Part One: Geography
Instructions for the Teacher

Materials
For Each Student
- ☐ “Investigating a Shotgun House: Part One: Geography” (“Archaeology Notebook,” pages 2-9)

For the Teacher
- ◆ “Unit Images and Analysis Sheets” PowerPoint (slides 2-11) from the Investigating Shelter Database on the Project Archaeology website (https://projectarchaeology.org/teachers)
- Pages 2-9 in “Archaeology Notebook” and ☐ “Historic Photographs of Davis Bottom Shotgun Houses” (Page 11 in “Archaeology Notebook”)
- An LCD projector
- ◆ “Kentucky’s Urban Shotgun Houses” PowerPoint for additional images of shotgun houses from the Investigating Shelter Database on the Project Archaeology website (https://projectarchaeology.org/teachers)
- ◆ Short videotaped interviews, and additional illustrations and photographs of Davis Bottom, its residents, and urban context resources from the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project website (https://anthropology.as.uky.edu/kas/kas-projects/davis-bottom-project) to accompany ☐ “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” (pages 3-6) and ☐ “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” (pages 7-8)
- ◆ Davis Bottom: Rare History Valuable Lives documentary as a DVD or on-line (http://transportation.ky.gov/Archaeology/Pages/Davis-Bottom.aspx)
- For measuring the size of a shotgun house: 108 feet of string or light-weight rope
- For your timeline: butcher paper or light rope; paper clips or clothes pins; images from the various PowerPoints, student drawings, primary sources, recipe-sized cards (noting, for example, laws and events); colored markers

Preparing to Teach
1. Make a copy of ☐ “Investigating a Shotgun House: Part One: Geography” (“Archaeology Notebook,” pages 2-9) for each student.
2. Get an LCD projector.
4. Access ◆ Davis Bottom History Preservation Project website and click on “Anthropology” to select optional short videotaped residents’ interviews to accompany ☐ “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” and additional illustrations and photographs of Davis Bottom, its residents, and urban context resources for ☐ “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom.”
5. Review Davis Bottom: Rare History Valuable Lives documentary.
6. For measuring the size of a shotgun house, obtain 108 feet of string or light rope. Make four marks on the string starting at one end: at 14 ½ feet, 39 ½ feet, 14 ½ feet, and 39 ½ feet. This is the size of the house as found in 2011.
7. For your class timeline, cut a long strip of butcher paper or light rope. You should display the timeline as prominently as possible in your room, and it should be easily reached for adding new elements. If you do not have space in your classroom for your timeline, try hanging it in the hallway near your class. In bold colored marker, place marker dates on the paper, extending from 1865 to Today, or suspend recipe-sized cards with dates from the rope with paper clips or clothes pins. You may want to leave space for dates before this span of time, as your class could need to add events that precede the Civil War. Decide what time increments you will use: decades? 25 years? 50 years? Decide how to choose the elements that will be put on the timeline and how they will be displayed: as a student illustration, a copy of a primary source, an historic image from the PowerPoints, etc. Review “Suggested Selected Historical Events in Davis Bottom and in the United States 1865-2016 to Include on Your Davis Bottom Classroom Timeline” (pages 20-22).

**WORD BANK**

**biography:** history of a person’s life as told by another person

**cultural:** having to do with the customs, beliefs, laws, ways of living, and all other results of human work and thought that belong to people of the same society

**ethnic enclave:** a concentration of people who have the same customs, religion, and origin; an **ethnic group** living in a small area in a city. For example, a section of a town where most people who live there have Italian or Irish heritage.

**prejudice:** an unfavorable or unreasonable opinion, feeling, or attitude made beforehand or without knowledge, especially an unfriendly opinion, about an ethnic, racial, social, or religious group

**redryer:** a place in a tobacco warehouse, a machine, and a kind of job. Workers put tobacco leaves on a belt that fed the leaves through a redyer’s heating chambers. This removed moisture so the leaves could be stored in the warehouse without getting moldy.

**resident:** a person who lives in a place

**shotgun house:** a long, narrow building that is one room wide, and two, three, four, or five rooms long

**urban:** related to a city

**working-class:** people who work for wages, usually in manual labor (with their hands)

**UNCOVER PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

Inform students that this question will guide their learning: *What can we learn about the lives of urban working-class people by investigating a shotgun house in Davis Bottom?*

1. Post the Word Bank words.

2. Tell students that they are going to play the role of an archaeologist as they investigate the shotgun house, a type of shelter used by working-class people in urban settings, like cities.

