

How Can One Corner Shape History?



Image From: <https://www.mortontheatre.com/the-morton-building>

Supporting Questions

1. Why is the Hot Corner considered an historical district?
2. Who performed at the Morton Theatre and who had offices in the Morton Building?
3. What individuals and groups are involved in preserving and celebrating the Hot Corner's legacy today?

How Can One Corner Shape History?

Standards and Content	Georgia Social Studies Standards: SS8H7 Evaluate key political, social, and economic changes that occurred in Georgia during the New South Era. SS8H11 Evaluate the role of Georgia in the modern civil rights movement.
Staging the Compelling Question	Discuss why a section of a city might be viewed as historically significant.

Supporting Question 1	Supporting Question 2	Supporting Question 3
Why is the Hot Corner considered an historical district?	Who performed at the Morton Theatre and who had offices in the Morton Building?	What individuals and groups are involved in preserving and celebrating the Hot Corner’s legacy today?
Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task	Formative Performance Task
Create a timeline by sorting historical events.	Make a list of the artists who performed and individuals who had offices in the Morton building.	Make a list of the ways the Hot Corner’s legacy is being preserved and celebrated today.
Featured Sources	Featured Sources	Featured Sources
Source A: <i>Georgia Political Review</i> article about the Hot Corner Source B: <i>Downtown Athens</i> article about the Hot Corner Source C: <i>The Red & Black</i> article on the history of Black Athens Source D: <i>Hot Corner</i> audio documentary	Source A: <i>Georgia Public Broadcasting</i> video about the empire of Mr. Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton Source B: <i>Downtown Athens</i> article about the Morton Building Source C: The Morton Theatre website	Source A: <i>The Red & Black</i> article about the Hot Corner festival Source B: <i>UGA Russell Library Oral History</i> video about the Hot Corner festival Source C: <i>The Red & Black</i> article about the Hot Corner mural Source D: <i>Online Athens</i> article about the Hot Corner Mural Park

Summative Performance Task	ARGUMENT: <i>How Can One Corner Shape History?</i> Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from the sources.
	EXTENSION. Explore a community mapping project that highlights Hot Corner businesses in 1940, 1960, and 1980 and then create a map highlighting some of the businesses.
Taking Informed Action	UNDERSTAND Learn more about the Hot Corner and the Morton Building by visiting the Morton Theatre. ACT Create a plan to share its history at your school.

Overview

For educators who are not familiar with the IDM Model, see:
<https://gpb.pbslearningmedia.org/asset/d10d0694-436a-4d18-ab0f-78bd51d83bd9/>

Inquiry Description

This inquiry leads students through an investigation of the Hot Corner business district in Athens, Georgia. In the early 1900s, the Hot Corner was one of the most prosperous Black business districts in the South in spite of legalized segregation and Jim Crow laws ([Hot Corner](#)). At the core of the district was the Morton Building built in 1910 by Mr. Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton. Now listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Morton Building housed the offices of many prominent Black professionals, and its theater featured acclaimed performers such as Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and Bessie Smith.

From the early 1900s until the 1960s, there were 66 Black-owned businesses cataloged on the Hot Corner, and the district “left an immeasurable impact on the city of Athens, one that many people in the community fail to realize” (Bledsoe, [Cornering History](#)). Spanning over a century of influence, the Hot Corner holds significant historical importance and its legacy continues today.

In this inquiry, students will investigate:

- The Hot Corner district as a source of art, commerce, and culture.
- The Hot Corner—as a leading Black business district in the region— home to 66 Black-owned businesses from the early 1900s until 1960s.
- African American histories of entrepreneurship, resistance, and social change.
- The importance of preserving and amplifying history.

This inquiry highlights the following additional standards:

Georgia Social Studies Standards: SS8H7 Evaluate key political, social, and economic changes that occurred in Georgia during the New South Era.

SS8H11 Evaluate the role of Georgia in the modern civil rights movement.

C3 Framework: D2.His.3.6-8. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to analyze why they, and the developments they shaped, are seen as historically significant. D2.His.15.6-8. Evaluate the relative influence of various causes of events and developments in the past.

Note: Teachers are encouraged to adapt the inquiry to meet the needs and interests of their students. This inquiry lends itself to differentiation and modeling of historical thinking skills while assisting students in reading the variety of sources. Featured sources are suggestions and links are provided. It may be that these links are broken and we apologize in advance for the inconvenience. **Teachers should review the sources in advance to determine what sections and material would be appropriate for their grade level and classroom.**

This inquiry is expected to take three 50-minute class periods. The inquiry time frame could expand if teachers think their students need additional instructional experiences (e.g., supporting questions, formative performance tasks, featured sources, writing).

