



# The African American Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma

## OKLAHOMA HISTORY CENTER EDUCATION DEPARTMENT



Protest at Bishop's Restaurant in Oklahoma City, June 1, 1963  
(20246.38.83.1, John Melton Collection, OHS).

African Americans have a long history in Oklahoma. They first came to Oklahoma during the forced removal of American Indians because some tribes held African Americans as slaves. There were also African Americans who were American Indian and free. During the Civil War, many of these men in Indian Territory joined the war on both the Union and Confederate sides. Called Buffalo Soldiers, these African American servicemen played a vital role in Oklahoma and Indian Territory as well as in other regions of the West. Both the 9th and the 10th Cavalries and the 24th Infantry served in Indian Territory during the latter nineteenth century. Stationed at Fort Gibson, the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers Infantry Regiment (later supplemented with the 2nd Kansas) fought at Cabin Creek and at the pivotal engagement of Honey Springs in July 1863. After the Civil War ended in 1865, all of the enslaved people in the United States, including Indian Territory, were to be freed. Known as **Freedmen**, many continued living among the Indians.

Many African Americans participated in the land openings in Oklahoma. Some came from the Southeast in hopes of new opportunities to own their own land and escape persecution. Some African Americans worked together to create All-Black towns. E. P. McCabe, for example, founded Langston, Oklahoma. Other African Americans also lived among whites in other communities.

During the **Civil Rights Movement**, African Americans fought to achieve equality as citizens in American society. They fought for the right to vote, for access to public places, and for equal education. The Civil Rights Movement fought against racism and discrimination. **Racism** is when someone thinks they are better than someone else based on the color of their skin. **Discrimination** is similar to racism, but applies to judging and mistreating people based on their religion, background, class, ethnicity, gender, or race. The Civil Rights Movement occurred during the mid-twentieth century, although the movement continues as African Americans and people of different races in America continue to work towards complete justice and equality for all.

When most people think of the civil rights era, they often think of events that happened in the South, in states like Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee. However, events of national importance to the civil rights movement happened right here in Oklahoma. As Oklahomans, we must remember the atrocities, the long-fought struggles, and the victories of the civil rights era in order to understand our culture and our laws today.

The struggle for civil rights continues today as people of various races, backgrounds, genders, sexual orientation, and religions are not always treated equally and with respect. For example, calling someone gay as an insult is a form of discrimination. Bullying is an example of discrimination that happens today when people do not respect or understand someone who is different from them.

The following pages will help you learn about the Civil Rights Movement in Oklahoma. As you read, think about what you can do to continue promote **equality**, **respect**, and **fairness** in your school or community.

## Segregation



This “Jim Crow Funeral,” at the Oklahoma State Capitol was held the same day Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have A Dream” speech in Washington DC, August 28, 1963 (20246.38.106.12, John Melton Collection, OHS).

**Segregation** is when Blacks and whites are kept separate, either by law or by practice, and it existed in Oklahoma. For example, African Americans could not use the same bathroom or drink from the same water fountains as whites. In restaurants, African Americans had to use a back entrance and were not allowed to eat with white people. There were also rules that said they could not live in white neighborhoods.

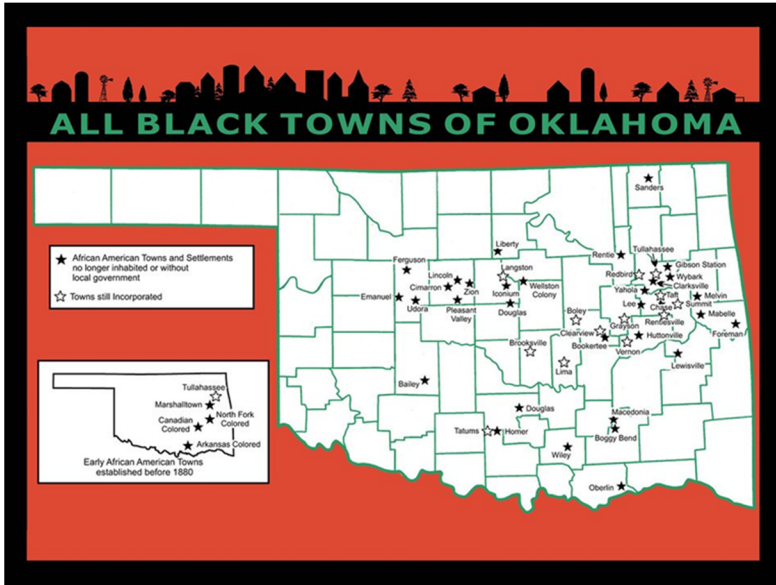
There were even separate schools for Black children. The schools were supposed to be "separate but equal." However, they were never equal. African American children's schools used old textbooks that the white schools had already used and worn out. Their schools were also not as nice as the white children's schools and had fewer resources, teachers, and locations within communities.

