



African Americans in Nebraska: A Special Double Issue

(Article begins on second page below.)

This article is copyrighted by History Nebraska (formerly the Nebraska State Historical Society). You may download it for your personal use. For permission to re-use materials, or for photo ordering information, see: <https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/re-use-nshs-materials>

Learn more about *Nebraska History* (and search articles) here:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/publications/nebraska-history-magazine>

History Nebraska members receive four issues of *Nebraska History* annually:
<https://history.nebraska.gov/get-involved/membership>

Full Citation: David L Bristow, "African Americans in Nebraska: A Special Double Issue: Introduction," *Nebraska History* 91 (2010): 114-115.

URL: <https://history.nebraska.gov/blog/african-americans-nebraska-history>

Date: 2/28/2019

African Americans in Nebraska

A SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

Introduction

The notion that some races are naturally inferior to others is one of the most effective conscience-soothing and money-making ideas in history. It buttressed colonialism and Manifest Destiny. It let Christian slave owners sleep at night. It supplied employers with cheap laborers who had few other options. It handed politicians another tool with which to maintain power by manipulating public fears and prejudices. It has played a role in many of the bloodier chapters of our history, and it is not yet properly spoken of only in the past tense.

African American history is the story of a long struggle against this idea, and black Nebraskans are part of this story. While in no way comprehensive, this special issue of *Nebraska History* examines portions of black history from the time of Nebraska statehood in 1867 through the 1950s.

For those who understand black history mainly as a story of the South and of major Northern cities, these half-dozen essays will contain plenty of surprises. Lynchings and segregated schools are usually portrayed as Southern phenomena, but Orville Menard and David Peavler Trowbridge prove otherwise. Abolitionist and orator Frederick Douglass is associated with the East Coast, but Tekla Johnson, John Wunder, and Abigail Anderson describe his personal connection with a Nebraska woman who was his adopted sister. The black cultural movement of the 1920s is often known as the Harlem Renaissance, but Jennifer Hildebrand shows that the New Negro Movement (as it is more properly called) was truly national—even flowering in Lincoln, Nebraska. And while the Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott of 1955-56 is one of the best-known events of the Civil Rights Movement, Amy Forss describes how four years earlier, *Omaha Star* publisher Mildred Brown and other activists led a successful boycott of an Omaha bus company that refused to hire black drivers.

As the first state to join the Union after the Civil War, Nebraska was shaped by the contemporary national discussion about race and civil rights. As a condition of statehood, Congress forced Nebraska to guarantee voting rights to black men in its constitution. As James Potter shows, even our state motto, “Equality Before the Law,” was prompted by the Civil War’s reshaping of the nation’s political and racial landscape—and was an ideal that would long await fulfillment. 🗳️

DAVID L. BRISTOW, EDITOR