Structure of the Inquiry

This inquiry is structured into three supporting questions that unpack the compelling question, “How can one corner shape history?” Each supporting question is supported with featured sources and a performance task to assess understanding. The questions are created to enable students to construct an argument addressing the compelling question by the end of the inquiry. The inquiry concludes with students Taking Informed Action by visiting the Morton Theatre.

Staging the Compelling Question

The inquiry opens with a staging activity that explores how communities shape history. Teachers may begin by asking students why a corner—or area of a city— might be seen as historically significant.

Supporting Question 1

The first supporting question—“What makes the Hot Corner a historic district?”— examines the events and histories of the Hot Corner beginning in the early 1900s. By examining the three online articles, students learn about the Hot Corner’s long and influential history in the area. The formative task is a timeline sorting activity that helps students further their understanding and situate Hot Corner histories alongside other events.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedure:

- Have students read and discuss Featured Source A, Featured Source B, and Featured Source C.
- Have the class listen to Featured Source D—Episode 2 of the *Hot Corner* audio documentary by Alexander Stephens and Broderick Flanigan.
- Implement a timeline sorting activity.
 - Link to slides here:
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/18O1QZ0wiut_KmMqWI67NQqWrrMEogdyMRxb3CxTSWxQ/edit?usp=sharing
 - Print the slides—folding each slide in the middle vertically. Make multiple copies in preparation for small group work. Students will begin the activity with the picture side (of each slide) facing up and the side with the date facing down.
 - Divide students into small groups and distribute a set of the slides to each group.
 - Have students work together to sort the events according to chronological order without looking at the dates on the back of the slides.

- Once they have sorted the pictures, each group can turn the slides over to see if they sorted the events correctly according to chronological order.
- Review the events and timeline as a class.

The following sources were selected to support this question:

Featured Source A is an online article about the Hot Corner published on the *Georgia Political Review* website.

Bledsoe, M. (2018, January 22). *Cornering history*. Georgia Political Review.
<https://georgiapoliticalreview.com/cornering-history/>

Featured Source B is an online article published on the Downtown Athens website about the history of Hot Corner.

Athens Downtown Development Authority. (n.d.). *Hot corner*. Downtown Athens.
<https://downtownathensga.org/explore/art-culture/aahp/hot-corner/>

Featured Source C is an online article published on the *Red & Black* newspaper website on the history of Black Athens.

Shivers, B. (2022, August 8). *A brief history of Black Athens: In the face of hundreds of years of systemic oppression, Black Athenians strived for—and achieved—success*. The Red & Black.
https://www.redandblack.com/guides/athens/a-brief-history-of-black-athens-in-the-face-of-hundreds-of-years-of-systemic/article_8fe47bc4-1344-11ed-975f-b7b08640b6cc.html

Featured Source D is the *Hot Corner* audio documentary by Alexander Stephens and Broderick Flanigan. The audio documentary has six episodes. Episode 2 is a 15 minute episode—*Back in the Day*— featuring interviews with people who worked on the Hot Corner in the 1950s and 1960s.

Stephens, A., Flanigan, B. (Creators). (2023). *Hot Corner* [Audio documentary]. Enlighten Media Productions. <https://www.cornerhistories.com/home>

Supporting Question 2

The second supporting question—“Who performed at the Morton Theatre and who had offices in the Morton Building?”—examines the empire of Mr. Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton and the influence of his Morton Building. The Morton Building housed Black-owned businesses and medical professionals starting in the early 1900s. The building also contained a performance venue—the Morton Theatre—listed in the National Register of Historic Places as one of the first, and the oldest surviving, vaudeville theaters in the United States. The formative task has students make a list of the artists who performed at the Morton Theatre and individuals who had offices in the Morton building.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedure:

- Instruct students that they will be learning about Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton—specifically how he built the historic Morton Building in downtown Athens, Georgia.
- Have students watch Featured Source A—a video from GPB/PBS about the empire of Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton. Instruct students to begin to make a list of the individuals who had offices in the Morton Building, as well as the artists who performed in the Morton Theatre.
 - Teachers may also want to incorporate some of the activities and resources at the bottom of the GPB webpage.
- Have students read Featured Source B—an online article about the Morton Building.
- Have students explore Featured Source C—the Morton Theatre website.
- Have students complete their lists. Teachers may also choose to discuss the ways the Morton Building influenced the community.

The following sources were selected to support this question:

Featured Source A is a 7 minute video from Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB) about Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton and the Morton Building. Teachers should note that there are support materials at the bottom of the webpage—including discussion questions, vocabulary, and a teacher’s guide.

Georgia Stories. (n.d.). *The empire of Pink Morton: Turn of the century African-American mogul*. GPB. https://www.gpb.org/georgiastories/stories/pink_morton

Featured Source B is an online article published on the Downtown Athens website about the Morton Building. It also includes information about Dr. Blanche Thompson and Dr. Ida Mae Hiram.

