

# Perspective: African American Life circa 1900

## PART 1

**Estimated Time Required: One class period, approximately 55 minutes as written, additional time may be added with discussion at the end of the class period.**

### DRIVING QUESTIONS

Using the lives of the domestic staff working for the Dooley family at Maymont Mansion as a case study, what are the experiences of African Americans in the Jim Crow south during the early twentieth century?

### STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

I will analyze secondary source documents describing the lives of African Americans employed at Maymont estate. I will cite examples from the secondary source document when I complete a biographical graphic organizer exploring the experiences of a specific individual. I will know that I am successful when I am able to state one inference and justify my stance using information from the text for each section of the biographical graphic organizer.

### MATERIALS NEEDED

- Copies of [Historical Figures Choice Board](#)
- Pens, pencils and highlighters

### INTRODUCTION

(15 MINUTES)

Instructor should ask students (can be used as a warm up exercise to be completed before class begins) “What do you think it would be like to work as a staff member (a maid, butler or cook) in the home of a millionaire?”

See [Curiosity Cultivation](#)—COPY into a Google Folder you create to keep your students' responses private.

Potential Follow Up Questions:

- “Can anyone think of examples of maids or butlers that they have read about or seen on T.V. or in the movies?”
- “Can you describe what type of work they do?”
- “What does a cook/maid/butler/ladies maid/chauffeur do?”
- “What hours of the day would you work?”
- “How many hours a day would you be at work?”
- “How do you think this would be different 100 years ago in the ‘Gilded Age’ Era?”
- “Many people who worked inside the homes of the wealthy in Virginia were African American, what laws or prejudices may have affected their lives?” (anticipated response: Jim Crow Laws, Segregation)
- “People who work inside of homes are often called domestic workers, does anyone know what ‘domestic’ means? Has anyone heard the term ‘domestic’ before?” (anticipated response: domesticated animals, domestic violence)

Possible misunderstandings

- Students may not understand that each role in domestic service has a specific job. The butler and house maid do not cook, that is the job of the cook.
- The person who cooks inside a home is referred to as a “cook”, not a chef.
- In the Gilded Age, a valet does not drive cars, he is in charge of the gentleman’s wardrobe.
- Students are unlikely to understand why people would want so much help from a non-family member.
- Students are unlikely to understand that the inequality of the time period made it possible for people to afford so much help.

The instructor should review material from USII.4 and USII.6 or VUS.8 so that students are able to access prior knowledge. The instructor may do this by developing a formative assessment and integrating technology such as plinkers or kahoot. This activity can be completed prior to this lesson, or as an integrated piece.

Prior Knowledge should include:

- The 13th, 14th and 15th amendments.
- Jim Crow Laws and segregation.
- Understanding of tenements and hazards of overcrowding in cities.
- Working conditions in factories.
- Racism toward immigrants, African Americans, indigenous peoples.
- Meaning of Gilded Age and wealthy individuals associated with it (Carnegie, Vanderbilt, Rockefeller).
- Progressive reforms including Food and Drug Standards, Prohibition and Woman Suffrage.

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### MAYMONT ESTATE BACKGROUND

#### POWERPOINT SLIDES

Maymont was completed in 1893 as the home of James Henry Dooley and Sarah O. May Dooley. They lived at Maymont from 1893 to the 1920s when they both passed away.

James H. Dooley was the son of Irish Immigrants. He grew up in a large middle class family and was well educated. He graduated from college with a degree in law. He became a millionaire by investing in railroads such as the Chesapeake and Ohio as well as venturing into other businesses.

Sarah O. May Dooley was from rural Lunenburg County. She was the daughter of a physician and had many siblings. She grew up near her grandparents plantation.

James and Sallie married in 1869 and lived in Richmond until they completed Maymont in 1893. While they lived at Maymont, they hired 10-12 domestic workers which included maids, butlers, chauffeur, lady's maid, cook and others. The biographies provided are of individuals known to have worked for the Dooleys while they lived at Maymont estate. These biographies have been compiled from census data and oral history from the descendents of the individuals who worked at Maymont. Additional historical information has been added to expand the historical narrative.

Teacher may state: "We spend a lot of time in history class learning about famous people from the past, but a lot of students are just as interested, or maybe even more interested, in what life was like for everyday people. We can understand the period better through reading secondary sources that tell us about the lives of regular people. Today we are going to learn what life was like for the people who worked at Maymont from 1893 until the 1920s."

### ACTIVITY

(20-25 MINUTES)

See [Student Page 1](#). Explain to students that they will be provided a specific biography. The instructor can assign biographies at random or use the included "[choice board](#)" to have students select their own biographies.

Students should be provided with a biography and a biographical graphic organizer (biographies and organizers are accessible in the choice board document).

Students should read their biography. Then complete the biographical graphic organizer using information from the text to support their answer. Students should copy the organizers into the class or a student owned google folder before completing it in order to keep their responses private.

Example: James Carter may have thought that: it was important to serve his country because he enlisted in the United States army when WWI started.

Students should be given time to complete an example for each section of the graphic organizer.

### CONCLUSION

(15 MINUTES)

Students should share their answers and reasoning with the class. With any additional time, students should compare and discuss the varied life experiences of the individuals examined. How were the responsibilities of the butler different from that of a maid. What were some hobbies of the individuals? What did they do outside of work? How were they remembered by their children? Why are the stories of these individuals important to learn about? How do the stories of their lives change or influence your thoughts about history? Why might they have chosen to work at the Dooley house? What other opportunities were available to working class African Americans at that time? What do you think about their choice to work for the Dooleys?



This program has been funded in part by a grant from Virginia Humanities. A special thank you to our curriculum experts who assisted in the development, editing and pilot implementation:

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