Migration of African Americans – from Texas, Mississippi, and elsewhere – to work in the metal shops, automobile plants, tire factories, and shipping docks of a rapidly expanding economy.
- On the other hand, African American migrants found that unskilled white workers were hired first, while many skilled black workers were forced to take inferior jobs and lesser pay. Defense plants refused to hire African Americans.
- African American activists, elected officials, and community organizations fought against discrimination and racism.



## 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.)

### *After WWII*

- During the twenty years after World War II, thousands of black men advanced from menial labor and service positions to more stable careers in the city's manufacturing industries.
- Black women moved from occupations in domestic service to offices in the private and public sectors.
- However, by the 1960s, it was clear that the industrial jobs for which African Americans had struggled were slowly disappearing.



### 3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (CONT.)

- Many industrial employers preferred Mexican over African American workers, especially in the metal and food industries. This eroded opportunities for black workers in blue-collar occupations.
- The widest gap was still between blacks and whites, since white workers took advantage of opportunities in newer, less physically-taxing, and cleaner industries outside of Los Angeles in communities closed to African Americans.





**Eastside**  
**Old**  
**Tap**  
BRAND  
**LAGER BEER**

**East**  
**Old**  
**LAGER**

**Eastside**  
**Old Tap Lager**

**Eastside**  
**Old Tap Lager**

**Old Tap**



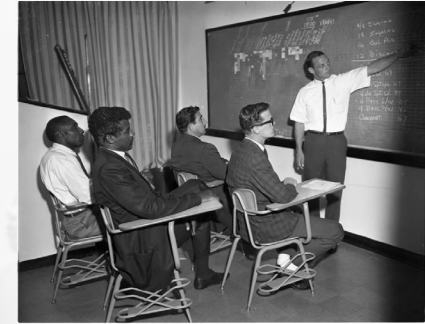
## 4. IMAGES



Advertisement, Los Angeles, 1950



Arrow Chevrolet, Los Angeles, 1963



Arrow Chevrolet, Los Angeles, 1963



Arrow Chevrolet, Los Angeles, 1963



Arrow Chevrolet, Los Angeles, 1963



Auto Showroom, Los Angeles, 1960



Avalon Hospital, Los Angeles, 1962



Bus Driver, Los Angeles, 1962



California School of Photography, Los Angeles, 1947

## 4. IMAGES (CONT.)



California School of Photography, Los Angeles, 1950



Central Chamber of Commerce, Los Angeles, 1967



Child's Festival, Los Angeles, 1948



Clothing Store, Los Angeles, 1949



Cotton Boys, Los Angeles, 1962



Crown Flour, Los Angeles, 1957



Design School, Los Angeles, 1949



Electricians, Los Angeles, 1948



Family Savings and Loan, Los Angeles, 1963

## 4. IMAGES (CONT.)



Gas Station Workers, Los Angeles 1955



Greyhound Pickets, Los Angeles 1961



Harry Adams Barber Shop, Los Angeles 1964



Johnsons Bath House, Los Angeles CA 1965



LA Academy, Los Angeles 1950



Les Shaw First Negro Postmaster, Los Angeles



Negro Bus Driver, Los Angeles 1962



Protest, Los Angeles 1957



Community Panel, Los Angeles 1984

## 4. IMAGES (CONT.)



Richfield Oil Company, Los Angeles 1967



Child Holding Sign, Los Angeles 1983



Roy Milton, Los Angeles 1965



Salesman, Los Angeles 1957



Towel Service, Los Angeles 1950



C.O.R.E., Los Angeles 1965



Western Union, Los Angeles CA 1960



Western Union, Los Angeles CA 1965

## 5. CITATIONS

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