

Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, WWII Heritage City

A series of lessons from the [World War II Heritage Cities Lesson Collection](#)



Figure 1: "Air view, east, metal producing plant, with trailer camp and construction boarding camp in background. McNeil Construction Co. Magnesium Plant. Las Vegas, Nevada." September 8, 1942. (Credit: pho020374, Victor Kunkel Photograph Collection. PH-00072. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.)

Introduction

The three lessons, and culminating fourth lesson, support learning about the significance of [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City](#). The first lesson teaches about the role of Basic Magnesium Inc (BMI) in wartime production, and the impact and motivation of workers there. The second lesson examines contributions by African American workers in the area, particularly at BMI, and barriers they faced, such as in housing. The third lesson describes security measures taken to protect the Hoover Dam

and the military training conducted at Camp Williston. All lessons highlight specific contributions but connect to larger themes and understandings of the U.S. home front during wartime. A mix of primary and secondary sources are used, along with photos and media.

Lessons (with World War II home front topics):

The first three lessons can be taught individually or together, in any order. The final lesson helps students summarize the contributions of Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, and offers a culminating activity to compare them with other World War II home front cities.

1. [Basic Magnesium Inc. War Production in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City \(p. 7\)](#)

- Manufacturing and industry
- Civilian workforce
- Social change
- Women in the workforce
- Economic and population growth
- Workers with disabilities
- Native American workforce

2. [Life and Work for African Americans on the Home front in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City \(p. 21\)](#)

- Civilian workforce
- Economic and population growth
- African American and Black history
- Wartime industry
- Housing

3. [Security and Military Training at Hoover Dam in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City \(p. 33\)](#)

- Army
- Military training
- Armed services
- Hoover Dam
- Camp Sibert and Camp Williston
- Bureau of Reclamation

4. [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities \(p. 44\)](#)

Positioning these Lessons in the Curriculum:

The standards listed beneath the lesson links are a collection of standards covered in the lesson collection. The lessons have been aligned to national standards and topics, as well as to the Nevada Social Studies disciplinary skills and standards (as of 2018). Objectives for each lesson, materials, and resources are listed within the lesson.

Time period: World War II

Topics: World War II, women's history, African American history, workforce migration, science and technology

United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

This lesson relates to the following [National Standards for History](#) from the UCLA National Center for History in the Schools:

Era 8: The Great Depression and World War II (1929-1945)

Standard 3: The causes and course of World War II, the character of the war at home and abroad, and its reshaping of the U.S. role in world affairs

Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

This lesson relates to the following [Curriculum Standards themes for Social Studies](#) from the National Council for the Social Studies:

- Theme 2: Time, Continuity, and Change
- Theme 5: Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Theme 8: Science, Technology, and Society
- Theme 9: Global Connections

Relevant Common Core Standards

These lessons relate to the following [Common Core English and Language Arts Standards for History and Social Studies](#) for middle and high school students:

Key Ideas and Details

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.1
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.2

Craft and Structure

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.4

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.7
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.9

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-12.10

Nevada Social Studies Standards

The lessons align to the following disciplinary skills and standards defined by the Nevada Social Studies Standards (as of 2018).

Social Studies Disciplinary Skills (Grades 6-12)

Constructing compelling questions

Creating supporting questions

Gathering and evaluating sources

Developing claims and using evidence

Communicating and critiquing conclusions

Taking informed action

Grades 6-8: Early U.S. History & Civic Ideals

SS.6-8.EUSH.13. Investigate the factors that shaped group and national identity in early U.S. history in relation to views of American identity today.

SS.6-8.EUSH.14. Interpret historical events from a variety of cultural perspectives, including but not limited to: Native Americans vs. settlers, Northerners vs. Southerners, and native citizens vs. immigrants

SS.6-8.EUSH.18. Explain how individuals and events in Nevada's history both influence and are influenced by the larger national context.

SS.6-8.EUSH.20. Investigate migration and immigration patterns to Nevada as part of U.S. history.

SS.6-8.EUSH.22. Investigate the causes, effects, and attitudes towards conflict and war from various points of view throughout early U.S. history

SS.6-8.EUSH.24. Analyze the ways in which dominant cultures have oppressed groups through institutionalized discrimination within U.S. history.

SS.6-8.EUSH.27. Investigate the ways in which individuals and groups build communities of respect, equity, and diversity throughout early U.S. history.

SS.6-8.EUSH.38. Explore the causes, motivations, and consequences of migration and immigration, both voluntary and forced, in early U.S. history, including but not limited to: Trail of Tears, western movement, Great Migration, various waves of immigration.

SS.6-8.EUSH.39. Explain how global circumstances affect changes in immigration, land use, and population distribution in various regions across early U.S. history

Grades 9-12: U.S. History (1877-Present)

SS.9-12.US.15. Evaluate the factors that shape group and national identity and how the American identity has evolved.

SS.9-12.US.16. Interpret events from a variety of historical and cultural perspectives, including but not limited to: suffragettes, civil rights activists, nationalists, progressives, political activists, immigrant groups.

SS.9-12.US.17. Investigate the evolution of gender roles and equality within social and economic life in the U.S.

SS.9-12.US.20. Explore how individuals and events in Nevada’s history both influence and are influenced by the larger national context.

SS.9-12.US.21. Analyze the causes of changing migration and immigration patterns in Nevada from 1877 to today.

SS.9-12.US.22. Trace the evolution of Nevada’s economy as it relates to national and global issues.

SS.9-12.US.24. Analyze the causes, effects, and attitudes towards conflict and war from various points of view.

SS.9-12.US.26. Examine how and why diverse groups have been denied equality and opportunity, both institutionally and informally.

SS.9-12.US.28. Examine how American culture is influenced and shaped by diverse groups and individuals.

SS.9-12.US.42. Explain how global circumstances and interaction affect resources, land use, culture, and population distribution in the U.S.

Additional connections may be made to World Geography and Global Studies (Grades 6-8) Civics and Economics (Grades 9-12).

The lesson series was written by Sarah Nestor Lane, an educator and consultant with the Cultural Resources Office of Interpretation and Education, funded by the National Council on Public History's cooperative agreement with the National Park Service.

Lesson 1: Basic Magnesium Inc. War Production in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson includes readings and photos to help learners understand how Basic Magnesium Inc. supported the war effort through the production and transportation of key resources—primarily magnesium for ammunition and aircraft. The primary sources highlight the company's impact and emphasize the contributions and motivations of its many employees. Among them were the “Magnesium Maggies,” a local version of “Rosie the Riveter.” Optional additional readings include unique stories about BMI’s first blind employee and Native American employees.

Objectives:

1. Explain and reflect on the impact of World War II on the way of life, workforce composition, and industries in the Henderson and Boulder City areas.
2. Describe the contributions of Basic Magnesium Inc and its employees. Reflect on the motivations of employees to contribute to war efforts.
3. Compare local, historical perspectives on the home front workforce and industries to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 2-9 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3 (and optional extension)
3. *Recommended:* Map of Nevada, with Boulder City and Henderson marked

Photos



Figure 2: "Construction Progress of Thickener Tanks in Neutralizing Plant, showing wall forms and reinforcing steel in place. McNeil Construction Co. Magnesium Plant." June 4, 1942. (Credit: pho020380, Victor Kunkel Photograph Collection. PH-00072. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.)

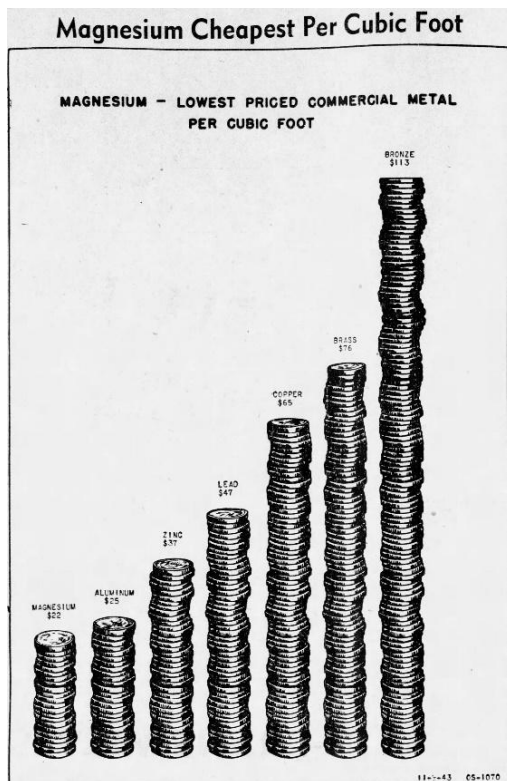


Figure 3: Chart published in *The Reno Gazette-Journal* on Nov. 24, 1943 showing that magnesium is the least expensive of commercial metals per cubic foot (\$22 at the time, compared to Copper at \$65, or Bronze at \$113).



Figure 4: Helmeted welder at the Basic Magnesium Plant, January 1943. Photo by Henle Fritz, Office of War Information. (Credit: Library of Congress)



Figure 5: "One of the construction workers at the Basic Magnesium Incorporated plant, working at the pipe vise. He is working on a building near the peat storage building shown in the background," December 1942. Photo by Henle Fritz, Office of War Information. (Credit: Library of Congress)



Figure 6: Employees, including women, working in the general sheet metal office. (Credit: pho020401. Victor Kunkel Photograph Collection. PH-00072. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Las Vegas, Nevada.)