3. Hand out folders to each student for organizing their papers.

4. Write the word *Shotgun House* on a board and show the students an historic photograph of a shotgun house. You may use the “Historic Photographs of Davis Bottom Shotgun Houses” (Page 11) or a series of shotgun house photographs in “Kentucky’s Urban Shotgun Houses” PowerPoint. Tell students that there are many different kinds of shotgun houses. Shotgun houses are linked to urban land restrictions. Ask students:

   - What does the design of the house suggest: about the materials used to build the shelter? About where the shelter was located?
• If students suggest the people probably used wood and/or brick, ask how might the builders have built the house using these materials?
• How might the people have used their house?

DISCOVER NEW KNOWLEDGE
1. Go over the cover sheet information for PART ONE and look at the data sources students will use in their investigation.
2. Review the meaning of the word culture (the customs, beliefs, laws, ways of living, and all other results of human work and thought that people of the same society share) from Lesson Three: Culture Everywhere in Project Archaeology: Investigating Shelter. Project illustrations and photographs of Davis Bottom residents from the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project. Watch the videotaped interview clips with Kenny Demus, Cissy Laffoon, and Mary Laffoon. Watch the Davis Bottom: Rare History Valuable Lives documentary as a DVD or on-line.
3. Project “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” (slides 4-7 in “Unit Images and Analysis Sheets” PowerPoint). As a class, read the biographies, or you may wish to assign students to groups, with some reading about Kenny Demus and some reading about the Laffoon Sisters. As class members read aloud, demonstrate how to highlight important information in the text. Share your rationale for selecting each piece of information. Assist students with defining biography, cultural, ethnic enclave, redryer, resident, shotgun house, urban, and working-class, and adding them to their Word Banks. Essential Facts/Key Points for “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” are provided on Page 18.
4. Estimate the size of a shotgun house using the following procedure:
   A. Go outside as a class.
   B. As a group, estimate a rectangle measuring 14 1/2 feet by 39 1/2 feet. Have a student stand in each of the four corners. Mark the estimated corners with pieces of ribbon or tape.
   C. Have the rest of the students place themselves along the sides of the rectangle.
   D. To find out how accurate your estimate is, use the rope to measure the sides. Have a student in one corner hold the end of the rope and another student hold the mark at 14 1/2 feet. The student holding the end then turns 90 degrees and another student holds the other end of the rope at 39 1/2 feet. Repeat the process until all corners have been marked accurately.
   E. You can square the rectangle by using the hypotenuse (42.07 feet) or simply by eye-balling the corners and sides.
   F. Have the rest of the students fill in the sides of the rectangle. How close was your original estimate?
   G. Measure 3 feet 3 inches (front porch), 12 feet 5 inches (front room), 12 feet 5 inches (back room) (24 feet 9 inches is the length of the original house) and 11 feet 8 inches (kitchen/bathroom addition) on each of the 39 1/2 foot-long sides. Have some students place themselves along these lines, simulating the room dividers.
   H. Ask students: How many people do you think could live in this house? Take some answers and pick one for illustration (8-9 people made up the Demus household). Ask for volunteers to go inside the space to represent that number of people actually living inside the house. Would this number of people be crowded by our standards? Tell students to remember what 8-9 people inside this space
looked like as they continue to investigate the shotgun house. Return to the classroom and project “Size of a Shotgun House” (Slide 8 in “Unit Images and Analysis Sheets” PowerPoint) as review.

5. Direct students to “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” in their notebook and project the essay (slides 9-10 in “Unit Images and Analysis Sheets” PowerPoint). On the map of the neighborhood, circle the locations of 712, 728, and 848 DeRoode Street. These are the shotgun houses the students will study, where Kenny Demus lived, and where the Lafoon Sisters lived, respectively. Point out features on the map like the schools, “The Park,” “The Jungle,” and the roads. Show students which part of the neighborhood is now destroyed (the low-lying area between the railroads, W. High Street, and S. Broadway Road). Project illustrations and photographs of the neighborhood from the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project website or download them, print them, and post them around the room. Ask students: What do you think this section will be about? Have students jot down their thoughts or take a few answers from the whole class.