Laws known as **Jim Crow Laws** are what made segregation legal. When Oklahoma became a state, Oklahoma lawmakers were not allowed to write segregation laws into their constitution because President Theodore Roosevelt would not sign it.

Although segregation laws were left out, as soon as President Roosevelt approved the constitution Oklahoma lawmakers

passed Senate Bill No. 1. Senate Bill No. 1 made Jim Crow Laws legal across the state. It would take many years to get rid of this law. In 1910, the “**grandfather clause**” was added to the Oklahoma constitution as well. This clause made it hard, almost impossible, for African Americans to vote. However, in 1915, the US Supreme Court said it was unconstitutional in the case of *Guinn v. United States*.

To escape from segregation and mistreatment, many African Americans established **All-Black towns** throughout Oklahoma and Indian Territory. All-Black towns grew in Indian Territory after the Civil War when men and women formerly enslaved by the Five Tribes settled together for mutual protection and economic security. When the Land Run of 1889 opened yet more "free" land to non-Indian settlement, African Americans from the Old South rushed to the newly created Oklahoma Territory. Many of these towns, like Boley, Red Bird, and Langston, became extremely prominent and thriving communities in the state and had private amenities for Blacks including banks, schools, churches, recreation centers, and dance halls. Langston held the first and only African American college in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Colored Agricultural and Normal University (now Langston University). This university would educate future Oklahoma civil rights leaders including Melvin Tolson, Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, and E. Melvin Porter, and attracted the attention of famed African American leader Booker T. Washington. Of the more than fifty All-Black towns founded in Oklahoma, thirteen still exist today. Many of these towns diminished during the Great Depression in the 1930s as many Oklahomans, including African Americans, left the state to find work and escape the Dust Bowl.



All-Black Towns of Oklahoma (OHS).

[Interactive map of All-Black towns in Oklahoma](#)



Flyer promoting African Americans from around the country to move to Red Bird, Oklahoma, one of the state's most famous All-Black towns (OHS Collections).



Boley, OK, High School, June 9, 1917 (20699-02-197-348, State Museum Collection, OHS).

Langston University,  
Phyllis Wheatley Hall, 1927  
(18827.520.A, Albertype Collection, OHS).