Getting Started: Essential Question

How was Basic Magnesium Inc. a key contributor to the home front wartime efforts of the United States?



By the numbers:

- At the time, in tons, the construction of Basic Magnesium, Inc. was the largest structural steel job tackled west of New York, using more than 50,000 tons. This was as much steel as went into the Empire State Building. More than 300,000 rivets and 200,000 permanent bolts were required.
- From the original one thousand homes: over 2.8 million square feet of plywood were used – the equivalent to 65 acres. The four-inch flooring would extend in a line for 587 miles.

- From August 1941 to November 1944, over 8 million dollars in transportation charges were paid from BMI, mostly for railroad transportation. Nearly 150 million pounds of magnesium had been shipped.

- *Basic Bombardier*, Vol. 11, no. 34, November 17, 1944.



Quotations to consider:

“Mrs. Paul Hughes bespoke the feelings of almost every one around the project when she went to work last week in the billet-shipping department. Said Mrs. Hughes: ‘I have a boy in the Solomons and somehow when I wrap this bomb metal I feel as though I am putting a weapon into the hands of my son. It may save his life.’”

- From “Basic Reaches 50 Percent Production,” *The Big Job: Basic Magnesium Newsletter* (no. 36, March 4, 1943 from [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))

“My hope is that I may be able to contribute sufficient effort on my job to construct one bomber plane, produce sufficient metal to load the plane with bombs, and to buy bonds enough to fuel the ship for one successful flight over Germany or Japan.”

- E.K. Dickerson, Sub-station Operator at Basic Magnesium, Letter to the Editor, *Basic Bombardier* (Vol. 1, no. 45, May 21, 1943 from [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))

“‘My buddies and I all like your paper,’ he writes, ‘and are proud that a great defense plant like Basic Magnesium named it ‘Bombardier.’ The word means a lot to us who fly in the noses of the bombers and fire tracer bullets made of magnesium. I’ve told the boys all about the big job you’re doing on the desert. Many of these buddies have been wounded in combat overseas, and they’re thankful to every plant worker for turning out the stuff to make tracer bullets, without which they could not find the targets at night so well. You make the metal for them and the incendiary bombs and we’ll use them for Victory.’”

- Frank E. Hartman, Army Bombardier Instructor, was stationed in Greenville, S.C., and received copies of the letter from his wife, Thelma, worker at the BMI post office. *Basic Bombardier* (Vol. 1, no. 47, June 18, 1943 from [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))



Read to Connect

Teacher Note: The background and article provide information on the impact of BMI on home front production. Additional connections to BMI can be found in [Lesson 2](#) which focuses on the work and housing issues faced by African American workers and their families. [Lesson 4](#) shares an additional reading on BMI.

Background: Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI) was a large industrial complex in what would become Henderson, Nevada. It opened to produce magnesium on the home front during wartime. Magnesium was used for aircraft and munitions. BMI was powered by the nearby Boulder Dam (now Hoover Dam). At its peak, BMI supplied approximately a fourth of the magnesium used by the War Department. BMI's operations attracted a diverse workforce from across the region. It also prompted migration to the area, including African Americans from the South, contributing to the region's demographic shifts and growth. Though BMI's production was ended by the War Production Board in 1944, BMI laid the foundation for the area's postwar identities.

Reading 1: Newspaper Article

Magnesium Output Reaches Top Mark

Miracle Story of Production Told in Figures from Basic

Reno Gazette-Journal, November 24, 1943

Hirohito and Hitler can read this and weep!

There's a miracle story in the production of magnesium. And plenty of it centers in the desert plant of BMI.

Take the BMI mill and mine for example. That outfit must and does produce a total of 400 tons – we said tons – of calcined products and concentrates every 24 hours to keep the Vegas plant in operation.

In turn the Vegas plant runs 700 tons of dry raw materials into the hoppers in order to keep the maws of the magnesium producing process at capacity.

Results? Read 'em Adolph!

This year BMI will produce 20 percent of all the magnesium put out in the entire United States.

BMI production in 1943 is five percent above rated capacity and on many days runs as high as 10% above.

BMI is right now producing more than 3 ½ pounds of magnesium per second.

BMI's 1943 production will equal the total production of magnesium in the United States for the 27 years preceding Pearl Harbor.

BMI makes as much magnesium in one eight-hour shift as was produced in the entire United States in the year of 1915 – and then the cost was \$5.00 per pound.

The Basic plant puts a big demand upon freight facilities. In October, for example, incoming freight by rail alone aggregated 1362 cars, while the outgoing products from the big industry filled 1129 cars. That's a total of 2491 freight cars for the month – or more freight than a lot of pretty good sized cities handle.

Every working employee at BMI, including maintenance, production, clerical and administrative workers, makes 70 pounds of magnesium every 24 hours. In other words, BMI employees produce just about half their own aggregate weight in magnesium every time the sun makes a circuit.

And another thing: Since Anaconda Copper Mining Company took charge in late October of 1942 production of magnesium in the BMI plant has increased twenty fold. And this despite the fact that as unit after unit was opened for production construction men were still working on the jobs.

In 1915 magnesium sold for \$5.00 a pound. It was not until 1925 that its cost went under \$1.00 a pound. Costs at BMI are steadily decreasing – and will continue to decrease.

Technicians and metal experts from Anaconda have sliced costs materially in the Nevada plant in the last few months. Short cuts in processes and increased efficiency in operations have steadily brought down per pound costs of production. This process is still going on.

Meantime BMI is producing chlorine for sale to other essential war industries – and caustic soda is being shipped regularly to defense plants.

The production record of BMI is something of which the plant, its executives and employees, and the whole country, may well be proud.

Questions for Reading 1 and Photos

1. How did BMI contribute to population growth in the region?
2. Why was magnesium important to home front war efforts? Consider both the uses and cost.

3. Consider the information shared across Reading 1, By the Numbers, and the photo of the cost of magnesium. How did the statistics and numbers shared in newspapers and company newsletters at the time contribute to both a sense of urgency and pride?
4. Reflect on the Quotations to Consider: What do these quotes show about why people wanted to work at Basic Magnesium during the war, and how did their personal connections to the war affect their motivation?

Photo

WOMAN OF WARSAW HELPS SEND
MAGNESIUM BOMBS BACK TO BERLIN



Figure 7: Loretta Roach, in the Basic Magnesium company newsletter (reading 2). *The Big Job*, Basic Magnesium Newsletter, no. 43, April 22, 1943.

Reading 2: Newspaper Article

Background Reading: Women who worked at Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) were nicknamed "Magnesium Maggies," a reference to the iconic "Rosie the Riveter," symbolizing women's contributions to home front industries during World War II. Many women joined the workforce at BMI to fill labor shortages left by men who had entered military service. They took on a wide range of roles, including driving forklifts, making gloves and masks, working in offices, and handling hazardous substances and metals such as chlorine and magnesium. A [statue in Henderson, Nevada](#), honors the efforts of these "Magnesium Maggies." The following newsletter article highlights the story of one woman who worked at BMI.

Woman of Warsaw Helps Send Magnesium Bombs Back to Berlin

From *The Big Job*, *Basic Magnesium Newsletter*, no. 43, April 22, 1943 ([Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))

We all know the story of Poland. Old stuff now. Forgotten, almost, in the light of what has happened since. When the Germans rained bombs on Warsaw for 28 days, without a let-up day or night, we weren't in the war. Pearl Harbor hadn't happened. When we read that 365,000 people had died in that one city it was just another European nightmare. Dreadful, it is true, but remote – affecting us little.

But there is one woman who hasn't forgotten. She never will. She was there. In Poland she put out magnesium bombs which fell on her own roof. She is here now, making magnesium to rain vengeance and death on the Axis.

Her name is Loretta Roach and she is the only woman worker in the Metals units doing 'a man's job.' It isn't easy. All day she works over molten magnesium. She must observe every safety precaution – mask, gloves and all.

In Poland she painted portraits. Three hundred fifty of them and over 100 sculptures – years of study and work, were destroyed by the Nazis.

Listen to Mrs. Roach: 'The wonderful courage of the women of Warsaw is deeply imprinted on my memory. But we must have courage here too. Perhaps at first this machinery and heat and fumes will frighten – but after awhile it is just like being around a hot stove. After Poland I no longer fear anything.'

Mrs. Roach is an American, of Polish ancestry, the widow of John M. Roach the grandson of the traction magnate of Chicago. She has two brothers in the U.S. Army, one 'somewhere in the Pacific.'

Questions for Reading 2

1. What nickname was given to women who worked at Basic Magnesium Inc.?
2. Why were women needed to work at BMI during World War II?
3. How is Loretta Roach's story unique? What does her story tell us about some of the reasons some women had for working in war industries?
4. What was the company newsletter's purpose in sharing stories like Roach's?

Reading 3: Letter to Company Newsletter

Background: J.R. Hobbins was the president of Anaconda Copper Mining Co. and Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI). This letter was published in the Basic Bombardier, the company newsletter for BMI, after the orders from the War Production Board (WPB) to discontinue wartime production of magnesium at BMI.

