

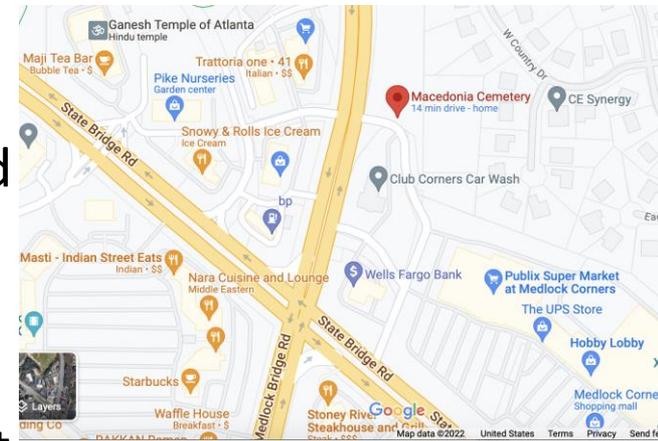
# They Were Here: Student Research about the Macedonia African Methodist Cemetery of Johns Creek, Georgia



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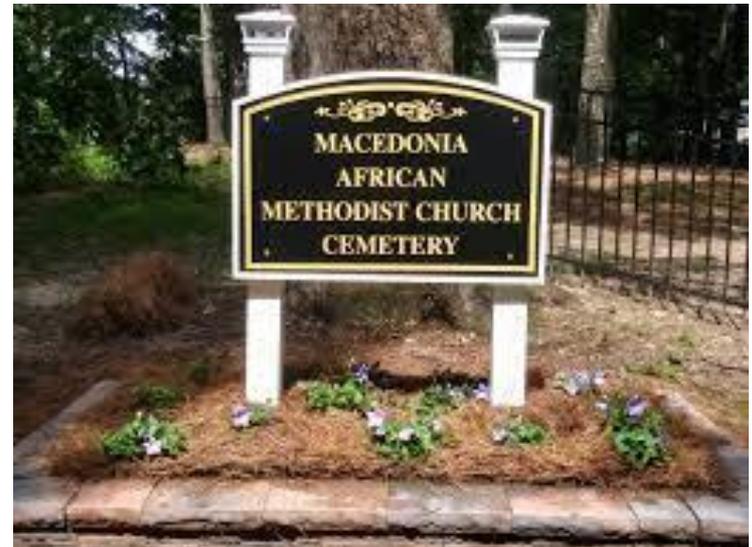
# Introduction: The Power of Community Engagement

- A “newer” city, Johns Creek, Georgia has a rich history of the diverse experiences, trauma, challenges, resistance, and survival of its ancestors and current residents
- Community members, organizations, and students have been active in preserving the land and legacy of the Macedonia African Methodist Church Cemetery
- This presentation highlights the efforts of community partnerships that supported student research about this important site in the Atlanta metropolitan region, and whether they demonstrated historical empathy as a result of this research



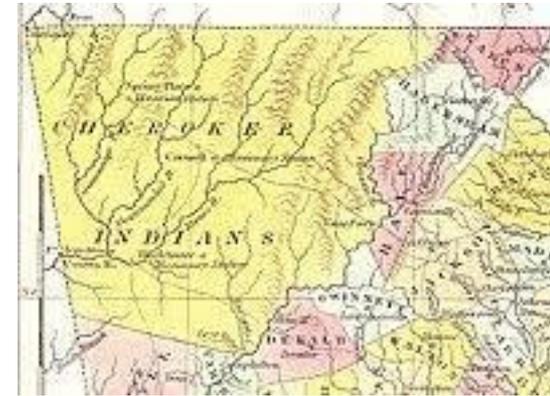
# Purpose of Study & Research Question

- Research Question:
  - *Can high school students' participation in a local history research project about the Macedonia African Methodist Church Cemetery promote historical empathy?*
- We seek to find whether developing a local history curriculum from an HE perspective can promote engaged learning, and foster pro-social behavior through participating in historical research about a community event, person, or site such as a historical cemetery



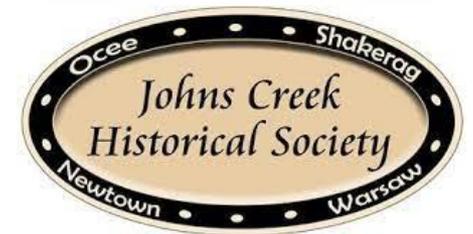
# Historical Background: The Macedonia African Methodist Church Cemetery

- Land was part of the Cherokee Nation, owned by the Waters Family of European and Cherokee ancestry
- The Cemetery was established during Reconstruction
- Former enslaved African Americans attended church and buried residents in the Cemetery
- Last burial in the 1980s
- The cemetery fell into disrepair after the destruction of the church from a fire during the 1990s
- Grassroots community organizers, youth groups, and city officials have mobilized the past 20 years to restore the cemetery, and commemorate the cemetery's significance as a civil rights sanctuary



# “They Were Here” Project Origins

- Community partnership between Mercer University Tift College of Education, Student Leadership Johns Creek, and the Johns Creek Historical Society
- Applied for a Georgia Humanities grant in March 2021- notified of full funding in May 2021
- Four groups of students from four high schools in Johns Creek were chosen to research and produce four documentary films (28 students total)
- Film #1- historical context of the Reconstruction through Great Migration
- Film #2- diversity of North Georgia and present-day Johns Creek
- Film # 3- importance of genealogy
- Film #4- current preservation efforts