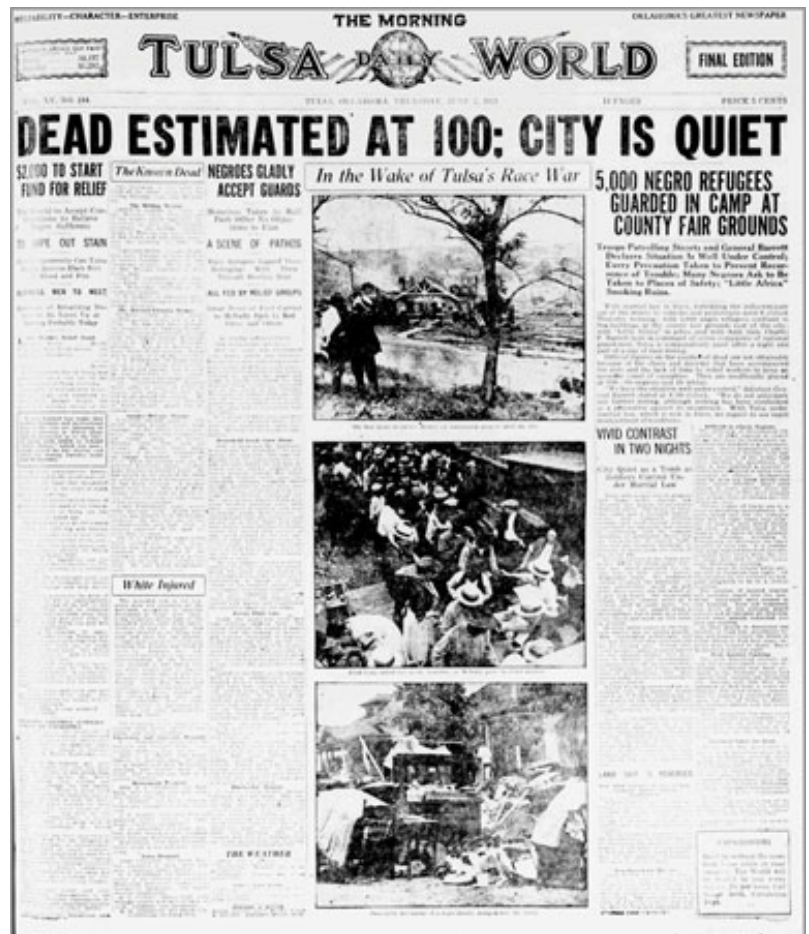
## Violence

In the past, at times, whites committed violent acts against African Americans. Several lynchings of African Americans occurred in Oklahoma. Lynching is when a group of people murder someone, usually by hanging, without first giving them a trial.

The **Ku Klux Klan (KKK)** was a racist secret society that had many members in Oklahoma. They wanted a society with no Blacks, Jews, or Catholics. The KKK used terror as a way to prevent African Americans from voting, starting businesses, and attending certain schools. Many KKK members held government positions which helped them to keep segregation legal and enforced. One state leader who was also a member of the KKK, Edwin "Daddy" DeBarr, was one of four original instructors when the University of Oklahoma opened its doors in 1892. He even had a building named after him until 1988, when students protested to have his name removed because of his membership in the Klan. The KKK did not just extend to men, though. Many communities in Oklahoma had women's Ku Klux Klans and Kiddie Klans for children to join.



Two KKK members in the 1920s (John Dunning Political Collection, OHS).



[View the front page of the \*Tulsa World\*, June 6, 1921](#)

## Tulsa Race Massacre

The Tulsa Race Massacre occurred in 1921 in the Greenwood district of Tulsa, Oklahoma. Due to segregation, this district consisted almost entirely of African American homes, churches, and businesses. For years before the riots, tensions between the two races grew.

A lynching a few months earlier led African Americans to fear that one of them might be lynched by a white mob. One day, a young African American man named Dick Rowland was accused of hurting a white woman. The sheriff arrested him and took him to the courthouse. An angry white mob gathered outside. They wanted to capture him and hang him before he had the chance to have a trial. Many of them had weapons.

Several African American men heard about Rowland and the growing white mob. They armed themselves with guns and went to the courthouse to offer help to the sheriff in protecting Rowland. In the crowd, some white men yelled at some of the Black men to hand over their weapons. They refused, a fight began, and a gun went off. This was the start of the Tulsa Race Massacre.

That night there was fighting in the streets. The next morning, a large white mob gathered throughout town. At dawn, they started shooting at African Americans. Many tried to fight back but they were outnumbered. Several African Americans fled their homes, and some were even killed. White people set fires to homes, churches, and businesses. They also looted, which means stealing, from the homes and businesses before they set them on fire.

Many Blacks fled Tulsa during the riot. With all of their neighborhoods and homes burned to the ground, many never returned. Some chose to stay and rebuild. Left homeless, many African Americans slept in tents for a long time. As soon as they were able, they started to rebuild their homes and their community in Greenwood.

Although we can only estimate, the violence resulted in the death of approximately 75–100 people, but possibly as many as 300 people, left about 9,000 people homeless, and destroyed about 40 square blocks in Tulsa. No white Tulsans were ever arrested or tried for their attack on Greenwood.

[Listen to an interview with Otis Clark, survivor of the Tulsa Race Massacre](#)



Rubble and brick walls remaining after the fires of the Tulsa Race Massacre (15583.A, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).



Destruction from the Tulsa Race Massacre (15583.B, Oklahoma Historical Society Photography Collection, OHS).



National Guard Troops escorting unarmed African American men after the Tulsa Race Massacre (15583.D, Oklahoma Historical Society Photograph Collection, OHS).



Tulsa Race Massacre (16939, Oklahoma Historical Society Photography Collection, OHS).



Women and children digging through the rubble after the Tulsa Race Massacre (20280.8, Oklahoma Historical Society Photography Collection, OHS).