Magnesium to Become Big Factor – Hobbins

Basic Bombardier, Vol. 11, no. 34, November 17, 1944

I believe that we all, as citizens of the United States, are proud and happy over the tremendous industrial accomplishments and the rapid increases in production that have been made in critical war material and equipment. Not the least of these accomplishments is that which has been achieved in the magnesium industry, which, in the late 30's was producing less than 10,000,000 pounds per year and which in 1943 produced above 400,000,000 pounds.

The fact that in the midst of total war, in many important fields, curtailment and cut-backs can be ordered and that critical production has so far exceeded requirements should give us all a feeling of great gratitude as well as assurance as to the ability of our people to meet whatever crisis is presented. BMI has been a great accomplishment from the early inception of the project. The bringing to America by our British associates of MBL the plans and the know-how, the assembling on the desert of a vast organization of men, including some of the finest technical skill in America, within the comparatively short time which has elapsed since 1941 marks this project out as one of the great industrial accomplishments of the war. This plant was designed to produce at the rate of 112,000,000 pounds of magnesium per year. At its early stages it was freely predicted that it could not produce at all. However, the plant has for a period produced metal at the rate of approximately 120,000,000 pounds per year.

From an industrial point of view I am most regretful that this plant was not able to operate at capacity for at least another year. It is my opinion that with the continued improvements in the process, greater mechanization and higher efficiencies, operating costs could have been achieved which would have been competitive with any other magnesium plant in the country.

To the men and women of Basic whose loyalty, industry, skill and vision have made possible the success of this great project I extend on behalf of myself and my associates, our very sincere gratitude and thanks. This plant achieved a peak of production at a time when magnesium was most needed for the war and, thus, fulfilled its purpose as a great

contributor to the war effort. The future of the plant I can not predict as that rests entirely in the hands of our government. I do predict, however, that within a comparatively few years magnesium will become an important factor in the economic life of this nation.

- J.R. Hobbins

Questions for Reading 3

1. What organization ordered the end of magnesium production at BMI? Why do you think this happened?
2. Why does Hobbins describe the magnesium industry's growth as a major accomplishment?
3. How does the author describe the workers at BMI, and why is this important?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How was Basic Magnesium Inc. a key contributor to the home front wartime efforts of the United States?

Extension

Additional Reading

Read one or both articles from the Basic Magnesium company newsletter: one highlights the first blind worker at the company, and the other shares connections to Native American workers and cultures.

1. "Dog You Shouldn't Pet Because He's Working"

Basic Bombardier (Vol. 11, no. 16, March 10, 1944, from [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))

Bill Tully, our new dictaphone operator in Miss Eichaker's pool, is very serious about his dog, Bennie. Bill is holding down his first job after being blinded in a mining accident.

Bennie to him is more than a dog—he is a constant companion, a grave responsibility, 'He is my life,' says Bill simply. Bill attended the Seeing Eye Institute in New Jersey, where he was taught to place his life in the hands of a super-intelligent animal. It is Bennie who familiarizes himself with a new situation before he leads his master into it. It is Bennie who



Figure 8: "Bill Tully, BMI's first blind employee, and his faithful guide, Bennie. They are the closest of pals. Bennie has a plant badge."

guards him night and day, who rests quietly beside his desk while he works, who loves to chase cats and sniff fireplugs when he is off duty.

Bill looks after Bennie's health, of course. He was taught this at the Institute.

Bill is worried because his dog is getting so much attention here at the plant. Conditions are new and upsetting to them both. Everyone wants to pet Bennie. Ever think of what 5000 pats on the head would feel like? Try it on yourself and see how Bennie feels at the end of the day.

And another thing -- when Bennie is working, that is, when he's leading his young master, don't distract his attention. If you will refrain from patting the dog or speaking to him when he's on the job you'll be doing them both a favor. Instead of whistling to Bennie, say 'Hi Bill.' They'll both like that.

Questions for Reading

1. How is the article about Bill Tully and his guide dog meaningful, and what does it show about the importance of valuing all workers?
2. How does the article help readers better understand the role of a guide dog (Bennie) and the challenges Bill faces? Why do you think this awareness was important at BMI?

2. "Indian Workers at BMI Plant Cling to Their Traditions Staging Dances and Powwows"

Teacher Note: For more information on using appropriate terminology when discussing Native American tribes, you can refer to [this article](#) from the National Museum of the American Indian (Smithsonian). If wanting to compare to Native American contributions at another Heritage City, you may wish to use [\(H\)our History Lesson: Native American Home Front Contributions in Los Alamos County, New Mexico, WWII Heritage City](#).

Basic Bombardier (Vol. 11, no. 9, December 3, 1943, from [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#))

Indians cherish their traditions, no matter where they are, and enjoy participation in the age-old ceremonials of their forefathers. They do at BMI.

A small but representative group of Pueblo Indians—Tiwas and Domingos—held a powwow and staged thrilling dances at the Trailer Park party on Thanksgiving Eve. Because it was more or less impromptu they were not in full regalia. Albert Cata and his son, Joe, even led the social dance in which all the palefaces took part.



Figure 9: "Picturesque descendants of the First Americans as seen here on occasion, many being employed in the plant. These staged an interesting ceremonial at Trailer park. Seated in the center is Albert Cata, leader of the Tiwa; at the left, with feather headdress, Ignacio Trujillo; in lower foreground, Joe, Cata's son, who is a clever little dancer. The others are family members and friends."

The following night at El Rancho Vegas a group of twelve, led by Cata, staged a real war dance . . . 'Chief Lightning' told the story of the Indians' part in Thanksgiving and demonstrated the varied uses of blankets.

Indians in considerable number are employed here, many from the Southwest, but also Seminoles from Oklahoma and Florida, Cherokees, Winnebagos, and Mission from California, and Navajos, Shoshones, Washoes and Paiutes from this area. They include men of education.

Many of these have relatives in the armed services – Cata a brother in the Air Forces in England and a cousin prisoner of the Japanese in the Philippines. A member of almost every one of their families is in khaki.

Employed principally in the Refineries and Preparation, their foremen report that they are good, conscientious workers, with a low percentage of absenteeism. Loyalty is a characteristic.

Questions for Reading

1. Why might the author have chosen to highlight the cultural traditions and work of Native American workers at BMI in the company newsletter?
2. What descriptions does the author use to talk about the Native American workers? How does the author show their connection to the military and their strong work ethic?

Additional Resources

[Basic Magnesium, Inc. Collection](#) by University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

[Boulder City and Hoover Dam Museum](#)

[Henderson Historical Society](#)

[Nevada Part VII: To War and Beyond](#) from *Nevada Magazine*

Lesson 2: Life and Work for African Americans on the Home Front in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson features historical readings and photos that explore the migration of African American families to southern Nevada during the war, primarily for employment at Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI). The materials highlight both the opportunities created by wartime industry and the systemic barriers caused by segregation and unequal treatment. Students are introduced to personal profiles of community leaders at BMI and Carver Park. Carver Park was first built to provide segregated housing to African American families. An optional extension reading provides additional context on migration patterns and labor conditions.

Objectives:

1. Describe the movement of African American families to the area of Boulder City and Henderson and the work they did there.
2. Identify examples of segregation and discrimination faced by African American families in the area.
3. Compare local, historical perspectives on service to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 10-15 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3 (and optional extension)
3. *Recommended:* Map of Nevada, with Boulder City and Henderson marked

Photos



Figure 10: African American worker at BMI, January 20, 1944. (Credit: Henderson Public Library Photograph Collection on Henderson, Nevada. PH-00254. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.)



Figure 11: "Carver Park – Developed by the Housing Authority of the County of Clark County, Nevada. A Victory Housing Project of the Federal Public Housing Authority." (Credit: pho032763. Dow Metals, Incorporated Photograph Collection on Basic Magnesium, Inc. PH--00260. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.)



Figure 12: Robert C. Williams and his wife and five children, the first family to occupy a home in Carver Park. The Williams family came from Arkansas, and he worked as a well attendant. Oct. 13, 1943. (Credit: ohr000100. Henderson Public Library Photograph Collection on Henderson, Nevada. PH-00254. Special Collections, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.)



Figure 13: Cathryn Cook, featured in the company newsletter, was a president of the Carver Park Tenants' Association Council. A council of nine members, it supported recreation and welfare in the segregated Carver Park residential area. (From the Basic Bombardier, Dec. 17, 1943, [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#).)



Getting Started: Essential Question

How did African American workers in the area contribute to home front efforts, and what barriers did they face?



By the numbers:

- In 1940 there were only 1000 African American persons in the state of Nevada, and only 178 resided in the southern portion. More than 4,000 African American workers and family members arrived in southern Nevada to work during the first two years of Basic Magnesium's opening.
 - Basic Magnesium provided only 324 places of residence for African American workers. Of these, 64 were units with no bedrooms (dormitories), 104 with one bedroom, 104 with two bedrooms, and 52 with three bedrooms. Workers who did not attain housing here had to find their own.
- *"A Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium of Southern Nevada," pp. 11-12, by Roosevelt Fitzgerald*



Quotations to consider:

"... Blacks who were evicted from downtown Las Vegas were forced to resort to make-shift shelters. This was the condition which the throngs of blacks who arrived to work at Basic found. They slept wherever they could. In some cases it was on the lawn in front of the Post Office and others lived in their automobiles or under lean-tos. The authorities had been aware of the housing needs for workers but, partially due to the suddenness of the BMI enterprise, there had not been sufficient time to prevent the problems of housing shortages.

