

Texas African American History Memorial Monument

Panel #1: First Contact and the Spanish Colonia Era 1528-1820

The first recorded people of African descent arrived in Texas with Spanish explorers and settlers. Estevanico, a Moorish slave from Azamor, Morocco, arrived in Texas in 1528 with a party of Spanish explorers who were shipwrecked on the Gulf Coast near Galveston Island. With three other survivors, Andres Dorantes de Castillo, Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca and Alonso del Castillo Maldonado, he walked across southern Texas and northern Mexico, showing a talent for Indian languages and acting as an interpreter for the party. Estevanico was later pressed into service by the Viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza, to guide an expedition into what is now Arizona. He was killed at Zuni Pueblo in 1539. His death may have been due to a sacred rattle given to him by Texas Indians, which the Zuni considered an offensive object.

Estevanico was one of the thousands of Africans who helped settle Spanish Texas over the course of 300 years. By 1792, African people in Texas comprised 13 percent of the population. Most arrived enslaved. The African-American cultural heritage is a significant legacy that has shaped both our state and national heritage.

Panel #2: Slavery During the Mexican National Era 1821-1836

During the Mexican national era, enslaved people of African descent were brought to Texas by the Anglo-American settlers introduced into Texas by Stephen F. Austin and other empresarios, land agents authorized by the Mexican government to help settle Texas.

In 1830, Mexican lawmakers prohibited further immigration into Texas from the United States and explicitly banned the introduction of enslaved people into the territory. This ban contributed to increasing tensions between United States settlers and the Mexican government, and was one of the causes of the Texas Revolution from 1835 to 1836. By the time Texas declared independence, there were approximately 5,000 enslaved Blacks in the region.

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Panel #3: Slavery During the Republic and Early Statehood 1836-1860

Between 1836 and 1860, the slave population in Texas grew from 5,000 to 182,566. The greatest increase in the number of slaves brought to Texas occurred from 1850 to 1865.

Among the expanding slave population were children who were purchased and brought to the State, or born in captivity to enslaved parents. Enslaved children typically wore slave cloth shirts made of homespun cotton or wool and were expected to do chores until they were old enough for field work. Enslaved women were expected to bear children and take care of their home life in the slave quarters, and to help farm cotton and other crops. Cotton produced by slave labor was the most important staple in the Texas economy, but slave labor was also integral to the economic growth of Texas in the lumber and construction industries. Several iconic Texas buildings including the 1853 limestone Texas Capitol, the 1856 Governor's Mansion, and the 1853 Pease Mansion were built with Black slave labor. Most slaves showed skills in farming, animal husbandry, construction, masonry, cooking and blacksmithing.

Panel #4: Civil War, Emancipation and Juneteenth 1861-1865

On the eve of the Civil War, the number of enslaved people in Texas totaled 30 percent of the state's population. This number continued to grow as slaveholders from other areas of the Confederacy came to Texas as refugees to escape the fighting and brought their enslaved property with them. Scholars estimate that more than 30,000 enslaved people were brought into Texas during the Civil War years alone. The conflict did not readily change the Black experience in Texas, as most African-Americans continued to be held in bondage and forced to labor.

Federal troops occupied Texas in June 1865 after the Civil War. General Gordon Granger issued General Order Number 3 at Galveston on June 19, 1865 to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation previously signed by President Abraham Lincoln. That day soon became recognized as Juneteenth or Emancipation Day, although many slaves in Texas were not freed until much later. Juneteenth was officially declared a state holiday in Texas in 1980, and today it continues to be celebrated here and in other states as a milestone of the African-American struggle for freedom.

After Emancipation, the former slaves entered the new stage of freedom with a mixture of joy, despair, elation, fear, hope, doubt, certainty and confusion. With little social infrastructure other than their families, they sought to make their way in a nation and state they helped to create, but in which they had very little ownership, input or power.

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Panel #5: Reconstruction and the Post Slavery Experience 1865-1900

After emancipation, Blacks in Texas, as in other southern states, became members of a society that was unwilling to accept them as equals. Despite efforts to be included in the fabric of Texas society, violence by hostile groups, the lack of access to courts and the ultimate withdrawal of federal troops resulted in the loss of equal protection under the law. In 1866-1867, Blacks could be arrested if they did not have employment, and once jailed, their labor could be forced. Prisoners, the majority of whom were African-Americans, were leased to contractors as convict laborers. These leased prisoners were used much like slaves, including during the construction of the current State Capitol. Although Blacks did serve on juries, vote and hold office for a few years from the late 1870s until the turn of the 20th century, their rights were constantly threatened at the local level and taken away statewide soon after 1900.

During the era of Reconstruction, African-Americans sought to live and prosper in the aftermath of slavery. Fifty-two African-American men served Texas as either state legislative members or Constitutional Convention delegates during the last half of the 19th century. They built communities with churches and schools. Some former slaves served in Texas in four African-American regiments with white officers formed in 1866, the 9th and 10th Cavalry and the 24th and 25th Infantry. Native Americans gave these men the title of "Buffalo Soldiers." Some African-Americans, including Bob Lemmons, Bill Pickett and Tige Avery became successful cowboys and horse wranglers on many Texas ranches, in part due to skills learned during their years of slavery.

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Panel #6 Post Reconstruction Challenges and Achievements 1877-1954

The end of Reconstruction proved an uncertain and violent time for African-Americans living in Texas. Riots and lynchings were common occurrences. By the early 20th century, Texas ranked third in the nation for lynching. Violence, however, did not deter Texans of African descent from seeking to improve their economic, political and social status. This period saw major African-American contributions to aviation, sports and the arts--particularly in music. Folk music from the African-Americans in Texas made an important contribution to the development of blues, folk and country music in America.