6. Teams of two will read “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” and analyze the data together on “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom: Analyzing the Data” (slide 11 in “Unit Images and Analysis Sheets” PowerPoint). As part of this activity, each student will draw a picture of what a Davis Bottom shotgun house might look like. After completing this activity, remind students to hold on to their drawings, or you may wish to collect them. Students will be asked at the end of PART THREE: ARCHAEOLOGY to reexamine their drawings in light of what they have learned. Essential Facts/Key Points for “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” and an Answer Key for “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom: Analyzing the Data” are provided on Page 19.

7. TIMELINE INSTRUCTIONS

A. Throughout “Investigating a Shotgun House,” students will collectively construct an illustrated timeline of historic events relevant to Davis Bottom and the national scene. This version of timeline building has been adapted from “Teaching with Timelines” (Fillpot 2008).

B. The timeline will help students understand the chronology of historic events and help them situate newly encountered events and figures in relation to those they have already studied. The timeline will provide a visual aid for identifying cause and effect relationships between events, and serve as a visual prompt to activate students’ prior knowledge. It will allow students to recognize how historic events, eras, and topics overlap in time. They will be able to use it to categorize similar or related events into themes, eras, and topics, and help them compare elements in different time periods. All of these purposes are important in their own right, but collectively, the timeline will help students develop a long-range understanding of historic chronology (Fillpot 2008).

C. The main classroom timeline may be supplemented by smaller posterboard-sized timelines that include only a few elements, such as changes in environmental regulation over time, or a chronology of legislation related to voting rights and disenfranchisement.

1) Start your classroom timeline at the conclusion of “Investigating a Shotgun House: Part One: Geography.” Ask the class what events and elements they would like to include on it. Paper clip/clothes pin the representation of these events and elements to the timeline, with a date and title prominently visible.

2) You will add to the timeline throughout the investigation. Review the timeline when starting each part. Settle your students on the floor in front of the line and invite them to do a silent “walk and talk” of the events on the line. Allow a minute or two for this activity, and then invite a student to stand and do a walk-and-talk aloud. The students do not need to account for every element on the line – they should just use the elements as prompts to tell a story about a particular theme, or inventory various things that were happening during the same time period. Let students finish before correcting any mistakes they may make in their storytelling.
3) When deciding which events and elements to put on your timeline, it is better to be generous than stingy. The more you have on your timeline, the better it reflects your students' learning. But do not limit yourself to events you explore in the investigation — include elements from other disciplines as well (language arts, science, music, math). If you encounter an historic topic in one of those areas, add it to the class line. If a student finds something at home that relates to Davis Bottom, invite them to add it to the line.

D. As your class explores Davis Bottom’s history, allow and encourage your students to view and reference the timeline spontaneously to situate new evidence in relation to what they have already studied, or to infer the timing of a new historic element for which they have no date. Refer to “Suggested Selected Historical Events in Davis Bottom and in the United States 1865-2016 to Include on Your Davis Bottom Classroom Timeline” (pages 20-22) as a guide.

8. Extension:
   A. Access the “Davis Bottom in the 1890s” mural directly from Teaching Through Documentary Art: Lessons for Elementary and Middle School Social Studies Teachers (http://arch.as.uky.edu/intro) or from the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project website (https://anthropology.as.uky.edu/teaching-through-documentary-art). This same image is on “The Davis Bottom Neighborhood in the Early 20th Century” (Page 16 in the “Archaeology Notebook”). “Davis Bottom in the 1890s invites exploration of the entire painting. Activities include analyzing the artist’s use of the elements of art and writing poetry. Meeting The Hathaway Family provides a link to an audio-biography of one of the most influential African-American sculptors of the 20th century, who grew up in Davis Bottom. There are art and writing activities provided here.
   B. If students want to learn more about the history and the people of Davis Bottom, direct them to the history section and the anthropology section on the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project website (https://anthropology.as.uky.edu/davis-bottom-history).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential Facts/Key Points for “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families”</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>integrated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school dropouts, and students didn’t do well in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blended families and single-parent families</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lots of kids in each family means little personal space in a house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they live in shotgun houses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they are very poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they make their own fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>they have more freedom than today’s kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>neighbors know each other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the mothers worked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>everyone worked menial, low-wage, hourly, laborious jobs</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Essential Facts/Key Points for “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom”

low-lying topographic setting
close to the town center, but isolated by poverty and race
no amenities, infrastructure is poor
the importance of The Park
the neighborhood’s industrial aspect, but also a place where people lived
home gardens and raised animals

NOTE: this essay and “The Davis Bottom Neighborhood in the Early 20th Century” essay complement each other in their descriptions of the community.

