

Information Compiled by Idaho State University  
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(2002)

African Americans make up the smallest proportion of Idaho's population, totaling less than one half of one percent of the total population (1990 census). Their contribution to Idaho's history and ethnic diversity, however, is greater than their small numbers would suggest.

The history of black Americans in Idaho begins with the Lewis and Clark expedition. York, William Clark's personal servant, was the first and perhaps the best known of African Americans in Idaho. He was followed by other black explorers, trappers, miners, cowboys, soldiers, and settlers who came to Idaho in the succeeding century. Unfortunately, the history and stories of these men and women is not well documented, especially those who lived outside Boise or Pocatello. Although some secondary sources summarize the African American history in Idaho, there is much more to be discovered in the county records, newspaper morgues, and photographic archives.

### **Resources:**

**Idaho Ethnic Heritage Project. (1990) *Idaho's Ethnic Heritage*. L. Mercier and C. Simon-Smolinski, project co-directors. Funded by the Idaho Centennial Commission, Ethnic Heritage Committee. Boise, Idaho.** This multi-volume report was published in limited quantities as part of Idaho's Centennial. Public and university libraries may have a copy. The volumes include un-refereed historical summaries of Idaho's different ethnic groups and a separate volume of "Resources." Among the many references are primary documents, such as newspaper articles, diaries, and letters; and secondary sources, only a few of which deal specifically with Idaho's black American community. **A selection of these sources follows:**

Armitage, Susan, and Deborah Wilbert. 1988. "Black women in the Pacific Northwest: A survey and research prospectus." In *Women in Pacific Northwest History: An Anthology*, Karen Blair (ed.) Seattle: University of Washington.

Biggs, Bradley. 1986. *The Triple Nickles: America's First All-Black Paratroop Unit*. Hamden, CT: Archon Books.

Blanchard, Florence. (n.d.) *Hailey, Idaho: 1881-1981*. Hailey: Parke Printing Co.

Carroll, John M. (ed.) (no date given) *The Black Military Experience in the American West*. (no publisher given).

Castles, Jean. 1969. "The west: Crucible of the Negro." *Montana: the Magazine of Western History*, 19 (Winter): 83-85.

Clark, Ed (1988). "Neglected history: Blacks in Idaho." *Focus*, 13 (Winter): 13.

Conroy, Michael S. 1985. "Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1850-1860." *Nevada Historical Quarterly*, 28 (Summer): 90-121.

De Graaf, Lawrence B. (1980). "Race, sex, and region: Black women in the American West, 1850-1920." *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (May): 285-313.

Evancho, Bob. 1988. "White fright: Idaho Grapples with its racist reputation." *Focus*, 13 (Winter): 25-39.

Fletcher, Marvin. 1972. "Army fire fighters." *Idaho Yesterdays*, 16:12-15. "Company G: the Army's all-black 25<sup>th</sup> infantry, in Avery in 1921 to help fight forest fires, protect town, evacuate people, maintain order."

Goldsmith, Claire. 1971. "Gentle people." *Incredible Idaho* 9. No page #'s given. "Biography of Abe Venable, black resident of New Plymouth."

Hanson, Sam. 1984. "Handling discrimination during the Depression." *Rendezvous*, 20(1):19-23. "Recalls the confusion and frustration faced by a young black girl growing up in Pocatello during the Great Depression." *Rendezvous* is an irregular publication from Idaho State University.

Hodges, Kathy. (n.d.) "The people of the cove." Unpublished manuscript, a biography of Doc Hisom of the Snake River canyon. Oral History Office files, Idaho State Historical Society. (dot notes: I'm not sure but that this entry may include some typos. Further down the list, the Resource Guide cites a document by "Doc Hysom" who was an early folk doctor and lived in a "cave". That document is listed as "IFA 83/69 at the Idaho State Historical Society."

Hutton, May Arkwright. 1900. *The Coeur d'Alene or a Tale of the Modern Inquisition in Idaho*. Denver: App Printing. All-black 24<sup>th</sup> infantry sent to quiet labor unrest in 1899.

Leckie, William. 1967. *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West*. Norman: University of Oklahoma.

Oliver, Mamie (ed.). 1982. "The Black church and kinship networks." Unpublished manuscript at Boise state University.

Oliver, Mamie, and John Clark (eds.) 1988. *Idaho Ebony: 1860 and Present*. Boise: Boise State University.

Porter, Kenneth W. 1969. "Negro labor in western cattle industry." *Labor History*, 10:346-374.

Porter, Kenneth W. 1971. *The Negro on the American Frontier*. New York: Arno Press.

Savage, W. Sherman. 1928. "The Negro in the history of the Pacific Northwest." *Journal of Negro History*, 13:255-64.

Schoenberg, Dale. 1969. "The Black man in the American West." *Negro History Bulletin*, 32 (March): 7-11.

Simmons, Jane T., and Everett S. Lee. 1974. "The extraordinary composition of rural black population outside the South." *Phylon*, 35 (Fall): 313-321. "Statistical analysis of african Americans in Idaho and other states in 1970."

Smurr, J.W. 1957. "Jim Crow out west." In *Historical Essays on Montana and the Northwest*, J.W. Smurr and K Ross Toole (eds.), pp. 149-203. Helena: Montana Historical Society Press.

Taylor, Quintard, Jr. 1977. *A History of Black in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970*. PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota. "Includes detailed history of blacks in Idaho."

**Photographic Sources, as listed in the Idaho's Ethnic Heritage Resources Guide:**

Bonner County Museum, photo collection. Henry, black saloon keeper, Hope, c. 1900.

Idaho State Journal photo archives, Pocatello.

Idaho State Historical Society, photo archives, Boise.

Latah County Historical Society, photo collection. Single image of Joe Wells' black logging crew.

Bannock County Musseum. Pocatello, black cowboy on bucking horse.

University of Idaho, photo collection. Barnard/Stockbridge collections includes: black infrantry to Wallace, 1892. Special collecitons, University of Idaho.

Boise State University: Educaitonal Media Services, 1982. "The Black Experience in Boise." 102 slides, cassette, text "The Black Church and Kinship Networks: Cultural Essay." (dot's note: from the title, I would guess that this text is the same as Mamie Oliver's unpublished manuscript listed above. I do not know if she is also responsible for the slides and cassette.)

**Sound Recordings, as listed in the Idaho's Ethnic Heritage Resources Guide, are held at these repositories:**

Idaho State Historical Society

Ketchum Community Library

Latah County Historical Society Oral History Collection

Twin Falls Public Library

Washington State University

**Historic Sites and Architecture, as listed in the Idaho's Ethnic Heritage Resources Guide:**

Boise: Lee Street Historic District. Settled 1900s (History Sites Inventory #93); Owyhee Hotel -- plaque, photos, memorabilia honoring Andrew Horton, waiter at the Owyhee Hotel.; St. Paul's Baptist Church (Historic Sites Inventory #74); Segregated burial sites for Chinese and Blacks at Rose Hill Cemetery.

Pocatello: Bethel Baptist Church, 401 N. 5th Ave (established 1921)

Idaho Falls: Community Church of God in Christ.

Oakley: Gravesite of Gobo Fango, d. 1886, in Oakley Cemetery.