- *"A Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium of Southern Nevada," pp. 11-12, by Roosevelt Fitzgerald*

"Carver Park is open for business, with school in session for the youngsters and with several families already occupying the new dwellings. This fine new project when all occupied will house 324 families and 250 unattached men. Two splendid community houses have ample facilities for meetings and recreation. The new Carver school will serve

children through the eighth grade. High School students of the area will attend Henderson High.”

- From the *Basic Bombardier*, Vol. 11, no. 6, Oct. 22, 1943



Read to Connect

Teacher Note: The following texts connect to the migration of African American workers and families to work in the war industries in Boulder City and Henderson, particularly Basic Magnesium Inc (BMI) for more information on the role of BMI, see [Lesson 1](#).

Reading 1: Manuscript Excerpt

Excerpt: "A Brief Look of the Development of the Black Community of Las Vegas"

Manuscript draft by Roosevelt Fitzgerald, written between 1970 and 1996 (years approximate)

From the [Roosevelt Fitzgerald Professional Papers \(MS-01082\)](#) from University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

The building boom went on into World War 2 when there were restrictions on travel due to gasoline rationing. Those (in Las Vegas) knew that the war would not last forever and this time they began to prepare for the future. A sense of optimism which had been present at the second beginning of Las Vegas in 1905 carried on into and through the war. Because of the presence of the abundance of power in southern Nevada there were military installations begun in Clark County. Basic Magnesium Corporation (BMI) was established in the new town of Henderson, Nevada for the same reason. More and more of the future of Las Vegas and Clark County was positively affected because of the presence of the Boulder Dam. . . .

Basic Magnesium and the 1940s

The next major change in relations to take place in Las Vegas occurred during the decade of the 1940s. It started with less than 200 Blacks in the community and ended with nearly 5,000. The 40s was the decade which brought BMI to Clark County. Several thousands of Blacks from the southeastern United States also arrived. They were not well received. Their arrival coincided with the city's removal of Blacks from downtown and their relegation to the westside. The newcomers entered an already overcrowded section of town. The new housing for workers at BMI which were to be built by the McNeil Construction Company had not yet been completed. Housing, however, in the new Huntridge area off East

Charleston was well underway. Whites who came here, not only those who would be involved in the operations at BMI, but also those involved in supportive services, did not experience as much difficulty in securing housing as did Blacks.

Dormitories would be constructed in the new town of Henderson but there were provisions only for accommodations for 200 Blacks in the rear section which was called Carver Park. White workers had a much larger area which was called Victory Village. The bulk of the facilities which were built were for white workers. It was a matter of convenience. Having the working men living nearby would reduce their expense in going back and forth to work. Blacks, on the other hand, were required to travel from Las Vegas to the plant site. Since it had been anticipated that the project would only be operational for the duration of the war, many of the city leaders were not anxious to construct housing for a population which would be, at the very most, a short term population. Even the dormitories which were constructed were intended to be only temporary quarters and they were constructed of a material which could be very easily dismantled.

Conditions on the west side deteriorated. There were some who were eager to point out the squalor and blighted condition of the area and they were equally eager to attribute those circumstances to the mere presence of Black people. They did not choose to acknowledge the fact that those conditions existed because of their refusal to provide adequate housing and as a result, there was a natural overcrowding of the area.

Blacks who came here during the early 1940s doubled and tripled up in whatever housing they could find – if they were lucky. Others slept wherever they could find an out of the way spot. They lived in tents and cardboard shacks. No funds were made available to them to erect housing. Banks and other lending institutions were not providing funds to Blacks to finance the building of homes. The deplorable conditions under which Blacks lived was a condition forced on them and there was not a great deal that they could do about it. . .

Questions for Reading 1, Quotations to Consider, and Photos

1. Why did African American families and workers move to Clark County in the 1940s?
2. What challenges did the area face with an increased population?
3. What were differences between Carver Park and Victory Village? What do these differences indicate about racial inequalities at the time?
4. Why did city leaders build Carver Park as temporary housing? What did this show about their views on the long-term role of African American workers in the community?
5. In the photos, find Cathryn Cook. What role did she serve in Carver Park, and why would this have been important?

Photos

**HE HAS FOUR SONS
ALL IN THE ARMY**



Figure 14: Photo of George Grant Gray, "He Has Four Sons All in the Army," from Reading 2. Basic Bombardier, Vol. 1, no.47, June 18, 1943.



**LEADER IN GOOD WORKS
BOOSTING CARVER PARK**

Figure 15: Photo of Rev. J. L. Simmons, "Leader in Good Works Boosting Carver Park," from Reading 2. Basic Bombardier, Vol.11, no.17, March 24, 1944.

Reading 2: Newsletter Excerpts

Teacher Note: Reading A and B provide examples of unique people working and serving in the BMI and Carver Park community. They were published in the BMI company newsletter, the Basic Bombardier. Language used in Reading B would not be considered respectful or appropriate today. Address this with students.

Reading A: “He Has Four Sons All in the Army”

Basic Bombardier, Vol. 1, no. 47, June 18, 1943, [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#)

George Grant Gray’s four sons and his heart are in the Army. Last heard from two boys were in Australia, the others ‘somewhere.’ And George, going on 73 but strong and youthful in spirit, works for BMI, having been on the project over a year, eager to do everything in his power to hasten the day of victory for the United Nations. Note that fighting chin.

Born in Kansas City when it was known as Wyandotte, he says, our subject took up stone-cutting and masonry sixty years ago but now wants a change, which he’ll get. Entitled to it after more than half a busy century, isn’t he?

He and Mrs. Gray reared nine children and have five married daughters. The parents own homes in Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Denver and Idaho Falls, but this last frontier on the desert is where they choose to live. . .

Reading B: “Leader in Good Works Boosting Carver Park”

Basic Bombardier, Vol. 11, no. 17, March 24, 1944, [Henderson Libraries Digital Archives](#)

Rev. J.L. Simmons, head of the janitor service at BMI Hospital, is an all-around leader. Coming to Carver Park in January 1944, he has led in successful bond campaigns, the Red Cross effort and other community activities.

Rev. Mr. Simmons hails from Tallulah, La., hometown of so many BMI employees. In Las Vegas, before moving to Carver he organized the First Mission Church with 34 members. It now has a membership of 226. In Chicago last September he attended the convention of negro Baptists – Nevada’s first representative to this gathering in 68 years. The minister-janitor had a leading role in the success of the patriotic double flag ceremony Sunday, March 12, when Old Glory was hoisted from two staffs over Carver Park with a thrilling military program and an attendance of 700 persons. This was an important event in the history of Nevada’s colored population.

Rev. Mr. Simmons is energetically working to induce his church members and other friends to move to Carver Park. He wants them to enjoy the fine privileges afforded at Carver – good homes, a fine school, recreational facilities, and a wholesome community spirit.

Questions for Reading 2

1. Why do you think the newsletter included stories about individual workers? What purpose might these profiles have served?

Reading A

2. What is Gray's connection to the Army?
3. How does the author describe Gray's age and dedication?

Reading B

4. How did Rev. J.L. Simmons show leadership in his job and his community at Carver Park?
5. Why was the double flag ceremony important for the Carver Park community?

Reading 3: Manuscript Excerpt

["A Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium of Southern Nevada,"](#) pp. 18-19, by Roosevelt Fitzgerald (1987)

Note: The Boulder Dam is today called the Hoover Dam.

Basic Magnesium changed the demographics of southern Nevada. Previously, little or no concern had been devoted to the area of race relations. That reality had been manifested during the difficult time for Blacks during the construction of the Boulder Dam. That atmosphere was reiterated at the close of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s as Blacks were ushered out of Las Vegas proper. Even during the heyday of activity at the plant, there was no real sensitivity to the needs of Black people. Las Vegas was in transition when the plant arrived and did not acknowledge any reason to halt that transition. After all, those Blacks who came to work at the plant would only be here on a temporary basis. There were acts of discrimination at the plant. Segregation of the latrines, lack of relief help on the job, and pay differences caused more than one walk-out on the site. Because Las Vegas had initiated a segregation process, it became easier for such to be activated in any and all new ventures in the area of southern Nevada.

Had it not been for BMI and its accompanying increase of Black population, there would hardly have been sufficient accommodations for Black troops who came here during the war years. Some of those soldiers, stationed at the Nellis gunnery range or at Camp Siebert in Boulder City, brought their families with them. Some of their wives worked in town as domestics. Beginning around 1941, the classified sections of both local newspapers ran, under the heading 'Help Wanted,' advertisements for 'colored' maids. Such advertisements

had not been placed in local newspapers before the 1940s. Also, from time to time, there were notices of cabins for sale to colored people. Some of those soldiers mustered out of the military in southern Nevada remained to make their homes and raise their families.

