



#### LESSON

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject: History and Social Studies

Time needed: 1 to 2 class

periods

### **MATERIALS**

The North Star Video is highly recommended, but not required. This lesson uses the North Star segment about Lena Smith titled "Fearless and from the West"

Copies of handouts and primary sources

Markers and paper for poster making

### NORTH STAR CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### LENA SMITH: FEARLESS AND FROM THE WEST

### **OVERVIEW**

In this lesson, students read some of the racist comments surrounding a pivotal housing discrimination case in South Minneapolis, and they identify Lena Smith's character and goals as a lawyer in that case. For the final project, students research and analyze a neighborhoods' changing demographics, predict changes, and suggest ways to peacefully address potential future problems in that neighborhood.

### **BACKGROUND**

For decades, housing segregation in Minnesota was enforced through formal systems of restrictive covenants in real estate transactions, and informal systems of biased real estate brokers, biased mortgage support, neighborhood intimidation, and self-restriction.

From the 1860s to 1900, African Americans moved into neighborhoods where immigrants settled, forming enclaves within larger neighborhoods. During this time, the African American population in Minnesota's cities was too small for informal methods of segregation to become identifiably entrenched.

As the immigration of Europeans and migration of Southern blacks increased at the turn of the century, competition for housing increased. Often employed in low-wage jobs, blacks sought housing that was close to jobs or transportation routes. As white immigrants moved up the socio-economic ladder and into more prestigious neighborhoods, blacks migrants moved into the available housing they left behind. After World War I, the arrival of new Southern blacks caused new housing pressures. With new customs and manners, these blacks were castigated by both whites and blacks. Whites began to use restrictive housing covenants to prevent blacks from moving into their neighborhoods, while black neighborhoods placed the newcomers at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

In the 1920s and 1930s, community services such as the Phyllis Wheatly house in Minneapolis and the Hallie Q. Brown house in St. Paul were established and began to campaign for improved housing for blacks. Blacks were living in concentrated neighborhoods with poor housing throughout the Great Depressions. However, it is interesting to note that literacy rates in those neighborhoods were high and crime was low.

In the summer of 1931, African Americans Edith and Arthur Lee purchased a home in a white neighborhood in Minneapolis. Though there were no covenants in place, the white neighbors did not want these blacks living nearby. Soon after the Lees moved into their new home, the harassment began. What initially began as smaller offenses such as items being thrown against the house, soon escalated into nightly crowds of threatening, angry whites. The police made attempts to quiet and disperse the crowd, but the tensions continued to rise. The Lees hired attorney Lena Smith, who quickly demanded that law enforcement increase and convinced the general public that the Lees were not moving.

Though such blatant acts of discrimination were few, by the 1940s, neighborhood segregation was firmly entrenched, and returning veterans only increased the pressures for good homes. In 1954, Governor C. Elmer Anderson signed a bill that specifically banned racially restrictive covenants, but attitudes and informal segregation systems remained. The 1950s and 1960s were marked by enormous demographic shifts and sweeping urban renewal projects. "Urban Renewal" and the creation of new freeways leveled many blocks of inner-city black neighborhoods. This further exacerbated housing problems for African Americans.

After the Civil Rights era, many of the informal systems of segregation began to break down. By the end of the 1900s, African Americans were living in suburban areas. However, this increased access to new neighborhoods continues to create an unintended consequence even today; as wealthier blacks moved to prestigious neighborhoods, the cultural and social divide between professional blacks and low-wage earning blacks appears to be increasing.

For more information about events during this time period, see the *North Star* website's timeline at http://www.tpt.org/northstar/Timeline.html

For suggested resources on Lena Smith and this era, see the *North Star* website's Resource section at http://www.tpt.org/northstar/Resources.html

For background on Lena Smith, visit the Lena Smith section of the *North Star* website at http://www.tpt.org/northstar/MakingHome.html?quick\_link=lena\_smith

### **OBJECTIVES**

- To analyze different historical perspectives on the Lee case, identify different assumptions about the causes of racial conflict at the time, and uncover racial bias in these quotes.
- To theorize what sorts of values and goals Lena Smith had for the Lee neighborhood.
- To compare different maps of black population settlement patterns and analyze how the Lee neighborhood has changed.
- To develop generalized theories about housing patterns and predict how a specific neighborhood has changed or may change.