Answer Key for “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom: Analyzing the Data”

1. From the name of the first landowner and from features of the landscape
2. Railroad tracks, the stream, the bottomland, roads, brickyards, railroad depot, tobacco warehouses, schools, houses, The Park, The Jungle, neighborhood stores, churches
3. Narrow lots meant houses were built long and narrow to fit on them. The tendency for flooding meant some houses had to be built on wooden piers. The soil was not good for farming, so people worked at other kinds of jobs. Living so close to businesses and industries meant residents lived near where they worked. Without curbs, sidewalks, and street lights, people had to be careful when they went out at night. The only place they could walk was the unpaved streets, so dust could come into the houses from the streets when the windows were open. Because no buses came through the neighborhood, it was not easy to come and go. The low-lying nature of the bottom made it easy to be overlooked by others, but made the neighborhood a close-knit community.
4. Berries, apples and peaches, rabbits, chickens, fish
5. Because residents were very poor; because some were African-American; because no public transportation came through the neighborhood; because it was physically hidden from view. Others in Lexington looked down on the people who lived in Davis Bottom. They had no respect for the residents. They overlooked the people and their neighborhood and thought them unimportant.
# Suggested Selected Historical Events in Davis Bottom and in the United States 1865-2016 to Include on Your Davis Bottom Classroom Timeline

Below is a suggested, but by no means exhaustive, list of events to consider using as you and your students construct your Davis Bottom Classroom Timeline. Events directly related to Davis Bottom are *indicated with italics*. The first column indicates the section in “Investigating a Shotgun House” where you can find the facts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instructions for the Teacher</th>
<th>Students’ Archaeology Notebook</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T-I  Introduction</td>
<td>S-G Geography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-H  History</td>
<td>S-H History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T-A  Archaeology</td>
<td>S-A Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S-T Today</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## WHERE | DATE | DESCRIPTION
---|---|---
T-I, S-G | 1865 | Civil War ends. Reconstruction begins. Former *Union* officer and civil rights advocate William "Willard" Davis buys forty-three lots of Lexington bottomland to provide housing for African-Americans, some of whom had been recently freed from slavery. The neighborhood becomes known as Davis Bottom. Its diverse mixture of African-Americans, European immigrants, and native-born Kentuckians makes it Lexington’s first integrated neighborhood.

1867 | Davis gives Fourth of July speech in Lexington, arguing for voting and other civil rights for African-Americans. U.S. Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts uses the speech to argue for the extension of the Reconstruction Act of 1867 into border states such as Kentucky. Sumner’s extension is turned down.

1877 | Reconstruction ends. Last Federal troops leave South Carolina. There are only four black members in the U.S. House of Representatives. Jim Crow laws in Kentucky and other Southern states enforce racial segregation, including in schooling. These laws remain in force until 1965.

T-I | early 1900s | Migrants from southern Appalachia move into Davis Bottom. *873 people live in Davis Bottom.*

1914-1919 | World War I.

T-I | 1920s | *1,051 people live in Davis Bottom (the largest number).*

1920 | Nineteenth Amendment passes. Women get the right to vote.

