



## Model Lesson Plan: Fourth Grade

While the African-American population in Montana has consistently remained small throughout its history, Black Montanans have participated in virtually every aspect of community life. In 1805, "York", the slave servant of William Clark, traveled to the area as a member of the Corps of Discovery and became the first documented person of African descent to spend time in what would become Montana Territory. In the following years African-Americans moved to the region where they participated as fur trappers, servants, interpreters, homesteaders, and business owners.

In many ways the African-American residents experienced life just as other citizens of Montana; they established churches and social organizations, served in the military, and worked the land. At the same time, they struggled to establish their rights to vote and gain an equal, not separate, education.

For the most part, the stories of these African-American residents have remained unheard. This is changing. By utilizing these lessons and the associated Montana Historical Society's [African-Americans in Montana Heritage Resources](#) web site, teachers will now be able to easily access primary source materials so their students might develop a better understanding of this important cultural group whose achievements and impact on Montana were greater than their small number.



## What it Means to be First

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### STAGE 1

#### Desired Results

#### Established Goals:

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding African-American life in Montana and the changes on their social structure through time. (SS8:B4.3 and 4)

#### Suggested Duration:

Three to five 50-minute class periods

#### Understandings:

Without engaging in protests and marches, individual African-Americans broke through several color barriers in Montana.

#### Essential Questions:

- How (and why) did skin color affect social status?
- What difficulties are there in being the first?
- What might be some of the effects of someone breaking the color barrier?
- Why did African-Americans organize their own institutions (e.g. first churches, first civic and social organizations, etc.)?

#### Students will be able to:

- Use the internet to find information about African-Americans in Montana.
- Interpret primary source material to learn more about a topic.
- Share what they learned with others.

#### Students will know that:

- Historically, skin color had a major impact on social status.
  - Montana African-Americans made social, economic, and political gains over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth century.
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### STAGE 2

#### Assessment Evidence

#### Performance Tasks:

- Create a poster board highlighting some of the trail-blazing efforts of African-Americans in Montana.
- Include biographical information, photographs, and other available primary source material from the African-Americans in Montana website of the Montana Historical Society.
- Exhibit an understanding of changing opportunities for African-American Montanans.



# African-Americans in Montana

## HERITAGE RESOURCES

**Materials/Resources Needed:**

Montana Historical Society, African-Americans in Montana Homepage,  
<http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AfricanAmericanInMT.asp>

**> Access links from above site:**

<http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/ContiguousStatesPopulation.pdf>  
<http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AAInMTCensusData.asp>

**> Suggested topics within this link:**

<http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AAinMTTimelineMain.asp>

- 1805 York, member of Corps of Discovery, first person of African descent to enter what will become Montana Territory
- 1893 Montana & Illinois Gold Mining Co., probably the first company incorporated by African-Americans in Montana
- 1893 John D. Posten; appointed 1st African-American U.S. Commissioner to District Court
- 1907 Alice Palmer, reputedly 1st African-American woman to file for homestead
- 1921 Henry T. Baker, appointed postmaster, believed to be 1st African-American state official
- 1921 James Dorsey, 1st African-American to graduate from University of Montana
- 1926 James Dorsey, 1st African-American to earn degree from University of Montana Law School
- 1957 Alma Jacobs, 1st African-American elected President of the Pacific Northwest Library Association
- 1960 Russ Williams, 1st African-American elected to Boy's State
- 1968 Black Studies Program established at University of Montana
- 1969 Ophelia Fenter, 1st African-American teacher at Butte High School
- 1974 Geraldine W. Travis 1st elected African-American Legislature to the Montana House of Representatives

**> Suggested Documents within this link:**

<http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AAinMTBibliographyMain.asp>

- 95I-484 Photo, James Dorsey, Missoula, 1963
- PAC2002-3 Color Transparency of Alma Jacobs
- PAC96-25-17 Photographic Print of "Tom Thumb wedding" at Union Bethel AME Church, Great Falls, ca. 1955
- PAC96-252 Photo of attendees of the 1st Convention of the Montana Federation Of Colored Women's Club, Butte, 1921
- MC281 Montana Federation of Colored Women's Club, 1921-1978
- 24CA 0970 "Union Bethel AME Church" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



### STAGE 3 Learning Activities

#### Step 1

Discuss essential questions. Teachers may also wish to use the K/W/L instructional technique, asking students what they know, what they want to know, and, at the conclusion of the lesson, what they have learned, about African-American history in Montana and in the United States.

#### Step 2

Divide students into three groups or work together as a class to investigate how job options changed for African-Americans. Encourage them to include stories of individuals they may know personally.

- a. Explain the decennial census, why it was established, and how historians use it to gain information about the lives of ordinary people.
- b. Have each group look at a different census year.

Group 1 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African-Americans in Montana in 1870?” using <http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/CensusData/1870Occupationsoverager12.pdf>.

Group 2 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African-Americans in Montana in 1910?” using <http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/CensusData/1910Occupationsoverager11.pdf>.

Group 3 will answer the question “What jobs were available for African-Americans in Montana in 1930?” using <http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/CensusData/1930Occupationsoverager14.pdf>.

- c. Have students share their findings and discuss. What does the data suggest about changes in African-Americans’ social status? Do students think there are greater or fewer job options for African-Americans today?

#### Step 3

Have students research African-American firsts and create poster boards that present information gathered from <http://mhs.mt.gov/research/AfricanAmerican/AfricanAmericanInMT.asp>. Teachers may wish to set aside time for students to look at each other’s poster boards (or they may wish to invite another class in to view their students’ work.)

#### Step 4

Lead your students in a discussion of the following:

- a. How might it have felt to be a “first”?
- b. What is the relationship between the African-American trailblazers the students researched and the changing opportunities they documented through their study of the census?



## African-Americans in Montana

### HERITAGE RESOURCES

- c. What other factors might have contributed to changing opportunities for African-American Montanans?
- d. How might it feel today to be a member of the African-American community in Montana?
- e. What can students do to make sure everyone feels welcome and a part of the overall community?