

Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



Arrival: *Finding a home in the city*



Photos (clockwise, from top left): John S. and Fannie Wright and their family, courtesy of Minneapolis Interview Project; adults and children on the steps of the Phyllis Wheatley House, courtesy of MNHS; Black Minnesotan soldiers serving in World War I, courtesy of MNHS Press; Somali Independence Day in 2016, courtesy of Fibonacci Blue

The City of Minneapolis has been working since 2019 to document the history of African Americans in Minneapolis. We have published a report about this work. It's called the Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study. One section focuses on how and when African Americans came to Minneapolis. This is a summary of that content.

People of African descent have lived in what is now Minneapolis since at least 1800. They may identify as African American, Black, or Black American. Others may identify with their country of origin.

Early 1800s

Some people of African descent worked in the fur trade. They were entrepreneurs, servants, hunters, guides and interpreters. Some people were enslaved laborers. They were brought by military officers stationed at Fort Snelling. For example, Dred Scott met and married Harriet Robinson at the fort. Others traveled with



Dred and Harriet Robinson Scott met and married at Fort Snelling. They were both enslaved. Courtesy of MNHS

vacationing white families from the South. During this time period, some people were free. They helped others get freedom here. Some also arrived to escape slavery in the South.

Late 1800s

After the Civil War, more Black people migrated to Minnesota. They settled in Minneapolis, Saint Paul, and other cities across the state. In many cases, one or two family members came first and then others followed. For example, John S. Wright moved here from Kentucky and stayed with an aunt and uncle. His wife, Fannie, joined him the next year.

1900s-1970s

Many African Americans moved to Minneapolis during the Great Migration in the 1900s. There were labor shortages during World War I and II, which new arrivals helped fill. Black soldiers also served in the wars, like John and Fannie's son Boyd. Many Southerners wanted to escape the oppression of Jim Crow laws. However, they still faced discrimination in Minneapolis. This impacted housing and job options, in particular. Various community organizations helped people get settled.

1970s to early 2000s

Since the 1970s, many people have moved here from Africa, especially Ethiopia and Somalia. Their home countries faced economic hardship, political unrest, and armed conflict. Often, one or two family members come first and the others follow. Most of the state's African immigrant community lives in the Twin Cities.



**Scan to learn more in the
*Minneapolis African American
Historic and Cultural Context Study***

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