T-I, T-A, S-A | 1920-1925 | *Shotgun house at 712 DeRoode Street is built.*
<table>
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<tr>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>The Great Depression begins.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-A</td>
<td>1930s-1940s</td>
<td><em>712 DeRoode Street shotgun house privy is cleaned out and used as a trash pit.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>T-I, S-G</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td><em>City of Lexington begins planning to build a road through Davis Bottom.</em></td>
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<td>T-I, S-H</td>
<td>1934</td>
<td><em>Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Davis Bottom is published. 756 people live in Davis Bottom.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>T-H, S-H</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td><em>U.S. Federal Census is taken, collecting information about the residents of Davis Bottom.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1941-1945</td>
<td>United States enters World War II after Japan bombs Pearl Harbor. World War II ends with the surrender of Japan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-A</td>
<td>1945-1950</td>
<td><em>712 DeRoode Street shotgun house privy is sealed up.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>S-G</td>
<td>late 1940s</td>
<td><em>Demus Family moves to Davis Bottom.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1950-1953</td>
<td>Korean Conflict. United States joins other United Nations members to end the invasion of South Korea.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-G</td>
<td>1953</td>
<td><em>Laffoon Family moves to shotgun house at 848 DeRoode Street.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Brown versus Board of Education U.S. Supreme Court decision declares school segregation unconstitutional.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Official entry of the U.S. into the Vietnam War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-H</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td><em>Family photographs taken of shotgun houses on DeRoode Street.</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1963</td>
<td>March on Washington and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gives his “I have a dream” speech (August 28). Assassination of President John F. Kennedy (November 22).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Civil Rights Act signed into law, ending segregation.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Voting Rights Act signed into law. It is aimed at overcoming legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African-Americans from exercising their right to vote.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Archaeology can uncover a lot of information about people in the past, but it tells only part of the story. In this investigation, you will learn what other stories can be told by studying geography and history. You will use different forms of evidence to learn about the working-class people who lived in shotgun houses in an urban neighborhood near downtown Lexington, Kentucky. You will consider how Lexington’s urban geography influenced the neighborhood. You will study historic photographs, read oral histories, and explore historic documents and maps. You will “make” an archaeological site and classify artifacts. You will help create a time line. You will use what you learned to design a project about the Davis Bottom neighborhood. In a final informative essay, you will show what you learned.
You are an archaeologist. Your question is:

*What can we learn about the lives of urban working-class people by investigating a shotgun house in Davis Bottom?*

**Investigation Activities**

1. Read *biographies* of Kenny Demus and the Laffoon Sisters, “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” (pages 3-6)
2. Estimate the size of a *shotgun house* with the whole class (teacher-led activity)
3. Read “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” (pages 7-8)
4. Complete data collection sheet: “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom: Analyzing the Data” (page 9)
5. Begin “A Davis Bottom Timeline” (teacher-led activity)

**Data Sources**

Biographies of Kenny Demus and the Laffoon Sisters, “Meet Two Davis Bottom Families” (pages 3-6); “Urban Geography of Davis Bottom” (pages 7-8)

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**Word Bank**

*biography:* history of a person’s life as told by another person  
*cultural:* having to do with the customs, beliefs, laws, ways of living, and all other results of human work and thought that belong to people of the same society  
*ethnic enclave:* a concentration of people who have the same customs, religion, and origin; an *ethnic group* living in a small area in a city. For example, a section of a town where most people who live there have Italian or Irish heritage.  
*prejudice:* an unfavorable or unreasonable opinion, feeling, or attitude made beforehand or without knowledge, especially an unfriendly opinion, about an ethnic, racial, social, or religious group  
*redryer:* a place in a tobacco warehouse, a machine, and a kind of job. Workers put tobacco leaves on a belt that fed the leaves through a redryer’s heating chambers. This removed moisture so the leaves could be stored in the warehouse without getting moldy.  
*resident:* a person who lives in a place  
*shotgun house:* a long, narrow building that is one room wide, and two, three, four, or five rooms long  
*urban:* related to a city  
*working-class:* people who work for wages, usually in manual labor (with their hands)
Meet Two Davis Bottom Families

Davis Bottom is different from Lexington’s other urban, working-class neighborhoods. That is because throughout its long history, black people and white people lived side-by-side as friends and neighbors. Let’s meet members of two Davis Bottom families who lived on DeRoode (pronounced duh-road-ie) Street.

Kenny Demus, and Cissy and Mary Laffoon know each other, even though Kenny grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, and Cissy and Mary grew up in the 1950s and 1960s. All three grew up in Davis Bottom shotgun houses and lived in them as adults. Each holds warm memories of life in the neighborhood. They also remember the sting of prejudice because of where they lived.