That initial rapid change which occurred between 1940 and 1941 would have been short lived were it not for the arrival of BMI. . . The supportive impact of Basic Magnesium on transforming southern Nevada into a segregated community in housing, jobs, politics, recreation and education would plague the area until the first chink would be made in 1960 with the ending of segregation in public accommodations of Las Vegas. . .

Questions for Reading 3

1. How was the migration of workers for BMI compared to workers at the previously constructed Boulder Dam (Hoover Dam)?
2. In what ways did the area and BMI show “no real sensitivity” to African American workers during the war?
3. What does the text suggest about the long-term consequences of the segregation policies introduced during the BMI era?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How did African American workers in the area contribute to home front efforts, and what barriers did they face?

Extensions

Additional Reading

The following text can be used to provide more information and context for migration and work in the area, along with postwar considerations. It is an additional excerpt from “[A Demographic Impact of Basic Magnesium of Southern Nevada](#),” by Roosevelt Fitzgerald, aligning with Reading 1 and 3.

. . . The city of Las Vegas was certain that, once BMI had done its job, the plant would close and there would be a repeat of the mass exodus of workers as had taken place following the completion of Boulder Dam.

Black people who arrived here to work on the project had come from the deep south. Many had been among those historic victims who were the first fired as the depression of the 1930s crept silently upwards toward white Americans. Large numbers of them had worked in the cotton fields of Louisiana and Arkansas. They had witnessed a drop in cotton prices

from 35.3 cents per pound in 1919 to 16.7 cents in 1929 and to 6.5 cents in 1932. They had been barely able to eke out a living in the south. Those who had made the best livings had worked in sawmills and even those were closing. The jobs they acquired at Basic Magnesium paid them higher wages than they had ever earned. That was due, in large part, to the earlier efforts of A. Philip Randolph.

The expectation by the city that they would return home once the plant project had terminated did not take those factors into consideration. Also, by the time the war materials produced by the plant were no longer in demand and some of the white workers were returning to their homes to become involved in the post war boom, the hotel industry of Las Vegas was beginning to boom. Blacks were not following suit. Depression still awaited them in the south. As they left BMI they went to work in the hotel industry as maids, porters, groundskeepers, dishwashers, and in all other 'back of the house' job categories within the entertainment industry. Even though the jobs they were able to acquire were menial, they paid yet higher wages than they expected they would receive upon returning to the south.

Additionally, the fledgling businesses which were developing on the westside needed workers. There were demands for black dealers, waiters, and waitresses, bartenders and custodians in those businesses. There were grocery store operators, barbers and cosmeticians, soda shop operators and those others who made accommodations available for the surge of black entertainers who performed in Las Vegas' posh hotels but who were not permitted to obtain accommodations there. The westside was truly becoming a city within a city.

In addition to local Black people, there was an additional need which had to be met. World War 2 had brought with it the establishment of numerous military establishments in California, Arizona and Nevada. There were black servicemen stationed at those bases. Like other soldiers stationed in those areas, they came to Las Vegas during their weekend leaves and some even had their families living there. They spent their military dole in westside businesses and they came in such numbers that a black USO club was opened on the westside for them.

Reading Questions

1. What motivated African American families to migrate to southern Nevada?
2. What were some of the types of jobs they pursued after working at BMI or serving in the military during the war?
3. What barriers did they face, both during and after the war?

Additional Resources

[Carver Park & BMI During WWII and Beyond](#) from Henderson Historical Society

Note: This community event recording is of a panel that includes James Balk, a former Carver Park resident. He lived there when he was a child, and his father was a worker at BMI. His story is unique as he was a part of a white family that lived in Carver Park alongside African American families. He shares his personal story alongside a professor who discusses the local African American history.

[Transcript of Interview with Otis & Tisha Harris, September 15, 2010](#) from UNLV Special Collections

Note: This oral history has connections to Basic Magnesium and African American history in the area.

Lesson 3: Security and Military Training at Hoover Dam in Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series about the World War II home front in [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada, World War II Heritage City](#). The lesson contains readings and photos to contribute to learners' understandings about security measures taken to protect the Hoover (Boulder) Dam and the military presence at Camp Williston (first named Camp Sibert). The Army supported security at the dam and conducted training.

Objectives:

1. Describe security measures taken to protect the Hoover (Boulder) Dam during World War II.
2. Explain the military training conducted at Camp (Sibert) Williston and its role in supporting dam security.
3. Compare local, historical perspectives on service to synthesize and connect to larger wartime perspectives and themes.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 16-21 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2, 3
3. *Recommended:* Map of Nevada, with Boulder City, Henderson, and the Hoover Dam marked. You may also wish to mark locations mentioned in [Reading 3](#).



Getting Started: Essential Question

How was Hoover Dam protected during World War II, and what role did the military at Camp Williston play in that effort?

Photos



Figure 16: Sign reads: U.S.A. Military Reservation. No Trespassing. The photo shows Camp Sibert (Williston) being constructed. February 10, 1941. Photo by Cliff Segerblom. (Image provided by Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum)



Figure 17: Camp Williston Soldiers, April 29, 1944. (Image provided by Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum)



Figure 18: Camp Williston soldiers convoyed to Fort Ord in San Francisco for a parade. The train arrived at Boulder City at noon on October 3, 1941. The convoy arrived at 4 p.m. This photo is from Howard Boutin's collection, and includes fellow camp cooks, Babich and Aiello. (Image provided by Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum)



Figure 19: Tourist convoy at the Nevada entrance to Hoover Dam on December 18, 1941. Soldiers from Camp Williston assisted in escorting and monitoring tourists. (Credit: US Bureau of Reclamation photo, featured in Lillian Morrison interview, 1996 transcript from University of Nevada Las Vegas.)

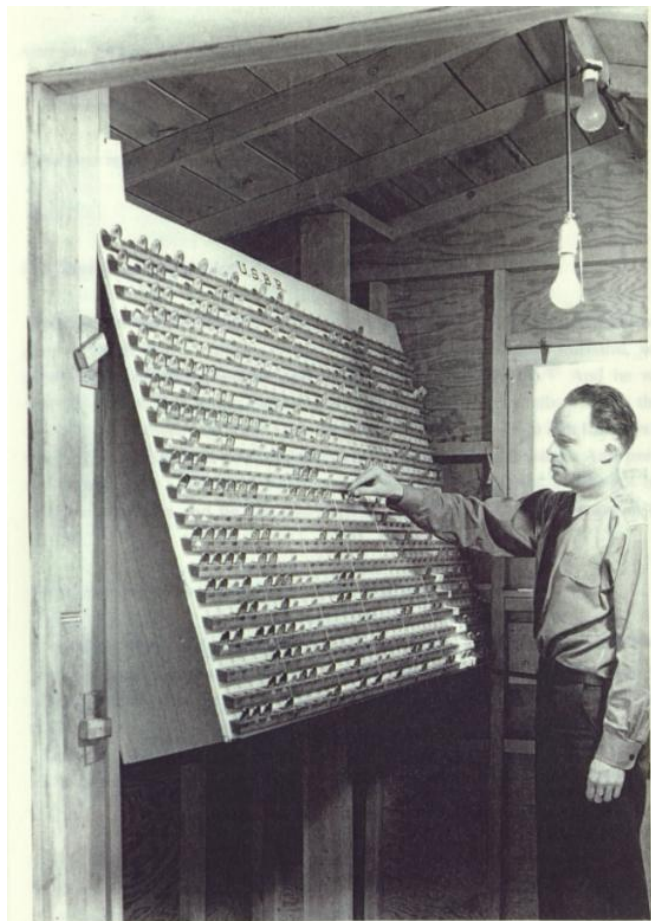


Figure 20: An employee checking station for badges at the Hoover Dam during the war. One employee badge board was for the Bureau of Reclamation, and the other, for other operating agencies. April 6, 1942. (Credit: US Bureau of Reclamation photo, featured in Lillian Morrison interview, 1996 transcript from University of Nevada Las Vegas.)



By the numbers:

- The Hoover Dam is 726 feet high from the lowest foundation point to the crest. At the base it is 660 feet thick and at the top, 45 feet thick. At the top, it is 1,244 feet long. Its immense size required many people actively involved in security to address home front security concerns.
- Camp Sibert was originally built on a \$364,445 contract, valued at over \$7.5 million today.
- Approximately 800 soldiers were stationed at the dam (Camp Sibert, then Camp Williston) during the war. The camp had been built to accommodate 945 men.

Quotations to consider:

“Because the loss of Boulder [Hoover], Parker, and Grand Coulee power plants would be a fatal blow to war production... [and] because the Department of the Interior does not have the facilities for their protection from air assault...I request that the Army assume the entire responsibility for their protection.”

- Then acting Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes to the War Department

“Boot camp was over at Camp Williston at Boulder City, Nevada. There was a big Army battalion there to guard Boulder Dam and part of the 9th Service Command. And being limited service, there were only about ten of us. And, I hate to say this, but we only had 19 days of basic training with two five-mile hikes carrying full canteens. Period. Oh, and a highlight for me was that I made sharpshooter with the old 3 Springfield, and everyone else only qualified.”