Blacks were barred from attending public schools with Whites in Texas until 1954, when the United States Supreme Court ended public school segregation in the United States. Despite being forced to attend inferior public schools, African-Americans were able to attain higher education at traditionally black colleges including Huston-Tillotson University, Prairie View A&M University, Texas Southern University and Wiley College.

During and after World War II, Black Texans played a significant role in advancing Civil Rights. The landmark case *Smith v. Allwright* (1944) improved the voting rights for African-Americans in the South and *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950) paved the way for equal access to education by opening the doors of The University of Texas law school to African-American students. More groundbreaking changes followed. African-American voter registration peaked in the 1960s. Activists organized peaceful protests including lunch counter sit-ins, marches and business boycotts.

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Panel #7: Major Achievements

African-American Texans have contributed to the state's culture, and have gained prominence in a host of fields. Despite the tremendous challenges posed by the institution of slavery, Jim Crow segregation and discrimination, African-Americans overcame and continue to overcome great obstacles to make a place for themselves in the Lone Star State, and are an essential part of Texas history, life and culture.

Scott Joplin, a world class composer and pianist, was known as the "King of Ragtime Writers." Jack Johnson was the first Black heavyweight boxing champion of the world. Bessie Coleman broke historical barriers by becoming the first African-American woman aviator and one of the first licensed female pilots in the world. Navy Mess Attendant Second Class Doris "Dorie" Miller shot down four Japanese warplanes at Pearl Harbor and was awarded the Navy Cross.

Barbara Jordan was the first African-American woman elected to the Texas Senate (1966) and later became the first African-American congresswoman from Texas (1972-1978). Congressman Mickey Leland held the office previously occupied by Barbara Jordan and was a champion for equal rights until his untimely death.

From exploration of unchartered lands in Texas to exploration of outer space, people of African descent contributed significantly to Texas history. This memorial is dedicated to their struggle and their accomplishments so that both will not be forgotten.

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Back Panel 1: Battles for Texas Independence from Mexico 1836

Several notable individuals of African descent participated in the battles at the Alamo and San Jacinto in 1836. Joe, slave of William B. Travis, fought at the Alamo and survived. His account of the fighting is one of the most important Alamo narratives. Mack Smith, slave of Ben Fort Smith, and Dick the Drummer, a musician, both participated in the battle of San Jacinto.

A story recorded in 1842 by William Bollaert, an Englishman touring Texas, claimed that the Mexican Army probably lost the battle of San Jacinto because of the influence of a mulatto girl named "Emily," who belonged to Col. James Morgan and was "closeted" in Santa Anna's tent, detaining him when the Texans charged the Mexican Army camp. No other account of the battle mentions this story, but in 1836 a free woman named Emily D. West, who came to Texas from New York in late 1835, was employed by Col. Morgan as a house worker in New Washington (now Morgan's Point) on Galveston Bay. Morgan's settlement was occupied and burned by Santa Anna's army on April 20, the day before the battle. His servants, unable to escape, were captured by the Mexican Army. Emily, sometimes known as "the Yellow Rose of Texas," may have been among the prisoners because in 1837, when seeking a passport to leave Texas, she said she had lost her free papers at San Jacinto in April 1836.

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Back Panel 2: Hendrick Arnold and Samuel McCulloch, Jr.

Hendrick Arnold and Samuel McCulloch, Jr. played important roles in the Texas Revolution and the formation of the Republic of Texas. After Texas became independent, both were considered free Blacks, but they were placed under severe legal restrictions. Samuel McCulloch, Jr., who lived near the Lavaca River with his family, has been called “a genuine Texas hero.” McCulloch volunteered to serve in the Texas Army and was wounded at the Battle of Goliad, the only Texan to be injured. After the war in 1837, he petitioned the Republic of Texas for citizenship rights and land. His petition was rejected, but McCulloch performed other military duties for the Republic of Texas, including serving as a spy during the Mexican invasion of San Antonio in 1842. After twenty years of petitioning the Congress of the Republic of Texas and the Texas State Legislature, McCulloch finally received his land in 1858 and settled at Von Ormy in Bexar County, where he farmed and ranched until his death in 1893.

Hendrick Arnold’s family resided in San Antonio. In 1835, Arnold and his father-in-law, Erastus Smith, went on a hunting trip. When they attempted to go home, Mexican soldiers, who had since occupied San Antonio, refused to let them return. Subsequently, both Arnold and his father-in-law joined the Texas Army under Stephen F. Austin and worked as soldiers, spies and guides. Arnold became known in military circles as an associate of Sam Houston, an efficient and brave spy, and was cited for his service in the Texas Revolution. With his commendation from the Republic of Texas, he acquired land outside of San Antonio where he is buried today.

Back Panel 3: The 21st Century

The State of Texas has thrived economically. Early history indicates that the development of the cotton industry, initially dependent on slave labor, as well as the cattle market and the discovery of abundant supplies of oil contributed to this economic wealth. These three profitable industries facilitated Texas’ economic progress. However, such achievements were often at the expense of African-Americans who rarely reaped the benefits of such growth. For 200 years, Texans of African descent struggled for economic, social and political success. They fought to gain access to basic judicial and human rights to secure their enfranchisement and their role in Texas society. In some cases, they achieved some success. In other areas, there is work yet to be done. This Memorial is dedicated to both the struggles and achievements of African-American Texans and the impact of both on the economic and cultural vitality of the State of Texas.