When Kenny, Cissy, and Mary heard about the Davis Bottom History Preservation Project, they brought in family pictures to share. Through their videotaped oral history interviews, you can hear them talk about what it was like to live in Davis Bottom. Learn even more by reading their biographies here.

Kenny Demus

Kenny Demus was born in Davis Bottom in 1961 at 565 DeRoode Street. His grandparents had lived in Davis Bottom since the late 1940s.

Kenny’s was a big family. He had a twin brother, four other brothers, a half-brother, and a sister. He grew up surrounded by aunts, uncles, and cousins who also lived in Davis Bottom. When Kenny was a child, he spent a lot of time at his grandparent’s house at 728 DeRoode Street. The Demus Family lived in several rented houses in the neighborhood when Kenny was young. One of the places they rented was a shotgun house.

It was a lot like 712 DeRoode Street, the Davis Bottom Shotgun House Site that you will investigate. It had three rooms and a wood-burning stove. All the boys slept in the same big steel-frame bed. There was never any argument about where to sleep. Each boy knew his spot on the mattress. The family used an outhouse, and at night, they kept a little pot in the corner of the bedroom. During the time they lived there, their landlord had a bathroom added to the house. Thank goodness, with such a big family!

As a child, Kenny ran errands for grownups. Carrying a note, he’d walk to the store to get things like a pack of cigarettes. He played with friends in “The Jungle,” a wooded area on the steep hillsides below the train tracks. They build forts out of tree limbs, old blankets, old tires—anything lying around would work.
Kenny remembers how, if he misbehaved out of sight of his parents, they somehow knew all about what he had done when he got home. Once, Kenny snuck into a yard in the neighborhood and stole peaches and apples off the trees. Because he ate the “evidence” as he walked home, he felt proud of himself for getting away with it. But when he arrived, his father wanted to know why he had stolen the fruit!

Davis Bottom’s black children went to a neighborhood school near the neighborhood’s center: George Washington Carver Elementary School. White children went to Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, on the northern edge of Davis Bottom. Once Lincoln School closed, though, those students went to Carver.

From first to fifth grade, Kenny walked the short distance to Carver Elementary. He loved Carver. Lexington integrated its public schools when Kenny was in sixth grade.

So, as he later would for junior high and high school, he had to go to school outside of Davis Bottom. He took a school bus across Lexington.

Teachers and students looked down on Kenny because he lived in Davis Bottom. They said nothing good ever came out of his neighborhood. They let his poverty in material things cloud their judgment about him. It was hard to go to school and learn in a place like that. Kenny taught himself to read, because he did not learn to in school.

When Kenny was a teenager, he got a job cutting and hanging tobacco. He graduated from high school and soon afterwards, took a job with the City of Lexington as Director of Southside Park. He held that job for 17 years, until The City closed the park.

Kenny married and moved to another Lexington neighborhood. Kenny and his wife had three girls—Ken-nisha, Ken-nae, and Ken-yale—and a boy, Kenny, Jr. After Kenny became a single parent, he and his children moved back to his old neighborhood to live for a while. They lived in a shotgun house near his parents, who helped him take care of his kids. His children were upset about moving to Davis Bottom. They knew what people in town thought of people who lived there. Kenny told them, “It’s not where you live that counts. It’s how you choose to live.”

Today, Kenny works for the Lexington Public Schools as a bus driver. His children are grown and in college. He lives in an apartment near Davis Bottom. Once the City of Lexington finishes building the roads and new houses as part of the Newtown Pike Extension Project, he hopes to move back to his old neighborhood.
Cissy and Mary Laffoon

Cissy Laffoon and her older brother PeeWee were born in Marble Creek, Jessamine County, Kentucky. When Cissy was about three years old, she and her family moved to Lexington. Mary Laffoon was born in Lexington when they lived in the nearby neighborhood of Irishtown. Cissy was six and Mary was three when they made the short move to 848 DeRoode Street in Davis Bottom in 1953.

Both of their parents had been married before, so Pee Wee, Cissy, and Mary have nine other brothers and sisters. When Mary was six years old, their parents divorced. Their father moved a few streets away in Davis Bottom. The girls, their brother Pee Wee, and their mother stayed at 848 DeRoode Street.

