

# Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



## Art, Design, Music, and Culture: *Adding vibrancy to the city*



Photos (clockwise, from top left): Prince at First Avenue, courtesy of Joel Bremer; The Gentlemen perform at the Riverview Supper Club, photo by Charles Chamblis, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS); "American Gothic" by Gordon Parks, courtesy of Library of Congress; Capri Theater, courtesy of MNHS; Cecil Newman, photo by Rohn Engh courtesy of MNHS; Cozy Bar, photo by Norton & Peele, courtesy of MNHS



*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. A section of the report focuses on African Americans in media, visual arts, performing arts, and design. This is a summary of that content.*

The media and arts have been creative outlets and critical information sources. They have also nurtured jobs and civil rights advocacy. Work in these fields fosters community identity.

The first Black **newspapers** in the Twin Cities were published in the 1880s. They helped share information specific to this community. They also pushed for civil rights. The first long-running Black newspaper in Minneapolis was the Twin City Star from 1910 to 1919.

In 1934, Cecil Newman founded the *Minneapolis Spokesman* and the *St. Paul Recorder*. These critical news sources continue today as the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*. It is still in the family as Newman's granddaughter Tracey Williams-Dillard is the CEO and publisher.



African Americans also enrich the city's **performing arts**. In the late 1800s, Charles E. Johnson and Dora Dean were top vaudeville stars. Others have shone in theater. Black musicians have shaped jazz, the blues scene, and more.

A distinct musical style called the **Minneapolis Sound** emerged here in the 1970s. Prince and other musicians fused R&B, funk, rock, and New Wave.

**Venues** across the city have hosted performances with Black artists. However, in the first few decades of the 1900s, many music venues restricted who could perform or attend shows. For example, Pantages Theater was the site of a legal battle related to segregation in 1916. This led to the emergence of Black venues, which became beloved social spaces.



Several Black **architects** rose to prominence in Minneapolis. Notable people include Lorenzo D. Williams, Lonnie O. Adkins, and Jay W. Tyson. They designed houses and

churches across the city. They also led major planning projects. Their legacies continue today as more Black designers are helping shape the city.

More individuals and related spaces can and should be uplifted in the future.

*Photos: Dora Dean and Charles E. Johnson, courtesy of Hennepin County Library (left); Zion Baptist Church designed by Lorenzo D. Williams, courtesy of MNHS (right)*



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

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