

DOCUMENT PACKET TEACHER'S GUIDE

This guide provides a brief commentary about each of the documents included in the packets for the five forgotten figures that students analyze in this lesson:

[Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher](#)

[Elizabeth Jennings](#)

[Clara Luper](#)

[George McLaurin](#)

[Samuel W. Tucker](#)

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher

Secondary Source: “Fisher, Ada Lois Sipuel (1924-1995)”

This article can be found in *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* published by the Oklahoma Historical Society. Written by lawyer Melvin C. Hall, it is a thorough biography of Fisher that provides students with an in-depth understanding of the legal issues that initially prevented but ultimately enabled Fisher to be admitted to the University of Oklahoma’s law school. Hall also highlights the important contributions made by Fisher in the years following her graduation from OU.

Primary Source: Excerpts from *A Matter of Black and White: The Autobiography of Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher*

In the first excerpt from her autobiography, Fisher recalls her meeting with civil rights activist and journalist Roscoe Dunjee and NAACP regional director Dr. W. A. J. Bullock. The meeting was arranged to determine if Fisher would be up to the task of working to integrate OU’s law school. Fisher reveals that she knew that she would certainly be up to the challenge. In the brief second excerpt, Fisher recalls the moment when she learned that the NAACP had chosen her to challenge Oklahoma’s segregation laws. In the third excerpt, Fisher recalls what was for her the most humiliating aspect of her experience as a law student at OU, when she was subjected to “partial segregation” (see George McLaurin topic below).

Primary Source: “Additional Instructions with Respect to Facilities Available to Colored Students”

This notice was distributed to African American students shortly after OU was integrated by George McLaurin in 1948. (Fisher followed soon after when she integrated the law school.) As students read this notice, they will hopefully imagine how difficult things would have been for them if they had been in the same position as OU’s first Black students. They would have had to keep track of exactly where and when they could eat, study, or use the bathroom, and if they did not abide by these stipulations, they were at risk of retribution from those students, faculty, and administrators who opposed integration.

Photograph: Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher meeting with OU President George Lynn Cross

This image shows Fisher consulting with President Cross around the time of her arrival at OU. The situation surrounding the integration of OU was complicated. The photo attests to the fact that Cross held Fisher in high regard and was determined to ensure that her experience as a law student at OU would be worthwhile. He was a supporter of integration, but he was faced with the difficult task of implementing it at an institution where a significant number of people still opposed it. Ultimately, the OU Board of Regents resolved to admit Fisher under a policy of “partial segregation.” In her autobiography, she makes it clear how hurtful and unjust this policy was to her and others.

Elizabeth Jennings

Secondary Source: “The Woman Who Refused to Leave a Whites-Only Streetcar”

Written in 2018 by Allison C. Meier, this article was published by *JSTOR Daily*. It provides excellent insight into Jennings’ forgotten act of defiance. Meier’s account of the Jennings incident is interspersed with details about the difficulties that Blacks faced while living in mid-19th Century New York City. She also provides details about the impact that Jennings’ case had on the desegregation of public transit in New York City and describes the life Jennings led in the years following the incident.

If you have online access to the *New York Times*, another potential secondary source is the article [The Schoolteacher on the Streetcar](#).

Primary Source: “Outrage upon Colored Persons”

This letter was read at a church rally the day after the streetcar incident and posted in *The New York Tribune*, a paper which was edited by abolitionist Horace Greeley. Through her narrative, Jennings recalls the incident in vivid detail. Students should note that this letter was published to draw attention to the unjust treatment that African Americans faced as passengers of New York City’s new transit system.

Primary Source: “Rights of Colored People Vindicated”

This article was originally published in the *Anti-Slavery Standard* before being published in an Ohio abolitionist paper, the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. The article describes Jennings’s court case in great detail and articulates a hope that the segregation of New York’s transit system is nearing an end. The author goes on to point out two discouraging facts that students should note. First, because of her race, Jennings did not receive the full compensation to which she was entitled. Second, another African American woman, Caroline Stedman, was prevented from getting on a streetcar in spite of bad weather and the judge’s verdict.

Photograph: Elizabeth Jennings

This portrait of Jennings was taken in the late 19th Century, although the exact date is unknown. It is the only image of Jennings known to exist. Students might notice that this is the same image that appears in the lesson slides—an indication that there is not much physical evidence left that documents Jennings’ life. While photography was in its infancy when the streetcar incident occurred in the 1850s, the fact that only one photograph of Jennings exists from her later years indicates that she lived in relative obscurity.

Clara Luper

Secondary Source: “Luper, Clara Shepard (1923-2011)”

This article can be found in *The Encyclopedia of Oklahoma History and Culture* published by the Oklahoma Historical Society. Written by Stefanie Lee Decker, it provides students with details about Luper’s education and career as an educator and civil rights activist and the chain of events that led to the pivotal sit-in at Katz Drug Store.

Other potential secondary sources for Clara Luper include obituaries from [*The Washington Post*](#) and the [*Los Angeles Times*](#).

Primary Source: Excerpts from *Behold the Walls*, the autobiography of Clara Luper

In the first autobiography excerpt, Luper recalls the nonviolent principles that she and the protestors kept in mind as they prepared to begin the sit-in at Katz Drug Store: investigation, negotiation, education, and demonstration. In the following two excerpts, Luper recollects the start and finish of the first sit-in in vivid and riveting detail. Students will get a sense of how tense the situation was, and they will understand the courage that was required of the adults and children who participated. In the final excerpt, Luper recalls that she not only received obscene phone calls from Whites but spoke with a couple of Black callers who accused her of disgracing her race. In considering the pushback that was demonstrated by some of the White and Black members of the community, students may realize one of the reasons why this sit-in is not well-remembered—it did not have widespread public approval.

