



African Americans' Contributions to Our Nation

Ethnic and Cultural Group



The Union victory in 1865 marked the close of the Civil War. One of the most widely anticipated benefits of emancipation was freedom of movement. No longer confined by law to a slaveholder's plantation, most formerly enslaved African Americans expected to have the option of migrating. However, during Reconstruction, "vagrancy" laws, debt peonage and the convict-lease system were quickly implemented to curtail the new freedom. And because African American labor had been the mainstay of the southern economy, efforts to force them to remain and work in the communities where they had been enslaved often succeeded because they were destitute, and the "40 acres and a mule" they expected never arrived.

The legal battle for equality continued with the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments, but unfavorable Supreme Court decisions, Jim Crow laws, separate-but-equal policies and a campaign of terrorism carried out by the KKK and allied groups, made sure that African Americans would not easily achieve their real freedom in the Southern states. Moreover, those who migrated to the North quickly realized they had not reached the promised land and continued to face discriminatory practices in housing and employment. Those that had migrated to the West, however, fared better. Finally, in 1954, the *Brown v. School Board of Topeka, Kansas*, decision declared segregation to be unconstitutional.

Despite the hardships, many native-born African Americans succeeded in almost all occupations. And, like all other ethnic and cultural groups that made a life for themselves and their families in America, the native-born African Americans have made—and continue to make—a vital contribution to our nation's growth. (Text and photographs from the Americans All Classroom Resources.)

Legacy Stories from the Americans All Heritage Honor Roll

We are pleased to host and share these legacy stories created by honorees' family, friends and associates. They, like us, appreciate that heritage and culture are an integral part of our nation's social fabric and want to help students participate effectively in our nation's economy, workforce and democracy.

Search by: and
 Language State

and or
 Last Name of Individual First Name of Individual Group name

Civil War: Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, 54th Massachusetts (March 13, 1863 - August 4, 1865) Carney, Glory, Hallowell, Medal of Honor, Military, Shaw, Fort Wagner

On January 26, 1863, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton authorized Massachusetts Governor John Albion. Andrew to create volunteer companies of artillery "for duty in the forts of Massachusetts and elsewhere, and such corps of infantry for the volunteer military service as he may find convenient.

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Timeline of the Civil War: Background and Causes South Carolina (April 12, 1861 - April 9, 1865) Union, Confederacy, slavery, Lincoln, Douglas, Brown, Stowe, Taney, Scott, succession, Tubman, Andersonville, Pennington, Truth, Davis, Fifty-Fourth, 54th

The Civil War is one of the most complex, studied and written about events in U.S. history and was fought from April 12, 1861 to April 9, 1865. Although many theories have been considered, it is now generally agreed that the main cause of the conflict was the long-standing controversy over the enslavement of Black people.

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Stories can be published in multiple languages and in any character set

Mollie Arline Kirkland Bailey Texas (November 1844 - October 2, 1918) Circus Musician, Singer, War-Time Nurse, Philanthropist

Mollie Bailey, "Circus Queen of the Southwest," the daughter of William and Mary Arline Kirkland, was born on a plantation near Mobile, Alabama. Sources differ regarding her birthdate. As a young woman, she eloped with James A. (Gus) Bailey, who played the cornet in his father's circus band and was married in March 1858. With Mollie's sister Fanny and Gus's brother Alfred, the young couple formed the Bailey Family Troupe . . .

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Matthew Alexander Henson New York (August 8, 1866 - March 9, 1955) African-American, Explorer, North Pole

Matthew Alexander Henson was born August 8, 1866, to free African American parents on an impoverished tenant farm in Charles County, Maryland. By the time he was 11 years old, both of his parents had died and he lived with relatives. At age 13 he went to sea as a cabin boy.

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