# Project Timeline- Research and Production

- June-August 2021- creation of Google classroom, curation of primary sources, curriculum development
- September 2021- student interviews of experts and stakeholders for each film; transcription of interviews, reflection
- October 2021- student primary and secondary source research on film topic
- October-November 2021- student script writing, narrations, filming and production begins
- December 2021-January 2022- film editing and production- students interviewed for 11Alive News



# Project Timeline- Community Screenings

- January 2022- Johns Creek High School- attended by Johns Creek City Council, GA State representative, GA Superior Court justices, past and current mayor of Johns Creek, D.A. Fani Willis, U.S. Rep. Lucy McBath- received Congressional certificates for service
- February 2022- Mercer University Atlanta Campus- attended by descendants of April Waters, Mercer University dignitaries
- March 2022- recognized by Fulton County and City of Johns Creek with Proclamations; Rotary Clubs of Johns Creek



# Methodology, Data Collection & Analysis

- Case study methodology- built upon Endacott's (2010) recommendations that studies are needed to gain greater pedagogical understandings on whether student engagement in inquiry about underrepresented historical figures can promote HE.
- A 15-question survey with a Likert Scale about students' perspectives of engagement in HE- February 2022
- Next, participants were asked 10 open-ended questions about engagement in HE- February 2022
- Focus group interviews were conducted to investigate deeper affective connections to the research and project- February-March 2022



# Scan the QR Code to Access the Documentaries



# Findings- Survey Results

**Table 1. Survey Results, 24 participant responses**

| <b>Participating in this project helped me with...</b>                              | <b>Agree</b> | <b>Disagree</b> | <b>Neither Agree/Disagree</b> |
|---|--------------|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Identifying and explaining historical contexts</b>                               | 91.49%       | 5.16%           | 3.09%                         |
| <b>Discussing how historical contexts shape perspectives of those from the past</b> | 92.94        | 1.39%           | 5.55%                         |
| <b>Making affective connections to what I learned</b>                               | 88.30%       | 5.21%           | 8.85%                         |

# Student Feedback- Questionnaire

- "I've been living in Johns Creek about eleven years, and I had never heard about M.C."
- "Johns Creek isn't that old of a city to have deep, rich culture, but by going through this project, we were able to learn more about where we're living, whose land we're living on"
- "Doing the documentary gave me this emotional perspective, and I'm able to apply it everyday in class"
- "There were a lot of legal processes that [they] went through that I didn't know existed or were necessary for a project like this."



# Focus Group Feedback

- **Cognitive Connections to Historical Contexts and Race-** *It [this project] forced me to open my eyes and dismiss the idea that [our city] is a sort of idealistic bubble — one that is devoid of the problems the rest of our country faces. The history of the Macedonia cemetery is not a pretty part of our community's history, but it's so crucial to recognize and accept because being ignorant of the struggles of past African Americans in this land would be a disrespect to them (Field Notes, February 24, 2022).*
- **Cognitive Connections to Perspectives on Curricular Deficits-** *I had known that [our city] was such a diverse community because [at our school] you could see all different cultures being shown as we have an International Night and various and other cultural representations. But it kind of allowed me to see that this diversity had been in the past, too, and these are the stories that need to be included in our textbooks, That needs to be better included because we actually recently had a Black History Club presentation, and they kind of explained to us more about how the lack of African American representation in our textbooks and how that information is kind of being shut down and not promoted as a whole when it has been such an integral part of our American history” (Field Notes, March 8, 2022).*
- **Affective Connections to Identity and Citizenship-** *I’m the daughter of two immigrants from India, so I’ve always had diversity and inclusion in the back of my mind whenever I’m doing anything. But I think I’ve really been immersed into this different perspective that I never would have been immersed in or would have known about. So it definitely has got me thinking that hey, there’s other people out there...It gives you that different perspective that everyone needs, which I thought was very important” (Field Notes, March 7, 2022).*

# Limitations & Implications

- Lack of African American and BIPOC representation-evidence of a “historical empathy gap”
- COVID-19 protocols restricted visitation to physical archives
- Future research can include:
  - Examination of African American and BIPOC representation in advanced placement courses and extra curricular programs
  - Analysis of how students’ social identities impacts their demonstration of affective aspects of historical empathy
  - Investigation of whether social studies instruction conducted via implementation of the NCSS C3 Framework leads to long-term engagement among students in college and careers

# Film #1: They Were Here: The Founding of the Macedonia Cemetery



# Film #2: They Were Here: The Diverse People of Johns Creek, GA



# Film #3: They Were Here: April Waters and the Importance of Historical Research



# Film #4: The Were Here: The Future of the Macedonia Cemetery



# Conclusion

- We hope this project serves as inspiration for schools, youth organizations, historical societies, etc. to engage young people in historical research and preservation
- Through engagement in historical empathy, we hope that students can grow into active citizens in our democratic society.



# Questions?

Thank you for your time and attending this presentation!



# Thank you for coming!

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions:

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**Twitter:** @DrKAPerrotta

**LinkedIn:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/katherine-perrotta-ph-d-6ba78515/>

**Visions of Education Podcast Episode 156:** <https://visionsofed.com/2021/02/26/episode-156-busing-and-historical-empathy-with-katherine-perrotta/>

**Let's K-12 Better Episode Season 2, Episode 23:**

<https://letsk12better.buzzsprout.com/1036873/9688670-historical-empathy-making-it-real-for-kids-with-dr-katie-perrotta>

