

## Montana's African American Heritage Resources



=Detail of "Aunt Milly [sic] Ringsold, Once a Slave. R.L.P."  
Montana Historical Society Research Center, #M4 585

### Model Lesson Plan: Seventh–Ninth 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 enslaved 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 African Americans 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 this lesson and the associated [Montana's African American 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.

### Creation of a Community

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#### Stage 1 Desired Results

#### Established Goals:

Students demonstrate an understanding of African American life in Montana and how it has changed over time. (SS.H.6-8.5, SS.H.9-12.1, SS.H.9-12.3)

#### Students will:

- Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content (CC.ELA.W.2)
- Conduct short research projects to answer a question (CC.ELA.W.7)
- Produce clear and coherent writing (CC.ELA.W.4) and develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting (CC.ELA.W.5)
- Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (CC.ELA.SL.1) and present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner (CC.ELA.SL.4)

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Social Studies  
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**Suggested Duration:**

Approximately three to five 50-minute class periods

**Understandings:**

- While consistently small in number, African Americans have maintained a significant presence in Montana since the early nineteenth century.
- In Montana, African Americans found both prejudice and opportunity.

**Essential Questions:**

- How (and why) did skin color affect social status?
- Why did African Americans organize their own institutions (e.g. churches, civic and social organizations, etc.)?
- How did laws relating to race affect African Americans' economic, political, and social opportunities?

**Students will be able to:**

- Recognize the contributions and struggles that diverse groups can make to the entire state.
- Verbalize and create a written interpretation of their research.

**Students will know:**

- That, historically, skin color has had a major impact on social status.
- Montana African Americans made social, economic, and political gains over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

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**Stage 2**  
**Assessment Evidence**

**Performance Tasks:**

- Students will analyze census data, photographs, and other available primary and secondary source material.
- Students will create brief feature articles, focused on a topic central to Montana's African American history.
- Students will identify an appropriate illustration and write a brief caption.
- Students will provide a brief oral presentation of research and findings during class.

**Materials/Resources Needed:**

- Montana Historical Society, Montana's African American Heritage Resources website, <http://mhs.mt.gov/shpo/AfricanAmericans>.
- Computers with Internet access for student use.

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**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 five groups and assign each group the task of researching a different aspect of African American life in Montana. Groups should gather as much information as possible that applies to each of these questions. (Note: Under each groups' assignment, we have directed students to areas of the Montana's African American Heritage Resources website that will have pertinent information. Among the sources are National Register of Historic Places nomination forms and Historic Property Record forms. These resources were created as part of a project to identify and document African American heritage places, and follow the format required by the Montana State Historic Preservation Office. Each form begins with architectural information. Students can find the historical information they need toward the middle of the document under the subheading "Narrative Statement of Significance" or "History of the Property.")

After conducting their research, group members should organize themselves so that each student writes a short, one to two paragraph feature article (with proper citations) on a different part of their research (e.g., a particular person or organization or event that helps answer the main question).

**Students in Group 1** will answer the question "What laws were enacted that were specifically directed to African Americans?" (education, voting, marriage). Students will find relevant information on the following sections of the site: The Timeline (under the history tab) and the Resources and Research page.

**Students in Group 2** will answer the question "What evidence is there of African Americans creating community life?" (jobs, churches, homeownership, organizations). Students will find relevant information on the following sections of the site: The History tab (particularly the Timeline, Women's History, and Churches pages) and the Places page (particularly the Story Maps).

**Students in Group 3** will answer the question "What were some of the successes that African American Montanans experienced?" Students will find relevant information on the following sections of the site: The History tab (particularly the Timeline), the Oral History summaries (follow the link to the Oral History page from Resources and Research), and on the National Register page (under the Places tab).

**Students in Group 4** will answer the question "What were some of the difficulties African American Montanans faced?" Students will find relevant information on the following sections of the site: The History tab (particularly the Timeline) and the "African-American

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Heritage Places in Helena, MT" Multiple Properties Documentation (find link toward the bottom of the National Register page, under the Places tab).

Students in Group 5 will answer the question "How did the African American population change from 1910 to 1930?" This group will need to work with the census data and should analyze demographic trends, as well as population size, using information from the Resources and Research page.

Ask students within each group to read and edit each other's articles. Then have groups discuss what generalizations they can make about their research. Have them write an introduction that ties their research together.

### Step 3

Have each group find at least one (but preferably more) relevant images to illustrate their research from the MHS Collections page of the website (under the Resources and Research tab). After writing appropriate captions, which should include the credit information (including the image catalog number), have each group combine their introduction, articles, and illustrations to create a mini-magazine focused on their topic and have them present their topic to the class.

### Step 4

Have the class merge all the "mini-magazines" into one binder. Create a table of contents for the magazine and donate a copy of it to your school library and/or community library.

### Step 5

Lead your students in a wrap-up discussion that engages your students' critical thinking skills and elicits their emotional responses with the following four questions, most easily remembered through the acronym DICE: What **disturbed** you about what the information you uncovered during this exercise? What **interested** you? What **confused** you? What **enlightened** you?