- Walter Theodore Hansen

Hansen served from 1943-1946 and trained at Camp Williston. He served in the 3rd Radio Squadron Mobile for the Army Air Forces/Corps. This is an excerpt from his [oral history interview](#), Veterans History Project from the Library of Congress.



Figure 21: Walter Theodore Hansen, as quoted in the quotation to consider, at Camp Williston, just after basic training. (Credit: Veterans History Project, Library of Congress)

Read to Connect

Reading 1: Background Text

Teacher Note: This text provides background information to then connect to key events and details about Camp Williston in primary sources – readings 2 and 3. The following background text does not detail the construction of Hoover Dam. To learn more about the construction of the dam and its geography, you may wish to use the lesson ["The Greatest Dam in the World": Building Hoover Dam \(Teaching with Historic Places\)](#).

In this background text, “Reclamation” is used to refer to both the U.S. Reclamation Service and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Protecting Hoover Dam during the War and the Role of Camp Williston

By Sarah Nestor Lane

Funding for the Hoover Dam was approved in 1930 by President Herbert Hoover, and construction was completed on May 29, 1935. Built on the Colorado River in Black Canyon, the dam played a critical role in generating hydroelectric power—especially for southern California, including its aviation and defense industries.

The dam’s name shifted over time. As explained by the National Archives in [this article](#):

“Both the names Hoover and Boulder have been used for the dam. In 1930, Interior Secretary Ray Wilbur announced that the dam would be called Hoover Dam, and Congress affirmed the name to honor the then-President of the United States. After Roosevelt took office in 1933, the dam, which was actually built in nearby Black Canyon, was frequently called Boulder Dam or Boulder Canyon Dam allegedly because Roosevelt’s Interior Secretary, Harold Ickes, did not like Hoover. Therefore, when quoting documents from the time, Boulder Dam is often used. In April 1947, an act of Congress signed by President Truman officially confirmed the name as Hoover Dam.”

Growing Security Concerns Before and During World War II

Even before the United States formally entered World War II, there were growing concerns about the dam’s vulnerability to sabotage. For example, on November 30, 1939, the State Department received a report of an alleged bombing plot. The loss of power from the dam would have disrupted aircraft production in Los Angeles and other defense-related operations.

Security at the dam increased significantly. More security features, guards, and checkpoints were established. A formal review in September 1940 pointed to a need for higher security.

On April 24, 1941, *The Washington Post* reported that the Army was sending 850 soldiers to guard the Hoover Dam. A military camp—originally named Camp Sibert—was established on the southern edge of Boulder City in April 1941. Camp Sibert was built on the former site of housing used by Hoover Dam construction workers, where infrastructure like streets, curbs, and utility connections already existed. This made it easier and faster for the Army to establish the military camp.

Its primary purpose was to train military police and support dam security operations. While these troops were not intended to fully replace Reclamation’s rangers, they supported efforts by conducting patrols, convoying vehicles, and reinforcing security procedures.

When it was discovered that another Camp Sibert already existed in Alabama, the Army renamed it to Camp Williston on September 30, 1942.

The camp published its own newspaper, initially called *The Sibert Scorpion* and later renamed *The Desert Scorpion* after the name change. Like many camp newspapers during the war, it served to share news and build morale.

Security at the Dam during the Camp Williston Era

Hoover Dam had employee checking stations. There were Bureau of Reclamation employees being checked, along with other operating agencies, including ones such as the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. Lillian Morrison, a longtime Bureau of Reclamation employee, recalled the heightened security measures in place during the war in an oral history:

“When we went down [to work], we got out of the main channel of [traffic] because we were going to go right on through as soon as they checked everybody’s [badge]. The tourists came down, but they didn’t get out here in this little bypass that the government workers were going through. They had to wait until so many cars were there. And then the Camp Williston soldiers took them across. . .

They kept our badges [at the gate]. If our badge wasn’t there on the board, we just had to wait until the administration building got it straightened up and got a badge down there for us. They were very careful that everyone who was going to work that day had a badge. . .”

In addition to physical checkpoints and patrols, authorities explored other security measures such as camouflage, decoy dams, and protections against potential air attacks.

African American Troops

African American soldiers were among those stationed at the camp. However, they faced racial discrimination. Local newspapers accused them of misconduct, and fundraising efforts for the local USO building faltered due to objections about Black soldiers using the facility.

The situation grew more tense when officials were concerned that African American troops might sympathize with the striking African American workers at the Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI) defense plant. In response, the company brought in white troops as outside reinforcements, reflecting a lack of trust in the African American soldiers’ loyalty to enforcement efforts. These white troops were assigned to support perimeter security around the plant. Once the strike tensions eased, the African American units were relocated before the end of 1942.

Camp Closure and the End of Army Involvement

Despite the ongoing training at Camp Williston, by September 1943, Reclamation was informed that the Army would be withdrawing its presence. This decision was based on the relatively low level of security incidents at the site, and the belief that Reclamation rangers could adequately manage security moving forward. Troops departed for Fort Custer in Michigan on March 9, 1944. The camp was fully abandoned on April 30, 1944 and put up for sale in October of that year.

After the Army's departure, dam security was once again fully managed by Reclamation, with additional support from the National Park Service at nearby Lake Mead.

Questions for Reading 1, Quotations to Consider, and Photos

1. Where is the location of the Hoover Dam, and what was one of its purposes during war time?
2. Why did the name of the dam change from Hoover Dam to Boulder Dam and back again?
3. Why was Camp Sibert, later named Camp Williston, established? What did soldiers do who were stationed there?
4. How did public tensions influence the decision to relocate the African American troops?
5. Who took over security measures after the closing of Camp Williston? (And, who manages the Hoover Dam today?)

Reading 2: Newspaper Article

Camp Sibert, New Army Post at Boulder, To Be Occupied in Near Future by 850 Men; Work on Barracks Progresses

Nevada State Journal, March 28, 1941

Camp Sibert, chief link in an army program to ring famous Boulder dam with strong defenses, will be occupied by about 850 military police within the next few weeks following completion of the camp's 48 new buildings, announces Lieutenant Colonel Elmer G. Thomas, constructing quartermaster in charge of seven defense projects in Nevada and Utah.

The camp buildings, located on eight Boulder City, Nev., blocks formerly occupied by dwellings erected by Six Companies during construction of the mammoth dam, are rapidly

being completed, said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas following an inspection visit to Boulder City.

He was accompanied by William D. Joardn, former New York construction company official, now chief engineer for quartermaster defense projects in this area with headquarters at [Ogden, Utah](#).

'Twenty-six of the 48 frame buildings in the new camp are practically ready for occupancy by troops, and the other 22 buildings will be ready in a week or so,' said Colonel Thomas.

The camp has barracks for 945 men, but original units are expected to total only 850. June 1 was the original occupancy date, but with many buildings complete some officers and men are expected before then, he said.

Boulder City's warm spring weather, a tourist attraction, has also been an invaluable aid to speedy construction of the camp. Looking ahead, army chiefs have erected the camp buildings with an eye to making them as cool as possible under a scorching summer sun which sometimes makes Boulder a rival for parts of Death Valley nearby, one of the hottest places on earth.

Outside walls of barracks, mess halls, hospital buildings, warehouses and other camp structures have been painted cream with grey trim, light colors which reflect heat. Roofs are green. Inside, the buildings are insulated with plywood and composition board. Air conditioning is not in the original installation, but a forced draft heating system can easily be converted into a cooling apparatus if found necessary.

Another cooling facility, Lake Mead's fine swimming beaches, undoubtedly will be widely used by the soldier-guards. Shores of [Lake Mead](#), world's largest man-made lake, are only a few miles from Camp Sibert and not far from the huge hydro-electric project which the men will guard. . .

Painting has progressed to the three-coat stage on many of the new buildings. Plumbing has been installed in most. Cooking stoves – iron coal burners – have been set up in mess halls. Electric deep fat fryers are part of the cullinary equipment. Large electric refrigerators are being uncrated.

A new trailer and tent camp, occupied by contractors' employees and their families, has sprung up near Boulder City during the camp's construction. Barred from a regular tourist area near Lake Mead's shore by a 30-day limit for campers, the workers were provided with a level area near Camp Sibert, which, like Camp Sibert, was used by the Six Companies during the dam's construction. Water and electrical connections were made available, and the workmen now have a full-fledged camp of their own with seven trailers and three tents.

Another part of the new Boulder dam defenses is a Marine Corps airplane hangar, recently completed but not yet in use, at Boulder City airport.

Questions for Reading 2

1. How many soldiers were stationed at Camp Sibert (later called Camp Williston), and how many could the camp accommodate at full capacity?
2. What date was originally set for occupancy of Camp Sibert? Did they meet or surpass this date? (You may wish to connect to Reading 1.)
3. How were the engineers thoughtful of the local environment and weather conditions when designing Camp Sibert?
4. Why might the army have chosen to reuse land previously developed by construction companies at the Hoover dam?

Reading 3: Newspaper Article

Military Police Unit Camps at Ely

Reno Gazette-Journal, September 5, 1941

Ely, Sept. 4. -- En route from Fort Lewis, Wash., where they recently engaged in the war games, to their home base at Camp Sibert, near Boulder Dam, 136 members of Military Police (MP) Battalion 524 camped overnight on the court house lawn here Monday.