Photograph: Greensboro Plaque

This plaque can be found in downtown Greensboro, NC, outside the Woolworth’s where the most famous sit-ins were held in 1960. There are several errors that students might note on the plaque. The most notable is that the plaque identifies the store as the site of the “first lunch counter sit-in.” (Even Luper’s sit-in was not the first.) The plaque also labels the store as the “birthplace of the civil rights movement.” Historians agree that the movement began well before the Greensboro sit-ins, with many identifying the starting date as 1954. It is important, when asking students to identify the errors in the plaque, to emphasize the bravery exhibited by the four men who started the Greensboro sit-ins. Although they were not the first, the sit-in they organized was the one that the national media finally seized upon, and their actions started a chain reaction across the country that led to widespread desegregation at lunch counters. However, that sit-in would not have been possible had it not been for the actions of Luper and others in Oklahoma City, as well as protestors at several other prior sit-ins.

Photograph: Katz Drug Store Sit-In

In this photo, students can see the fear in the eyes of the children as they bravely sit at the lunch counter at Katz Drug Store to protest segregation. Ayanna Najuma, who was seven at the time, glances at the camera. Seeing this photo will hopefully enable students to understand the bravery of the participants, who were met with racial slurs and threats of violence from store patrons and members of the community.

George McLaurin

Secondary Source: “Separate and Unequal”

This article appeared in an issue of the *OU Daily* in May 2017. It offers a thorough summary of the events that led up to McLaurin’s admission to the University of Oklahoma College of Education as the university’s first Black student. The article also details the discrimination to which he was subjected even after he began classes, and it describes how this unconstitutional treatment prompted Thurgood Marshall to take McLaurin’s case before the Supreme Court. The article concludes by analyzing the significance of the Supreme Court’s verdict and comparing it to another case that was ongoing at that time (*Sweatt v. Painter*).

Primary Source: “Negro Admitted to O.U.”

This article appeared in *Sooner Magazine* immediately after McLaurin had started classes. The article is noteworthy because it was one of the only instances in which McLaurin made a statement to the press. Although McLaurin expressed gratitude for the treatment he had received, his statement does not hint at the humiliation he must have felt in being forced to learn in a closet on the side of the classroom. Also noteworthy is the author’s downplaying of the ludicrous learning environment that the Board of Regents arranged for McLaurin, as the author notes that nothing about the class was “out of the ordinary.”

Primary Source: Notes from Meeting of the OU Board of Regents, October 10, 1948

As they read this excerpt from the notes recorded during a meeting of the OU Board of Regents, students will have the opportunity to delve into the testimony of OU Financial Vice President Roscoe Cate. Cate outlines two different plans for the Board to consider. The first would establish a policy of “partial segregation,” which would force McLaurin to learn in a closet, study at a separate desk in the library, and use a separate toilet from the other students. The second plan would enforce “complete segregation,” which would force McLaurin to learn in total isolation from other students. Cate goes on to list the many issues that would arise as a result of complete segregation, but he does not consider the criticism that OU would ultimately face from some members of the public and media once the policy of partial segregation was eventually implemented.

Photographs: Three Angles of the “Partial Segregation” Enforced by the OU Board of Regents

These photos should allow students to better understand the humiliating conditions of “partial segregation” to which McLaurin was subjected. The first photo shows McLaurin sitting at a desk in an adjacent anteroom while watching his White classmates and professor interact in the classroom. Taken from slightly different vantage points, the second and third photos will show students exactly where McLaurin was ordered to sit in relation to his peers.

Samuel W. Tucker

Secondary Source: “Out of the Attic: Samuel Tucker’s 1939 Library Sit-In”

This article was written by staff members of the Office of Historic Alexandria [Va.] and published by the *Alexandria Times* in a weekly column called “Out of the Attic.” It chronicles the events that led up to one of America’s first sit-ins. In attempting to determine why Tucker and the protestors have been forgotten, students should note that, near the end of the article, the writers address that initially the sit-in did not have its intended effect, as it expedited the construction of a segregated library. However, the article acknowledges that Tucker’s and the protestors’ efforts ultimately played a crucial role in ending segregation in the city of Alexandria.

Primary Source: Samuel W. Tucker’s Letter to Librarian Katharine Scoggin

Sullivan quotes this letter in her article. Tucker wrote the letter to Alexandria head librarian Katharine Scoggin on February 13, 1940, to protest the city’s decision to construct a segregated library rather than grant Alexandria’s Black citizens privileges at the existing library. Tucker’s refusal to accept the unfair treatment that he and others were continuing to receive foreshadows the many important contributions he would make over the course of the civil rights movement.

Primary Source: “Va. Library War in Court Again”

Shortly after the sit-in, this article appeared in a Baltimore newspaper known as *The Afro-American*. The article provides details of the sit-in and the early phases of the legal process that followed it. Although the unknown writer seems intent on providing a straightforward account of the incident, the writer also seems to be seeking to draw the ire of readers at the fact that a “lily-white policy” of discrimination is carried out with taxpayers’ funds. At the same time, the writer assures readers that a fight against the policy is underway.

Photographs: Front Pages from the *Alexandria Gazette*

These front pages from the August 29, 1939, and January 11, 1940, issues of the *Alexandria Gazette* should demonstrate to students that the story of the library sit-in was overshadowed by global events both immediately after and several months following the protest. Above the earlier article is a headline that begins, “Hitler’s Reply to...” The second article sits beneath a headline that reads, “Nazis Routed...”