## Resistance

**Resistance** means going against something. African Americans resisted segregation and racism in many ways and changed society by standing up for what was right. **Protests** are one form of resistance. A protest is when an individual or group of people publically show that they disagree with something they feel is wrong.

One type of resistance is non-violent resistance. Non-violent resistance is people deciding not to fight even if they are attacked during a protest. Martin Luther King Jr. promoted non-violent resistance all around the country and inspired Oklahoma civil rights leader Clara Luper. Clara Luper is considered the mother of the civil rights movement in Oklahoma. She was a teacher and an advisor for the Oklahoma City **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People** (NAACP) Youth Council. She, along with her students, started one of the first sit-in protests in the country. A sit-in is meant to protest segregation at public places like restaurants, where African Americans were not served because of the color of their skin. On August 19, 1958, Luper and her students went to Katz Drug Store in Oklahoma City, sat at the front counter, and ordered Cokes. They were denied service, but stayed until closing and returned the next day. They did this until the drug store agreed to serve them. This sit-in, and Clara Luper, became famous across the nation. Luper continued non-violent resistance to desegregate public places and was arrested several times for her non-violent protests.

Another way African Americans resisted racism was through newspapers. George Perkins in Guthrie used his newspaper, *The Oklahoma Guide*, to encourage civil rights. In Tulsa, A. J. Smitherman ran the *Tulsa Star*, an African American paper. A white mob destroyed the newspaper building during the Tulsa Race Massacre. Roscoe Dunjee, editor of the *The Black Dispatch*, was a leader in the civil rights movement. He used his newspaper to report injustices to the African American community and the goals of the civil rights movement.

In Oklahoma, politics also became an important tool for fighting segregation. Although there were many African Americans in Oklahoma City, the voting districts were divided unfairly so that whites always won. In 1964 the Oklahoma City voting districts were fixed, and E. Melvin Porter became the first African American elected to the State Senate in Oklahoma. Porter was also the president of the Oklahoma City NAACP chapter. Four years later in 1968, Hannah Diggs Atkins also made history by being the first Black female elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives. Not only was Atkins a strong supporter of African Americans, she also focused on helping women, children, the elderly, and prison inmates in the state. Atkins served the House for twelve years and then became both the secretary of state and the secretary of human services, making her the highest-ranking female official in Oklahoma's history up to that point. President Jimmy Carter appointed her as a delegate to the United Nations in 1980.

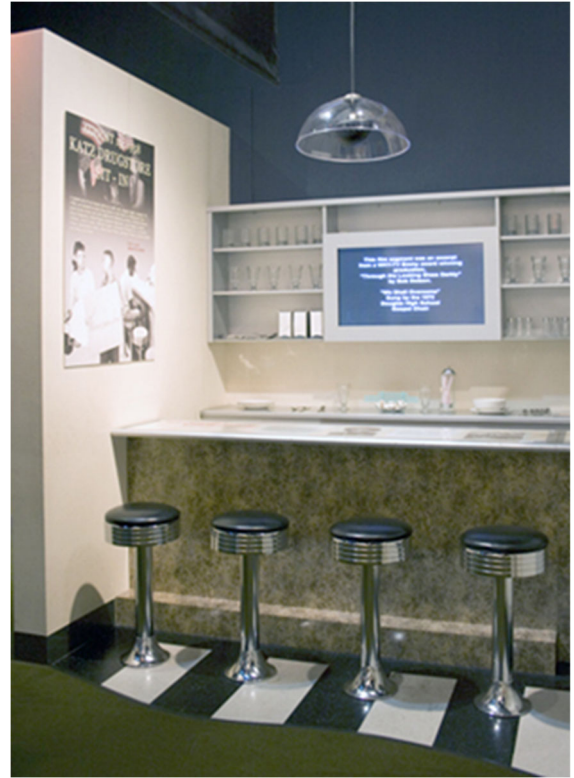
[Watch a video about Clara Luper's impact on the Civil Rights Movement](#)



Clara Luper's glasses (2005.205, Clara Luper Collection, OHS).



Sit-in at Katz Drug Store, 1958 (John Melton Collection, OHS).



Replica of the Katz Drug Store counter. *In Pursuit of the Dream* exhibit at the Oklahoma History Center.



Painting of Roscoe Dunjee (11901, State Museum Collection, OHS).



E. Melvin Porter (20246.38.97.5, John Melton Collection, OHS).



Hannah Atkins (22162.P.AT.07, The Journal Record Collection, OHS).