Athens Downtown Development Authority. (n.d.). *The Morton Building*. Downtown Athens. <https://downtownathensga.org/explore/art-culture/aahp/the-morton-building/>

Featured Source C is the Morton Theatre website which provides additional information about Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton and the Morton Theatre, as well as a photo gallery highlighting its history.

Morton Theatre. (n.d.). *Our history*. Morton Theatre. <https://www.mortontheatre.com/history>

Supporting Question 3

The third supporting question—“What individuals and groups are involved in preserving and celebrating the Hot Corner’s legacy today?”—highlights how individuals have worked to preserve, honor, and celebrate the histories of the Hot Corner. Students learn about the annual Hot Corner Celebration and Soul Food festival, as well as other projects that commemorate its history. The formative task asks students to make a list of the ways the Hot Corner’s legacy is being preserved and celebrated today.

Teachers may implement this task with the following procedure:

- Have students read Featured Source A—*The Red & Black* article about the Hot Corner Celebration and Soul Food festival.
- Have students watch Featured Source B—a Russell Library video about the history of the Hot Corner and the festival.
- Have students read Featured Source C—an *Online Athens* article about the Hot Corner Mural completed in 2019.
- Have students read Featured Source D—an *Online Athens* article about the construction of the Hot Corner Mural park.
- Instruct students to make a list of the ways the Hot Corner’s legacy is being preserved and celebrated today.

The following sources were selected to support this question:

Featured Source A is an article from *The Red & Black* about the Hot Corner Celebration and Soul Food festival.

Wright, H. (2024, June 9). *24th annual Hot Corner celebrates community and entrepreneurial history*. The Red & Black. https://www.redandblack.com/culture/24th-annual-hot-corner-celebrates-community-and-entrepreneurial-history/article_e43a5b5a-2682-11ef-a860-1bd1c73f19e6.html

Featured Source B is a University of Georgia (Russell Library) video about the history of the Hot Corner and the festival.

Russell Library Oral History. (2018, April 26). *Hot corner celebration and soul food festival* [Video]. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JcRR3ggLMH0>

Featured Source C is an article from *The Red & Black* on the Hot Corner mural by Miami-based artist Elio Mercado and Athens-based artist Broderick Flanigan.

Davis, M., Posey, K. (2019, August 22). *Athens mural commemorating Hot Corner officially celebrated two months after completion*. The Red & Black. https://www.redandblack.com/culture/athens-mural-commemorating-hot-corner-officially-celebrated-two-months-after-completion/article_99d69f34-c484-11e9-b014-2f393728a609.html

Featured Source D is an article from *Online Athens* about the construction of the Hot Corner Mural Park which will include a walkway, greenery, and seating.

Allen, S. (2021, April 7). *'Hot Corner Mural Park' final designs approved, park to replace Washington St. parking lot*. Online Athens. <https://www.onlineathens.com/story/news/local/2021/04/07/downtown-athens-hot-corner-mural-park-final-designs-approved-washington-street/7125325002/>

Summative Performance Task

At this point in the inquiry, students have learned about Hot Corner’s entrepreneurs and their economic prosperity—as well as Hot Corner’s influence on social change, its legendary performers, its role in the Civil Rights movement, and efforts to preserve and celebrate its legacy. In crafting their argument, students should be expected to demonstrate the breadth of their understandings and their abilities to use evidence from multiple sources to support their claims. In this task, students write an essay that answers the compelling question. Students’ arguments will likely vary, but could include any of the following:

- The Hot Corner shaped history when Black entrepreneurs created an economic hub for Black artists and entrepreneurs. There were 66 Black-owned businesses from the early 1900s-1960s on the Hot Corner.
- The Hot Corner shaped history when Black entrepreneurs created a thriving center for prominent Black professionals including doctors, dentists, and pharmacists.
- The Hot Corner shaped history when its business owners gave Civil Rights protesters a place to rest, eat, and plan.
- The Hot Corner shaped history because Monroe Bowers “Pink” Morton built the Morton Building and the Morton Theatre—the oldest surviving vaudeville theater in the United States which hosted famed artists including Duke Ellington, Bessie Smith, and Cab Calloway.
- The Hot Corner Association continues to preserve and celebrate its legacy of Black entrepreneurship and cultural expression through the Hot Corner Festival.

To extend their arguments, teachers could have students explore a mapping project by Benen Chancey that shows maps of the Hot Corner businesses in 1940, 1960, and 1980. Students can then create their own maps highlighting businesses they learned about in the inquiry and share how these businesses shaped history.

Dept. of Geography, University of Georgia. (n.d.). *Athens Hot Corner*. Community Mapping Lab.
<https://www.communitymappinglab.org/hot-corner.html>

Students have the opportunity to **Take Informed Action** by visiting the Morton Theatre on a guided field trip or to see a performance. Students may also choose to create a plan to share the history of the Hot Corner at their school.