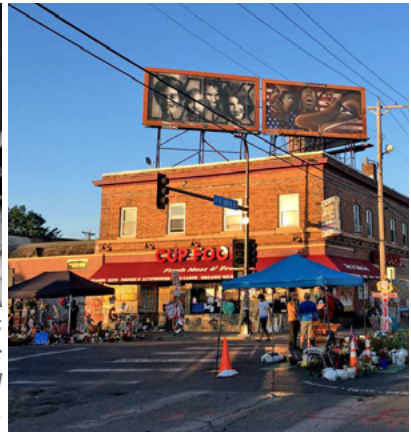




# Minneapolis African American Historic and Cultural Context Study



## Segregation, Discrimination, Civil Rights and Reclamation: *Fighting for equity*



Photos (clockwise, from top left): McCants Stewart, courtesy of Historical Pub. Co.; Rosemary Freeman, Horace Huntley, and Warren Tucker during the Morrill Hall Takeover, courtesy of University of Minnesota Libraries; George Floyd Square, courtesy of City of Minneapolis; Josie Johnson (center) with other Minnesota delegates at the 1963 March on Washington, photo by Marty Nordstrom

*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 history of African American civil rights. This is a summary of that content.*

Although Minnesota was a free state, there were enslaved people at Fort Snelling because of a legal loophole. Black men got the right to vote in 1868. Early state laws banned segregation in schools. They also banned discrimination in public accommodations. In reality, however, unfair practices occurred in housing and education. They limited job opportunities and economic growth. At the same time, Black Minneapolitans continued to fight for civil and human rights.

Early community efforts centered on freeing enslaved individuals. Eliza Winston was brought to Minneapolis by a Mississippi slaveholder. With the help of Ralph and Emily Gray, she sued for and won her freedom. In 1898, law student McCants Stewart was denied service at a restaurant. He sued and the owner was convicted of violating Stewart's civil rights.

In the early 1900s, more African Americans began to move to Minneapolis. As a result, they faced more barriers. Redlining and racial covenants began to limit where they could live or own property. Individuals and organized groups rose up to fight discrimination.

The Minneapolis chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) formed in 1909. They helped Black homeowners facing resistance from white neighbors. The Minnesota Club tried to stop the screening of *The Birth of a Nation*, a white-supremacist

film. Labor organizers pushed for fair wages for Black hotel and restaurant workers. Victor Hugo published the Green Book. It identified safe places across the country where Black travelers could eat, get gas, and stay the night. Several Minneapolis locations were included, like Cassius Bar and the Phyllis Wheatley Settlement House.

The Civil Rights Movement from the 1950s to 1970s led to key changes. The state's fair employment and fair housing laws passed. In 1969, Black students occupied Morrill Hall at the University of Minnesota. They protested the treatment of Black students and institutional racism. They advocated for an African American studies program, which was created.

In 1966, there was an uprising on Plymouth Avenue. It continued until the following year. Community members met with government officials to discuss racial inequality. One outcome was The Way Community Center, an important Northside space.

There have long been tensions between the Black community and the police. This has led to acts of racial violence against Black people. These incidents have resulted in injuries as well as the loss of lives. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by then-Minneapolis police officers. This event led to protests around the world. It renewed the Black Lives Matter movement.



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

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