#### A NOTE ON DIVERSITY

This lesson encourages students to research the racial diversity of their own neighborhood, and to develop a poster that promotes values that they wish their neighbors would develop or maintain. If students live in neighborhoods that are highly segregated, you may want to have students focus on a more integrated neighborhood. Or, If you are concerned that students will choose to promote a conservation of their existing segregated neighborhoods, gently challenge them to consider if it is the *people* or the *values* that they would like to preserve, and ask them to create posters that focus on promoting values or traditions—not racial characteristics.

### **CONTENT CONNECTIONS**

This lesson fits well within the teaching of foreign immigration, black migration, and community history. Connecting this to students' modern neighborhoods is easily done through research online. It is also easily connected to the study of laws prohibiting discrimination.

### CONNECTIONS TO MINNESOTA ACADEMIC STANDARDS IN HISTORY AND SOCIAL STUDIES

U.S. History, grades 9-12; I. U.S. History, J. Reshaping the Nation and the Emergence of Modern America, 1877-1916, "The Students will understand the origins of racial segregation"; I. U.S. History, K. The Emergence of Modern America, 1890-1930, "The student will understand how the United States changed politically, culturally, and economically from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression,"; IV. Historical Skills, grades 9-12; C. Historical Inquiry, "The student will analyze historical evidence and draw conclusions."

### INTRODUCTION

### Connections to Students' Experiences

Ask students to think about times when their rights or privileges were restricted. Are they prevented from being in malls after certain hours? Have they ever been asked to leave restaurants or other places? How did this make them feel? How do these experiences compare and contrast to segregation? As they learn about the Lee case and Lena Smith, ask them to keep these ideas in mind.

### Connecting to Neighborhoods

Ask students to brainstorm what groups they belong to (for ideas, consider social, political, athletic, religious groups). Ask them to focus on what groups they belong to *geographically*—what is their "neighborhood"? As they brainstorm, write down their descriptions on a white board or overhead. Ask the students to divide these descriptions into "inclusive" and "exclusive" lists. Which list is longer? How do we define our neighborhoods? When is exclusion good? When is it bad?

### Connecting to Lena Smith

Ask students to think about a moment when they witnessed an injustice. Did they confront the perpetrator or not? What kinds of things run through your mind when you face someone who is doing something wrong? What sorts of actions are hard to confront? Which actions are easy to confront? What qualities does it take to confront injustices?

### **PROCEDURE**

This lesson works best when taught after viewing the film segment. Divide the class into small groups, and give each group one of the primary sources. Ask the students to use their student worksheets to help guide their analysis (you may want to give them fresh copies of the worksheet for each source, or have them record their findings in a notebook). As they finish analyzing each source, move the source around so that every group gets a chance to analyze each source. As you move about the room, use the following questions to help guide each group's analysis, or after the groups are done, use the questions below to guide a class discussion of their findings.

### PRIMARY SOURCE 1 ANALYSIS: INTERVIEWS ON RACE AND THE LEE CASE

University of Minnesota student Maurine Boie studied white and black race relations for her sociology thesis in 1932. As part of her work, she interviewed 58 people about their attitudes about the other race, as well as their impressions of the Lee case (from just one year before). Boie's work is a snapshot of racial attitudes of the time, and well illustrates the way that many white people felt about blacks. The attitudes as starkly negative and prejudiced, and you may want to spend time discussing students' emotional responses to these quotes before analyzing them historically. As a class, discuss the following questions:

- When were these quotes made? Why do we have a record of them?
- What are some of the reasons people gave for their attitudes towards blacks?
- In what ways do the speakers attempt to appear sympathetic to black concerns?
- In what ways are blacks held responsible for the poor treatment they receive?
- Can you think of other eras when similar attitudes have been held about blacks or other groups?
- Are there echoes of these attitudes still present today?

### PRIMARY SOURCE 2 ANALYSIS: LENA SMITH'S COMMENTS ON BLACK ATTITUDES

Maurine Boie also interviewed Lena Smith about her experiences in the Lee case. Though Smith's identity was kept hidden in Boie's thesis, historians have been able to identify her by matching the description of the unnamed person's actions with Lena Smith's actions. Lena's quote gives insight into her motivations and character. Discuss the following questions with your students:

- What is the source of this quote? When was it said? For what purpose?
- What does Lena Smith identify as the cause of black people's unwillingness to challenge the status quo?

- What motivated Lena Smith to challenge housing discrimination?
- Both Lena Smith and one of the white people in the previous source comment on the supposed attitudes and behaviors of Southern Blacks. Do you think these assumptions were accurate? Why or why not?
- What kinds of values did Lena Smith want the people in the Lee neighborhood to have?
- What other historical activists were or are similar to Lena Smith?