Cissy and Mary’s mother was a single parent. When their mother worked nights, their older half-brother, Ed, fixed dinner. Neighbors helped out, too. When Cissy and Mary were small, “Miss Julie” watched them while their mother worked. Julia Turner was a black woman who lived across the street at 865 DeRoode Street. Cissy and Mary’s mother watched Julia Turner’s children, too.

When Cissy and Mary were young, their family lived in many different rented shotgun houses throughout Davis Bottom. Their mother was trying to save every dollar she could. Cissy and Mary remember sleeping together in a big bed in the living room of their two-room shotgun house. To try to insulate the house, their mother nailed up sections of cardboard boxes and pages from the newspaper on the walls and ceiling. She painted the nails different colors. From their bed, the girls often played a game of searching for words in the newspaper on the ceiling.

Cissy was a tomboy and always getting into trouble. She had many scraped knees. She stole the boys’ bicycles and rode all over the neighborhood. Mary was always the littlest and the youngest of the kids who played together. The girls loved to walk down to the end of DeRoode Street where someone had tied a swing on a tree. They’d jump out of the swing onto a mattress. Cissy also liked doing cartwheels and rolling downhill. Starting at the top near the West High Street Viaduct, she would roll all the way down, ending up at the bottom, in Southside Park. The girls tried not to get hurt, because they knew their mom did not have the money to take them to the doctor. Cissy remembers when she got sick, her mother used “old home cooking” medicine. For cuts and scrapes, her mother rubbed on liniment that came in a can.

White children in the neighborhood went to school at Lincoln Elementary. It was only about a block away from Cissy and Mary’s home at 848 DeRoode Street, so they could easily walk to school. They attended first through sixth grade there. Cissy and Mary loved going to Lincoln. The food was good. Their teachers were nice. They did not want to leave.
There were no junior high or high schools in Davis Bottom. Because there were no school busses, the girls had to walk many blocks or take a city bus. These schools were very different from Lincoln. They were not welcoming places. Teachers and students looked down on Cissy and Mary because of where they lived. It was hard to go to school and learn there. Mary said if she could have kept going to school in Davis Bottom, she would have stayed in school. Both girls dropped out of school when they were 16 years old.

Cissy married soon afterward and became Cissy Head. She had two sons: Steve and Tim. Mary married and became Mary Pollard. She had two boys, too: Les and Scott. Mary and Cissy lived with their families in Davis Bottom for many years, and on several different streets.

Cissy and Mary were homemakers, and went to work outside the home after their boys were older. Cissy worked in many different jobs: at the nearby Red Mile Race Track's track kitchen, and cleaning commercial buildings. When her boys were young, her family also had a paper route. Cissy, now divorced, has owned her own house cleaning business for many years. Mary worked at the dry cleaners, the R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. redryer, and other factories. Mary, a widow, is retired now.

Eventually, Cissy and Mary moved away from Davis Bottom to other parts of Lexington. However, they hold fond memories of their friends, the games they played, Southside Park, and their old neighborhood. Cissy and Mary want to see their old neighborhood thrive again. They are hopeful that the new homes and the road that The City has planned for so long, Newtown Pike Extension, will be finished soon. Mary said she might move back. She knows it will not look the same as her old neighborhood. The houses will not be shotguns. The streets will have sidewalks. But it will be home.

Mary Laffoon (left), Cissy Laffoon (center), and a friend (right) in front of the back porch at 848 DeRoode Street in the mid-1950s (see map Page 8).
Urban Geography of Davis Bottom

The Davis Bottom neighborhood once sat on the very edge of Lexington, Kentucky. Today, it is located only one-half mile southwest of downtown. You might think everyone always wanted to live in Davis Bottom. It would be easy to get to work in downtown offices and to shop in downtown stores. But you would be wrong.

In the early 20th century, buses and streetcars did not come through Davis Bottom. Their routes were along the streets that bordered it. Before the Newtown Pike Extension Project started, it was impossible to see much of Davis Bottom except from the edge of the West High Street Viaduct/Bridge.

In the early 20th century, invisible boundaries made life hard for the people of Davis Bottom. Some people were black. Some people were white. Everyone was poor. The City looked down on these working-class people. This isolation helped make Davis Bottom a close-knit urban community.