## Integration

**Integration** is the ending of segregation and allowing whites, Blacks, and all races to be together whether in schools, buses, or movie theaters. Many people in Oklahoma, such as Clara Luper, and nationwide worked to end segregation and bring about integration. All public schools, including those in Oklahoma, had to desegregate their schools because of a court case in 1954 called *Brown v. Board of Education*. Universities, however, also needed to be integrated.

Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, from Oklahoma, was a leader in the nationwide civil rights movement. Fisher dreamed of being a lawyer, but Langston University, an All-Black college she was attending, did not have a law school. Colleges and universities were segregated, so Fisher was not allowed to attend a school in Oklahoma that had a law school. She decided to apply for the law program at the University of Oklahoma anyway. The university denied her admission due to the segregation laws. She filed a lawsuit against the school. Amos T. Hall and Thurgood Marshall were her lawyers. Jake Simmons helped fund her case. The case went all the way to the United States Supreme Court. The case, *Sipuel v. Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma*, declared that she must be allowed the same opportunities for education as everyone else. After three years, in 1949, she was allowed to attend the University of Oklahoma.

Fisher and fellow African American students, although allowed to attend universities in Oklahoma, were still segregated within the schools. The school forced Fisher to sit in a chair with a chain around it and a sign that read “Colored.” Black students were also made to sit in a different part of the cafeteria and in a separate, back part of the classroom. An African American student from Oklahoma, George W. McLaurin, took this issue to court. In 1950, the US Supreme Court ruled in *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents* that this was not allowed.

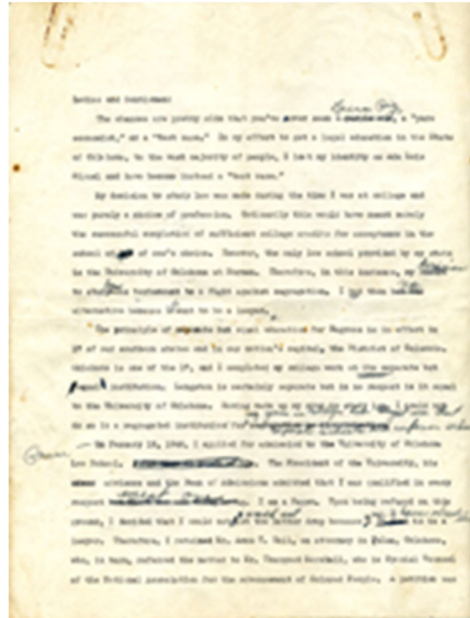
With the efforts of Oklahomans and people nationwide that participated in the civil rights movement, our society changed so that all people, no matter the color of their skin, can be together whether in school, at home, or in public places. However, today people do not always treat each other with **fairness** and **respect**. Bullying continues to be a problem in school, but you can continue to help the civil rights movement by making a friend with a classmate who may be different from you or standing up to someone who may be bullying a classmate or friend.



Ada Fisher signing the Registrar of Attorneys, 1952 (Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS).



Fisher filing her application with Thurgood Marshall on the far right (image courtesy of the Library of Congress).

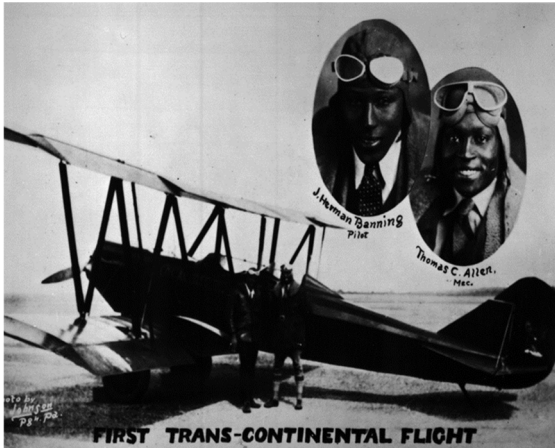


[Read a typed description of this event by Ada Fisher here](#)

Ada Fisher's University of Oklahoma State Board of Regents robe and mortarboard, c. 1992 (2001.129.001, Bruce Fisher Collection, OHS).

## Biographies

Oklahoma Connections: J. H. Banning was born in Oklahoma; Thomas Allen grew up and lived in Oklahoma City



Thomas Allen and J. Herman Banning (21412-BH734, Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS).