Under the command of Major Levi Ankey, the soldiers were convoying fifty-eight army units, mainly 'jeeps' back to the Camp Sibert base. They left Twin Falls at six o'clock Monday morning on their fourth day out of Fort Lewis, and planned to arrive in Boulder City in the early afternoon of September 2.

The convoy arrived during the annual Labor Day celebration and following Major Ankeny's approval the mechanized units paraded through Ely to give Labor Day celebrants a chance to view some of the army's newest motorized equipment. It is the first convoy to use U.S. route No. 93 through Ely.

The battalion, which originated at Fort Riley, Kansas, is composed of eight hundred men and was used for policing work during the army maneuvers in Washington. Two hundred members were left to guard Boulder Dam when the battalion started its northward trek two months ago. The remaining members, under the command of Lieut.-Col. Thornton Chase, commanding officer of the battalion, returned to Camp Sibert by train, with the 136 convoy men selected to take the equipment to southern Nevada.

Sheriff J. E. Orrock, City Marshal H.J. Marriot, the county and city police forces and members of the defense council under the guidance of Chairman A.E. Briggs, directed traffic and aided in selecting the campsite when the convoy arrived.

Questions for Reading 3

1. What kind of equipment was the convoy transporting and why?
2. How many soldiers were left behind to guard Hoover (Boulder) Dam?
3. How might the presence of the military convoy in Ely on Labor Day have impacted local morale or support?
4. Using a map and the locations mentioned in the text, trace a likely route from Fort Lewis, Washington, to Camp Sibert near Boulder City. What challenges might they have faced on the route?
5. How may troop movements like this have served both practical purposes and public relations goals during the war?

Lesson Closing

Answer the essential question: How was the Hoover Dam protected during World War II, and what role did the military at Camp Williston play in that effort?

Additional Resources

[Camp Williston Racism from “Boulder City History,”](#) Boulder City Magazine

[Hoover and Davis Dams,](#) from National Park Service

[Lillian Morrison interview, 1996: transcript,](#) from University of Nevada Las Vegas

Note: Lillian Morrison was quoted in Reading 1. Morrison was a civilian employee working for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation at the Hoover Dam during the war. She recalls her local experiences, along with a few connections to Camp Williston. Note that some language used to describe the workers is not to be used today and should be shared with students in that way.

[Nevada Part VII: To War and Beyond](#) by Nevada Magazine

[Safeguarding Hoover Dam during World War II](#) from The National Archives

Lesson 4: Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada: Comparing and Connecting WWII Home Front Cities

About this Lesson

This lesson is part of a series teaching about the World War II home front, with [Boulder City and Henderson, Nevada](#) designated as a [World War II Heritage City](#). This lesson includes photos, readings, and a culminating project. The photos highlight local aspects of the wartime effort, including industrial production at Basic Magnesium Inc (BMI) and military training and dam security at Camp Williston at the Hoover (formerly Boulder) Dam. Reading 1 shares highlights of BMI and its workers contributions. The second reading connects the region to the designation of a Heritage City. The culminating project contributes to learners' understandings of the city as a WWII Heritage City, with the opportunity to combine themes from the three other lessons in the Boulder City and Henderson [lesson collection](#). This is to summarize the city's contributions and encourage connections to the overall home front efforts.

Objectives:

In a culminating product:

- a. Describe the development and contributions of Basic Magnesium Inc to the Allied war effort.
- b. Explain the roles and challenges faced by workers in the local wartime industries, including women and African American workers.
- c. Describe the security measures taken to protect Hoover Dam and the military training conducted at Camp Williston.
- d. (Optional) Compare and contrast Boulder City and Henderson with other heritage cities or World War II home front locations.

Materials for Students:

1. Photos: Figures 22-26 (*can be displayed digitally*)
2. Readings 1, 2

3. Maps, project materials (as needed)
4. Student graphic organizers (See Figure 27 at end of lesson, for reference)
 - Create Comparison Matrices for your students to use. To compare two cities, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows. Label the left column Theme/Topic and the other columns City 1 and City 2. For a Comparison Matrix for three cities simply add an additional column.
 - Create two Single-Point Rubrics to assist students' self-assessment. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting teacher-selected standards. One is for assessing proficiency in meeting objectives.
 - For the rubric on standards, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improvement," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Standard)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Standard." Leave the first and third columns blank. In each row of the second column identify a Standard and indicate a space for noting the evidence for meeting the standard. Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column.
 - For the rubric on objectives, create a one-page sheet with three columns and four rows of content. Label the first column "Areas for Improving toward Objective," the second column, "Proficient (Meeting Objective)," and the third column, "Areas of Exceeding Objective." Leave the first and third columns blank. In the four rows of the second column identify these four objectives:
 - a. Describe the development and contributions of Basic Magnesium Inc to the Allied war effort.
 - b. Explain the roles and challenges faced by workers in the local wartime industries, including women and African American workers.
 - c. Describe the security measures taken to protect Hoover Dam and the military training conducted at Camp Williston.
 - d. *Optional:* Compare and contrast Boulder City and Henderson with other heritage cities or World War II home front locations.

Include a space at the bottom of the page for assigning points for each column. See the last photo of this lesson for reference.



Getting Started: Essential Question

Why was Boulder City and Henderson chosen as a World War II Heritage City, and what are its similarities and differences to other home front cities?

Photos

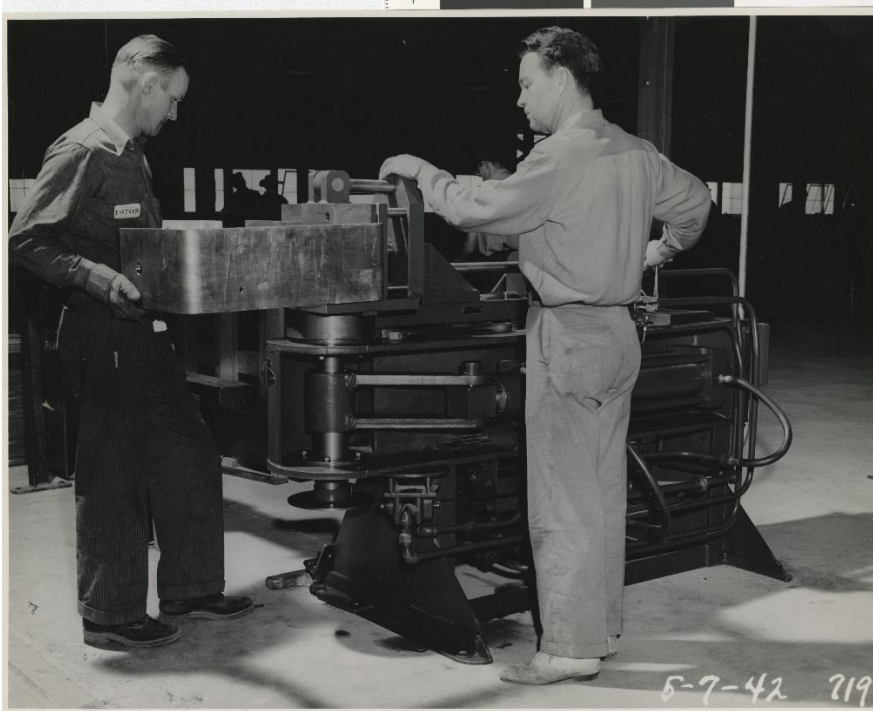


Figure 22: Unidentified men working with a hydraulic bending machine at Basic Magnesium Inc. May 7, 1942. (Credit: pho020382. Victor Kunkel Photograph Collection. PH-00072. Special Collections and Archives, University Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada.)



Figure 23: Henderson [BASIC], NV. 1943-45 women war workers at BASIC Magnesium, Inc. April 13, 1943 or '44 [UNLS 0260:0005; Dow Metals Collection] (Credit: Image provided by Boulder City / Hoover Dam Museum.)



Figure 24: Henderson [BASIC], NV. 1943-45 magnesium ingots produced for domestic use [note women workers] October 1, 1943 [UNLS 0254:0114; Henderson Public Library Collection] (Credit: Image provided by Boulder City / Hoover Dam Museum.)