In 1931, downtown Lexington needed a new road. The City wanted to build it through Davis Bottom. This road would have destroyed the neighborhood. The Davis Bottom residents protested, so The City put the plans on hold. For over sixty years, the residents lived with this threat to their community. By the late 1990s, however, traffic congestion was worse and the need for new development in downtown Lexington was urgent. The City could not wait any longer.

Today, as part of the Newtown Pike Extension Project, The City is building a new road, new houses, and a new park in the low-lying section of Davis Bottom (see map on Page 8). This neighborhood is called Davis Park. Only a small section of Davis Bottom still remains—the part that sits on higher ground on the eastern edge of the old neighborhood.

Davis Bottom got its name from two sources. “Davis” was the last name of the first landowner—Lexington lawyer and civil rights supporter Willard Davis. He bought land in what is now Davis Bottom in 1865. He divided the land into 43 long narrow house lots. Narrow lots mean narrow houses. That is one reason why cheaply built, wooden
frame shotgun houses were common in the neighborhood.

“Bottom” comes from the land itself. Bottoms are low-lying places along streams. Lower Town Branch used to flow down the center of the neighborhood. Because this stream was so quick to flood, The City built a covered culvert for it in the early 20th century. Then no one could see it.

Bottoms are often not good places to live. Low wet spots are perfect for mosquitos and snakes. The lowest spot in Davis Bottom was Southside Park, but everyone in Davis Bottom just called it “The Park.” It always flooded in heavy rains. Because of flooding, some houses were built on wooden piers.

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, “bottom” had another meaning. When people heard “bottom” as part of a neighborhood’s name, they thought of a low-lying city district where poor people lived. They thought of ethnic enclaves, places with cheap housing (like shotgun houses), cultural differences, and crime.

Early in its history, Davis Bottom had orchards and pastures. However, the land was no good for farming. So even though people lived there, Davis Bottom soon became an industrial area. Railroad tracks, tobacco redryers and warehouses, stone quarries, brickyards, and coal yards grew up around the neighborhood. A freight depot and a train station were nearby. The people who lived in Davis Bottom worked at these businesses. Over time, some industries polluted the soils in the neighborhood.

Through most of its history, the streets in Davis Bottom were not paved. There were no street gutters or curbs, no sidewalks, and no streetlights. But the residents did not have to leave the neighborhood to shop. There were neighborhood butcher shops and grocery stores like Hank’s, Henderson’s, Swagger’s, and Blue and White. They ran up bills at the stores and paid when they could. The neighborhood also had businesses, like a car repair shop and a scrapyard. It had churches—Nathaniel Mission, Pleasant Green, and smaller storefront congregations—and two elementary schools.

The Park was the heart and center of the community. People had picnics. The City held community ball games there. Teams from other parts of Lexington and other towns in the region played there.

Oaks and maples grew in the neighborhood, as did a few apple and peach trees. The Jungle was the rough area of woods that grew on the steep hillsides below the train tracks. Trees looked scraggly here because people cut branches for firewood. Wild blackberries and raspberries grew in brambles along the edges of the neighborhood. Cattails and cane grew in swampy spots.

People kept rabbits (for meat) and chickens (for meat and eggs). Mothers knew how to split a chicken and share it with the whole family. Residents fished in nearby lakes and invited the neighborhood to bluegill fish fries. They grew vegetables in small gardens, and fed the corn to their chickens. Mothers canned fruits and vegetables for their families. Some families could barely make it, but no one went hungry. Neighbors helped.
Name ___________________

Urban Geography of Davis Bottom: Analyzing the Data

*Using what you have learned about Davis Bottom’s urban landscape, answer the following questions. Use the back of this sheet to continue your answers.*

1. How did Davis Bottom get its name?

2. What are the most important characteristics of Davis Bottom’s urban landscape?

3. How did the urban landscape influence housing type and location? In what ways did the urban landscape influence the way people lived in the neighborhood?

4. On another sheet of paper, draw a picture of what a Davis Bottom shotgun house might look like.

5. Even though the people of Davis Bottom lived in a city and went to the grocery store, they also gathered or grew some of their own food. What kinds of food?

6. Explain how a place like Davis Bottom can be near the center of a city but still be “on the margins” (meaning unknown or ignored by other people in the city).