In 1932 aviators J. Herman Banning and Thomas C. Allen became the first African Americans to fly across North America. Their journey began in Los Angeles and ended in New York. The aviators made many stops along the way to raise money for gas and tell people about their trip. Banning had experience as a pilot and did most of the flying. Allen knew how to repair the airplane and kept it running throughout the trip.

## Hannah Diggs Atkins

Oklahoma Connection: Moved to Oklahoma in 1952



Hannah Diggs Atkins (image courtesy of *The Oklaboman*).

Hannah Diggs Atkins, born in North Carolina in 1923, became the first African American woman to be elected to the Oklahoma House of Representatives, where she served from 1968–80. Atkins served with the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, the General Assembly of the 35th Session of the United Nations, and was the Oklahoma Secretary of State. She also taught at multiple Oklahoma universities. Atkins is remembered for her lifetime of service to Oklahoma African Americans, women, children, elderly, and prison inmates. Atkins was inducted into the Oklahoma Women’s Hall of Fame in 1982.

## Buffalo Soldiers

Oklahoma Connection: Served in Indian Territory



Buffalo Soldiers (image courtesy of the National Park Service, US Department of the Interior).

The Buffalo Soldiers played a vital role in Oklahoma and Indian Territory as well as in other regions of the West. Both the 9th and the 10th cavalries and the 24th Infantry served in Indian Territory during the latter nineteenth century. Stationed at Fort Gibson, the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers Infantry Regiment (later supplemented with the 2nd Kansas) fought at Cabin Creek and at the pivotal engagement of Honey Springs in July 1863.

While stationed in Indian Territory, Buffalo Soldiers had a number of responsibilities: they kept out unwanted intruders from the Indian lands, they watched over the Indians on the reservations, and they maintained general law and order throughout the territory. The infantry built and maintained roads, telegraph lines, and forts. They also assisted the cavalry in military actions. Their duties included removing the "Boomers" from Indian Territory. Among other feats, Buffalo Soldiers in Indian Territory assisted local authorities and federal marshals; escorted civilians, stagecoaches, and freighters; guarded railroad construction workers and mail carriers; chased robbers, horse thieves, and cattle rustlers; attempted pacification of Indians; and provided protection for Indians.

## Roscoe and Drusilla Dunjee

Oklahoma Connection: Moved to Oklahoma as children



Roscoe Dunjee addressing a crowd at a parade, 1942 (21412.B81.19, Barney Hilleman Collection, OHS).



Drusilla Dunjee Houston (21166.P.HO.1, W. P. Greene Collection, OHS).

Roscoe Dunjee owned and edited *The Black Dispatch* (1915–1954), Oklahoma City's only Black newspaper. His sister, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, worked for her brother writing editorials for his newspaper. They both sought to help African Americans within and outside their writing; Roscoe served as president of the Oklahoma branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and Drusilla founded the Oklahoma Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Both worked tirelessly to end Jim Crow laws in the state of Oklahoma and were influential members of the civil rights movement as well.

## Walter J. Edwards

Oklahoma Connection: Walter Edwards moved to Oklahoma in 1916



Walter and his wife Francis (image courtesy of the W. J. Edward Memorial).



Postcard depicting Edwards Memorial Hospital, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (OHS Collections).

Walter Edwards, one of Oklahoma City's most prominent African American entrepreneurs and a real estate developer, also owned a junk business. He is credited with ending residential segregation in Oklahoma City and influencing the Federal Housing Authority to approve mortgages to African Americans. Edwards and his wife, Francis, are most famous for their philanthropic work, including Edwards Memorial Hospital built in 1948. This hospital served African Americans in the Oklahoma City area and was funded completely by Edwards and cost an estimated \$400,000 at the time.

## Ernie Fields

Oklahoma Connection: Ernie grew up in Taft and later lived in Tulsa



Ernie Fields holiday card (20277.10, Leslie Shefffield Collection, OHS).

The Ernie Fields Orchestra filled night clubs in the 1920s through the 1960s. His band was the first African-American band to play in Tulsa's Cain's Ballroom. The band toured nationally, also playing for the troops during WWII. Ernie received the honor of induction into the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame in 1989.

[Listen to the Ernie Fields Orchestra's "In the Mood"](#)

[Listen to the Ernie Fields Orchestra's "Workin' Out"](#)

## Ralph Waldo Ellison

Oklahoma Connection: Ralph Ellison was born in Oklahoma City



Ralph Ellison (Jimmy Stewart Collection, OHS).

