

Desegregating Durham

ACCESS THIS RUBENSTEIN LIBRARY INSTRUCTION SESSION GUIDE ONLINE AT:

guides.library.duke.edu/franklincenter_instruction/desegregating_durham

BRIEF OVERVIEW



North Carolina Mutual, Parrish Street, Durham, N.C.

This class session encourages learners to engage with collections from the Rubenstein Library that document the desegregation of Durham, NC, during the Civil Rights Movement. Durham was one of the great hubs of commerce for African Americans in the United States during the early and mid-twentieth century. Despite these great economic accomplishments, the African American community could not escape the shadow of the Jim Crow

system on their everyday lives. Participants will get a glimpse into the process and protest of desegregating Durham using both documents and oral histories from four different figures in Durham civil rights history—Rencher Nicholas Harris, R. Kelly Bryant, Nathaniel White Sr., and Ann Atwater.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- **Exposure** to a diverse set of primary sources (documents and oral histories).
- Work in groups to **discuss and analyze** primary sources.
- Better **understand** the systemic limitations of segregation from the perspective of the African American community.
- **Describe** how African Americans in Durham organized on the local level to overcome segregation.

BEFORE CLASS

Following the end of the Civil War in 1865, freed African Americans in North Carolina began to settle into an enclave sandwiched between Wake and Orange Counties affectionately called Hayti (pronounced Hay-tie). Even after it was incorporated into the city of Durham, Hayti served as a beacon where black owned businesses thrived and developed it's own "Black Wall Street" as the nineteenth century transitioned to the twentieth century. The African American community proved a shining example of social, economic, educational, and cultural prominence in the Jim Crow New South. With the emergence of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the mid-20th century, Durham was also a home of activism and advocacy for social justice and equality.

Students should familiarize themselves with the backgrounds of the four people used in this module:

Rencher Nicholas Harris (1900–1965) was an African American civic leader during the period following the Brown decision of 1954 and the Civil Rights Movement. Harris was the first African American to serve on the Durham City Council (1953) and the Durham County Board of Education (1958).

Robert Kelly Bryant Jr. (1941–2015) was born and grew up in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. He worked for NC Mutual, the largest African American-owned business in the country at the time. After his retirement in 1981, Bryant spent many years telling the stories of Hayti and being a champion for public works in the community.

Nathaniel White Sr. (1914–1999) was born in Henderson, North Carolina. After living in Hampton and Norfolk, Virginia, he moved to Durham in the early 1940s. White was trained in printing as a student at the then Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) and established his own printing business in the heart of the Hayti community after moving to Durham. He was an active member of the community, serving in a number of organizations including the Committee for the Affairs of Black People and the Durham Human Relations Committee. His son, Nathaniel White Jr. was part of the first five African American undergraduate students to attend Duke University. White Sr. died in 1999.

Ann Atwater (1935–2016) was an American civil rights activist in Durham, North Carolina. Throughout her career she helped improve the quality of life in Durham through programs such as Operation Breakthrough (Durham, North Carolina), a community organization dedicated to fight the War on Poverty. Her life and friendship with C.P. Ellis, a former member of the Ku Klux Klan, was the subject of a book, play, and feature film, *The Best of Enemies*.

SESSION OUTLINE

Activity:

- Students can be split up into small groups, and each group assigned [one figure](#) to examine.
- Students will spend about 10–15 minutes reading and investigating the source. There will be brief descriptions of the individual and their significance to Durham history within each tab. Students should use the “Document Analysis Worksheet” on the module’s homepage to guide their analysis. They may analyze individually or collectively as a group and take notes as they go so they are prepared to share with the entire class.
- After everyone the small groups have had a chance read and analyze the source on their own, they should work together to share their reactions/thoughts on the sources.
- Finally, each group will share what they’ve learned with the whole class. As the groups share, students should consider how their set of documents connects to the others, note common themes, and ask questions of each other.
- *Optional—small groups can examine more than one of the sources, if time permits.*

This activity can work for a synchronous (e.g., a Zoom class session that includes breakout rooms) or asynchronous (e.g., a multi-step discussion on a Sakai/Blackboard forum) class sessions.

Discussion Questions:

After you’ve spent some time reviewing the sources, you’ll be discussing these questions with your groupmates. You may not get to discuss every question and are welcome to choose to discuss the question(s) you like best!

- What are some of the differences in using a written source versus an audio source?
- How does the Durham story confirm or counter what you already know about the Civil Rights Movement?
- What can you learn by analyzing desegregation in a local context?

Additional Resources:

- Browse through [African Americans in Durham LibGuide](#) to explore additional collections in the Rubenstein Library.
- Learn more about the [Franklin Research Center](#).

QUESTIONS?

special-collections@duke.edu

DEVELOPED BY:

John B. Gartrell

Director, John Hope Franklin Research Center
john.gartrell@duke.edu



DUKE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES



THIS WORK IS LICENSED UNDER THE CREATIVE COMMONS ATTRIBUTION-NONCOMMERCIAL 4.0 INTERNATIONAL LICENSE. TO VIEW A COPY OF THIS LICENSE, VISIT [CREATIVECOMMONS.ORG/LICENSES/ BY-NC/4.0/](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/) OR SEND A LETTER TO CREATIVE COMMONS, PO BOX 1866, MOUNTAIN VIEW, CA 94042.