### **PRIMARY SOURCE 3 ANALYSIS:**

## (3a) 1930 MAP, (3b) 1990 CENSUS MAP, AND (3c) 2000 CENSUS MAP SHOWING LOCATION OF BLACKS IN COLUMBUS AVE NEIGHBORHOOD

Ask students to think about what factors cause someone to move to a specific neighborhood. What are generally considered to be appealing qualities in a neighborhood (access to parks, low crime, etc.)? What characteristics are generally considered unappealing? Why would someone live in a neighborhood that is generally considered unappealing? Review the maps that show black housing patterns in the Columbus Avenue neighborhood, the focus of the documentary segment. Discuss the following questions with your students:

- What do these maps show? Who developed them? What differences exist in the maps beyond the distribution of the black population?
- Find the location of the Lee home in 1930. (Marked in red on the 1930 map.) Why might Lee have wanted to move to that location?
- What sorts of boundaries appear to form the black neighborhoods?
- What do you notice about the changing patterns of black housing from 1930 to 1990 to 2000? What might have caused these patterns?
- What future changes do you predict for this neighborhood?
- What do these maps not show? How might more information alter what you think?

### FINAL ACTIVITY AND EVALUATION

Ask students to consider the multiple primary sources they have reviewed, and to consider what are the formal and informal boundaries of their own neighborhood or school. Is their neighborhood "inclusive" or "exclusive"? What would they like to change about their neighborhood or school?

Have students research the demographics of their own neighborhood at www.factfinder.censu s.gov. After they have analyzed how their neighborhood has changed, ask them to predict how it may continue to change and have them develop a poster to promote values they would like their neighborhood or school to develop or maintain. A good poster will:

- Identify how their neighborhood or school has changed between 1990 and 2000.
- Predict how their neighborhood or school will change in the next ten years.
- Develop a promotional poster that encourages values or traditions (not racial qualities) that they want their neighbors to maintain or develop.

### **PRIMARY SOURCE 1:**

### INTERVIEWS ON RACE AND THE LEE CASE

University of Minnesota Student Maurine Boie's Thesis: A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities July, 1932

Quote 1: Up here we don't know why we don't like the Negro until we come into contact with him and then we say it's the popular thing to dislike him. I used to like them but not any more because of their terrible arrogance and persistence.

Quote 2: Down South Negroes understand their place and there's no trouble, but here they are always pushing in. I don't think we should treat them as Southerners do; they won't let him vote, you know. He ought to get the same chance in employment and civic affairs, but let them keep their family affairs to themselves. They're lower than us; let them keep to themselves.

Quote 3: I think it was a terrible mistake on [Lee's] part. I don't blame him for wanting to get into a better neighborhood. He had a legal right to the place. But on the other hand the people of the neighborhood had a right. It is unfortunate that there is a color line but it is nobody's fault but God's. Colored people ought to recognize this but they don't; they insist on their legal and civic rights when they know it hurts the white's rights and they resent such an influx.

Quote 4: I had sympathy with those white people. He shouldn't have gone there... You can't blame them for resenting it. That's the trouble with these Northern Negroes. They bring it on themselves... They go around with a chip on their shoulders. They're like Jewish and Irish people, have an inferiority complex. They should be content to stay there.

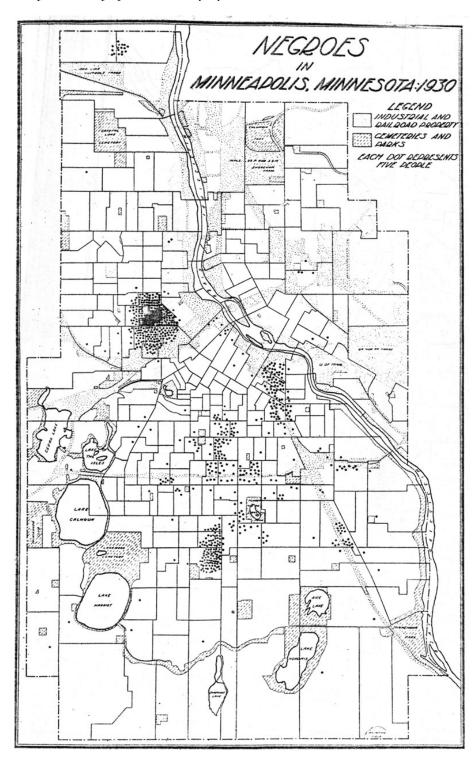
### PRIMARY SOURCE 2: LENA SMITH'S COMMENTS ON BLACK ATTITUDES

University of Minnesota Student Maurine Boie's Thesis: A Study of Conflict and Accommodation in Negro-White Relations in the Twin Cities July, 1932