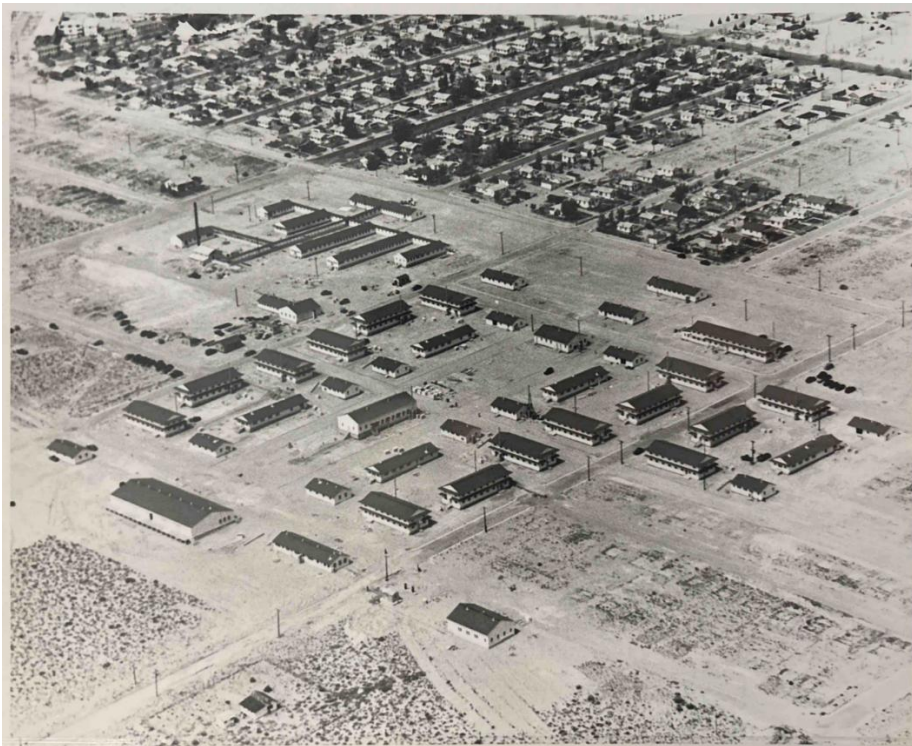


Figure 25: Camp Sibert, later named Camp Williston, 1941. Soldiers at the camp were involved in training and security at Boulder Dam, now Hoover Dam. (Credit: Image provided by Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum.)



Figure 26: Two soldiers who served as cooks for the Company B 524th Military Police Battalion. Howard Boutin is on the right, unidentified on the left. Boutin labeled this 1941 photo as “Camp Sibert – Nevada.” (Credit: Image provided by Boulder City/Hoover Dam Museum.)



Quotation to consider:

“Camp Sibert is located in the southern part of government-owned Boulder City, about eight city blocks formerly occupied by dwellings erected by the Six Companies during construction of Boulder dam several years ago. All the dwellings had been removed, but the streets, curbs and gutters, sewer and water connections were still on the ground, making easier the army’s speedy construction of the cantonment. . .

‘On-time completion of this important new military police camp makes prompt action possible in carrying out the army’s plan to station soldiers at Boulder City for protection of Boulder dam, one of the world’s great water-electric engineering marvels,’ said Lieutenant Colonel Thomas. . .”

- “Unit Occupies Boulder Camp,” *Nevada State Journal*, April 25, 1941

Note: Camp Sibert was renamed Camp Williston in September 1942. Boulder Dam is the Hoover Dam.



By the numbers:

Before Basic Magnesium Inc. (BMI), the population in southern Nevada was 16,384.

BMI brought an additional 13,000 people to the area, making it about 29,384.

By the end of the 1940s the population of southern Nevada had grown to 48,289. This is for the entirety of Clark County. Broken down: 5,715 resided in Henderson, and 3,903 in Boulder City. The rest were North Las Vegas and Las Vegas.

Reading 1: Newsletter Article

Teacher Tip: The following is from the Basic Bombardier, an employee newsletter for Basic Magnesium, Inc. (BMI), archived with [Henderson Public Libraries](#). To learn more about BMI, see [Lesson 1](#). To learn more about work and challenges faced by African American workers at BMI, see [Lesson 2](#). The article does not connect to Camp Williston (as seen in photos and described in the Quotation to Consider); if wanting to teach or review this topic, see [Lesson 3](#).

We Had a Good Job and We Did It

By Al Winberg

Basic Bombardier, Vol. 11, no. 29, September 9, 1944.

One of the most amazing, but expected, results of WPB (War Production Board) orders to discontinue production of magnesium at BMI the other day was the determined looks upon the faces of our workers – determined to complete the job with the same serious attitude that got it under way.

Practically every man and woman among us has someone in the family in uniform. Many of us have yet to settle down after hearing of distressing war casualties brought right to our own doorsteps.

Evening of the score with a common enemy kept hundreds of people here who otherwise may have left for rosier spots. If, as, and when this greatest of all magnesium plants folds up, maybe in December as present schedules indicate, everyone who had even the remotest part in the BIG JOB in the desert may assume personal credit for having contributed an outstanding part in the winning of the war.

Who fought the sand storms and howling winds and driving rains of the Nevada wastelands and came out on top? Who went fifteen miles to a shopping center for food in a packed, stinking, broken down fleet of antiquated busses? Who sweat through the 120 and more degrees of burning sun to give our fighting men the stuff it took to bring Victory home? YOU did! You beefed and you laughed, but you did a swell job. You helped. Give yourself credit! You helped knock off the Germans. . .

Questions for Reading 1, Photos, and Quotation to Consider

1. Describe the connection of each photo to Boulder City and Henderson’s designation as a Heritage City.
2. Consider the quotation to consider: Why was the Hoover (Boulder) Dam considered a potential target? How did this connect to the establishment of Camp Williston?
3. How did Basic Magnesium Inc support wartime industry and production?
4. How does the story of BMI and its workers connect to the bigger picture of how American factories and workers supported the war effort? Use what you learned in this text and in previous lessons to support your answer.

Reading 2: Heritage City Designation

Excerpt from: “[House Report 115-998](#), “*To Direct the Secretary of the Interior to Annually Designate at Least One City in The United States as An ‘American World War II Heritage City,’ and for other purposes*” (October 30, 2018)

“ . . .PURPOSE OF THE BILL

The purpose of H.R. 6118 is to direct the Secretary of the Interior to annually designate at least one city in the United States as an “American World War II Heritage City”.

BACKGROUND AND NEED FOR LEGISLATION

On December 7, 1941, military forces of the Empire of Japan attacked the U.S. Naval Fleet and ground bases at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. On December 8, 1941, one day after what President Roosevelt referred to as, “a date which will live in infamy,” the United States declared war against the Empire of Japan. Three days later, on December 11, 1941, Japan’s ally, Germany, declared war on the United States. Sixteen million Americans, mostly young working-age men, served in the military during World War II, out of an overall United States population of 113 million.

While an unprecedented number of Americans served in World War II, the country drastically increased its war production on the home front, serving not only the needs of

the armed forces of the United States but her allies as well--in what President Franklin Roosevelt called “The Arsenal of Democracy.” The combination of millions serving in the military, during a period of necessary and drastic increases in production, led to significant social changes on the American home front.

The World War II period resulted in the largest number of people migrating within the United States in the history of the country. Individuals and families relocated to industrial centers for good paying jobs out of a sense of patriotic duty. Many industrial centers became “boomtowns,” growing at phenomenal rates. One example, the City of Richmond, California, grew from a population of under 24,000 to over 100,000 during the war. . .”

Questions for Reading 2 and By the Numbers

1. What was the purpose of the bill (H.R. 6118) according to the report?
2. What contributed to the population growth in Boulder City and Henderson? Why do you think Boulder City and Henderson was designated as a World War II Heritage City? Connect details from the bill and evidence from the first reading, and/or other readings from the lessons.
3. Are there other cities you think of when considering home front contributions during wartime? Which, and why?

Culminating Activity/Mastery Product

To demonstrate student understanding, support students in creating a final product that meets the following objectives:

- a. Describe the development and contributions of Basic Magnesium Inc to the Allied war effort.
- b. Explain the roles and challenges faced by workers in the local wartime industries, including women and African American workers.
- c. Describe the security measures taken to protect Hoover Dam and the military training conducted at Camp Williston.
- d. *Optional:* Compare and contrast Boulder City and Henderson with other heritage cities or World War II home front locations.

Mastery products should be:

. . . **student-led;** Students work as individuals or in collaborative groups.

. . . **student-directed:** Students are offered a variety of choices for product type.

. . . **student-organized**; Teacher facilitates by providing students with the comparison matrices and/or resource links from throughout the series of lessons.

. . . **student-assessed**; Teacher supports student self-assessment and reflection by providing students single-point rubrics to assess for meeting standards and/or lesson objectives.

Note: Depending on time and scope, the comparison of Boulder City and Henderson to another WWII Heritage or home front city(s) within the mastery product (objectives) may be omitted. However, comparing cities is recommended, as it connects students to a deeper understanding of the WWII home front.

Examples of mastery product choices include, but are not limited to:

- **Written:** Letter (opinion or informative), essay, poem, narratives, biography, articles, class book or children's book, speech or debate (then presented orally), blog / website, plaque or historical displays, pamphlets or rack cards
- **Graphic Organizers:** timeline, flowcharts, mind or concept content maps, Venn diagrams, comparison matrices, posters
- **Artistic Expression:** song, dance, theater (ex. skits), 3-D models, dioramas, photo journal, stamp and coin designs, visual art, architecture/building or monument, museum design
- **Media design and creation:** podcast, historical markers, social media content, interactive virtual maps or tours, infographics, video, comic strips or graphics, game design, slideshows, digital scrapbook

Please view the [NPS Heritage cities lesson collection](#) for information and resources on other cities.

Single-Point Rubric

Areas for Improvement	Proficient (Meeting Standard)	Areas of Exceeding Standard
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
	Standard: _____ Evidence of meeting standard: •	
Points		

Figure 27: Single-Point Rubric (Standards; Blank) [Teacher selects priority standards for assessment.] Courtesy of Sarah Nestor Lane.

Acknowledgment

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