

Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



Community, Social Organizations, Recreation and Education: *Helping people thrive in the city*



Photos (clockwise from top left): golfers including Jimmie Slemmons, courtesy of Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS); street dance outside The Way Community Center, courtesy of MNHS; Minneapolis Central High School, courtesy of MNHS; kids at the Phyllis Wheatley House, courtesy of MNHS; National Urban League award recipients from the Twin Cities, courtesy of Hennepin County Library



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 the groups of people and places that shaped daily life for African Americans. This is a summary of that content.

People of African descent have lived and worked in the Minneapolis area for over 200 years. Racism and discrimination limited opportunities. African Americans were not allowed to live in certain parts of the city. They could not access all types of jobs. They were not paid the same wages as white workers. Organizations helped support the community and fight for civil rights.

Education

Unofficial segregation existed in the school system until 1970. This often meant Black students could not access the same resources as their white peers. Schools were key spaces for kids. Black students were able to attend schools in their tight-knit neighborhoods. They formed strong bonds with their peers. Over time, these beloved places faced closures. Neighborhoods rallied to save the schools. Sometimes they were victorious, like at North High School. Other times, they were not and Central High School still closed.

At the University of Minnesota, Black students organized several key actions. In the 1930s, they spoke out against segregated housing policies. In the 1960s, they fought for better student support. This is how the African American and African Studies program was created.

Community and social organizations

Black organizations and social groups helped shape the community. They connected people to resources like jobs and housing. They fought for civil rights. Community centers helped youth grow and develop. Some national groups formed important chapters here. Well-known community members were leaders in these groups. Many of these groups continue to serve today. Examples include:

- Urban League
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- Phyllis Wheatley Community Center
- Sabathani Community Center
- Pillsbury United Communities



A neighborhood dance at Phyllis Wheatley House, which later became the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center, courtesy of MNHS

Recreation and athletics

Leisure time was important to balance with work and school. Many people have fond memories of activities at Phyllis Wheatley on the Northside. Black athletes broke many barriers locally and nationally. Several individuals rose to great prominence. Solomon Hughes, Sr., was a top-ranked golfer. Bobby Marshall was the first African American to play in an NFL game. The Minneapolis Keystones were a notable Black baseball team.



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

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