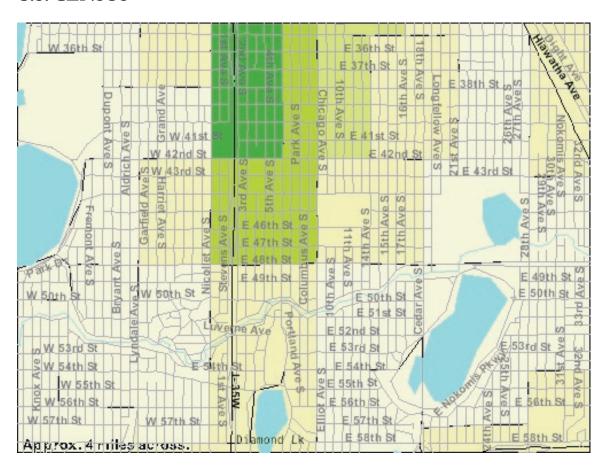
Lena Smith: Here's the difficulty, most of these people (the more conservative persons) are holding jobs from white people. Some of them were raised in the South and are used to catering to white men. I'm from the West and fearless. I'm used to doing the right thing with out regard for myself. Of course battles leave their scars but I'm willing to make the sacrifice. I think it is my duty. It's a hard place to be — on the firing line — but I'm mighty glad I'm there... Of course I want peace but I don't want it at any price.

### PRIMARY SOURCE 3a: NEGROES IN MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA, 1930

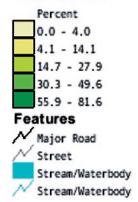
Unpublished population study by Dr. Calvin F. Schmid



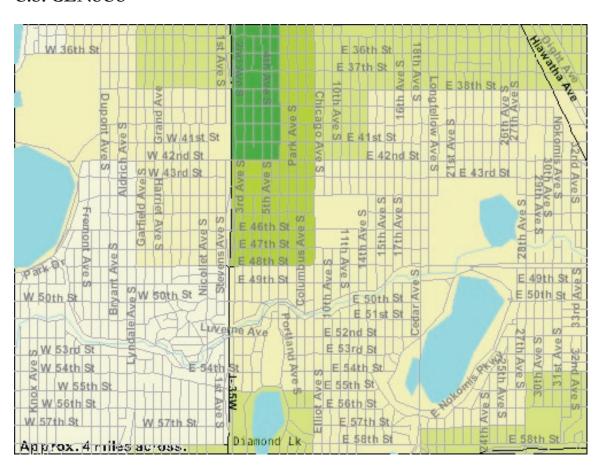
### PRIMARY SOURCE 3b: MAP OF PERCENT OF PERSONS WHO ARE BLACK, 1990 U.S. CENSUS

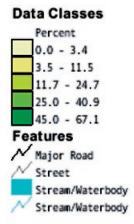






# ► PRIMARY SOURCE 3c: MAP OF PERCENT OF PERSONS WHO ARE BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN ALONE, 2000 U.S. CENSUS





LENA SMITH	Name:
FEARLESS AND FROM THE WEST	Date:
Student Worksheet	

### STEP 1: ANALYZE THE SOURCES

**1. What is the source?** Describe what the source is, who created it, when it was created, and where it was created.

2. What does this source tell you about the people in this neighborhood, historically or today? What kinds of people live in this neighborhood? What does the source tell you about their gender, race, ethnicity, jobs, and class?

**3.** What does this source tell you about the values of the people in this neighborhood? (Remember that Lena Smith lived near this neighborhood too.)

### STEP 2: RESEARCH HOW A NEIGHBORHOOD HAS CHANGED

Research the demographics of your own neighborhood (or any neighborhood you choose) at www.factfinder.census.gov, and analyze how your neighborhood has changed from 1990 to 2000. Once you have done this, make a prediction about how it may continue to change and create a poster that will promote values you would like your neighborhood to develop or maintain. A good poster will:

- Identify how this neighborhood has changed between 1990 and 2000.
- Predict how this neighborhood will change in the next ten years.
- Promote values or traditions that you want this neighbors to maintain or develop