



The African Texans
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Introduction

FROM THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY through the twentieth century the lives of African people in Texas changed dramatically. Within this span of four centuries, black Texans contributed to the development and diversity of Texas culture in numerous ways. This book expands our understanding of African American history in Texas by providing examples of the social and cultural contributions made by them, which have not received much attention. The bibliographical essay at the end of this volume offers a guide for readers who wish to know more details about specific topics.

This book is organized into five parts. The first section describes free Africans before the Civil War, beginning in the Spanish colonial period with explorers and continuing with settlers under Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, and the United States. The early free black men and women came primarily to build a new and prosperous life.


The focus then shifts to the lives of enslaved Africans before the Civil War, with greater attention given to the period of the republic and the state in the early 1800s. Within the limits imposed by slavery, black people worked and used a variety of creative skills. They kept some control over their lives through family ties and religion. They preserved their African heritage through music and folklore when they celebrated their few holidays from long days of labor. Many resisted the controls of slavery, sought freedom, and celebrated its arrival at the end of the Civil War.

Life after emancipation brought new hopes and struggles to gain economic opportunities and a chance to participate in government. While most African Texans worked on farms, others labored on ranches and service jobs in towns. In those places they tried to create stable families, establish their own churches and schools, participate in various sports, and use their music for both jobs and entertainment.

In the early twentieth century, the African Texans faced several forms of discrimination but struggled to overcome violence and segregation to participate more fully in all aspects of life in Texas. Blacks found new jobs loading ships, building railroads, working in oil fields, making steel, and constructing ships. They moved in growing numbers to cities, where they established businesses and became attorneys and doctors, as well as writers and photographers, professional musicians, and athletes.

In the later years of the twentieth century, African Americans formed and joined various civil rights groups that went to court to regain the right to vote and to desegregate schools and other public places across Texas. As a result of their efforts in the civil rights movement, and as laws and public opinion changed, black Texans began to join in the full range of activities available to citizens of the state and nation.

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