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.

When I discover who I am, I'll be free.

Life is to be lived, not controlled, and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat  
—Excerpt from *Invisible Man*

[Watch an interview with Ralph Waldo Ellison](#)

[Listen to “Battle Royal,” an excerpt from \*Invisible Man\*](#)

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in Oklahoma on March 1, 1913. Early on, he studied trumpet and piano and for a time lived with several jazz musicians in Oklahoma City. His book, *Invisible Man*, won the National Book Award in 1953. He died on April 16, 1994, of pancreatic cancer. His second, unfinished novel, *Juneteenth*, was published (in condensed form) five years after his death.

## Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher

Oklahoma Connection: Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher was born and raised in Oklahoma



Ada Sipuel signing the register of attorneys, 1952 (Barney Hillerman Collection, OHS).

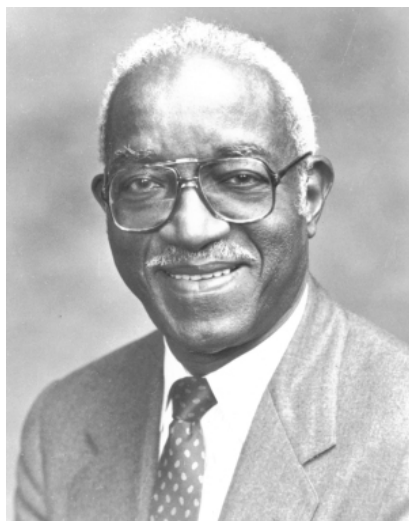
Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher, born on February 8, 1924, in Chickasha, took her battle over segregation and OU's refusal to let her attend its law school to the US Supreme Court in 1948 (*Sipuel v. Board of Regents the of University of Oklahoma*). Ms. Fisher graduated in 1951 with her law degree. In 1992 Governor David Walters appointed her to the Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, the same entity that had once denied her entrance. In 1996 Fisher was inducted in the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame. The University of Oklahoma has also dedicated a garden to Fisher to honor the civil rights legend and her battle at the university.

[Listen to an interview with Ada Lois Sipuel Fisher's son, Bruce, on his mother's legacy](#)



## John Hope Franklin

Oklahoma Connection: John Hope Franklin was born in Oklahoma



John Hope Franklin (OHS Publications Division, OHS).

John Hope Franklin, author of the preeminent source on African American history, was born in the All-Black town of Rentiesville, Oklahoma, on January 2, 1915. He was the grandson of a Chickasaw freedman. Franklin graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Tulsa and then earned his doctorate in history from Harvard University in 1941. His book, *From Slavery to Freedom*, was originally published in 1947 and is continually updated. In 1995 he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom for his lifelong fight for civil rights. Franklin's father, Buck Colbert Franklin, was an early civil rights lawyer in Oklahoma and represented many Blacks affected by the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921.

[Listen to an interview with John Hope Franklin](#)

## Maxine Horner

Oklahoma Connection: Maxine Horner was born in Oklahoma



Maxine Horner (image courtesy of the *The Oklahoman*).

Maxine Horner was one of the first African American female senators in Oklahoma, elected in 1986 (she was elected the same year as Vicki Miles-LaGrange).

[Read an interview with Maxine Horner](#)

## Vicki Miles-LaGrange

Oklahoma Connection: Vicki Miles-LaGrange was born in Oklahoma



Federal District Judge Vicki Miles-LaGrange swears in Constance N. Johnson as State Senator (image courtesy of the Oklahoma State Senate).

Vicki Miles-LaGrange was the first woman US Attorney for Oklahoma, one of the first African American woman senators, (with Maxine Horner), and the first African American Federal Judge for the 10th Circuit. Born in Oklahoma City in 1953, Miles-LaGrange grew up in a segregated district of the city. She graduated from Howard University School of Law in 1977. Miles-LaGrange was inducted into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 2013.

[Listen to an interview with Vicki Miles-LaGrange](#)

## Clara Luper

Oklahoma Connection: Clara Luper was born in Oklahoma



Clara Luper (2012.201.B0366B.0552, OPUBCO Collection, OHS).

Clara Luper had a very important role in the civil rights movement. She was the first African American student in the University of Oklahoma history department. She became a sponsor for the Oklahoma City NAACP Youth Council and in 1958 led her students in a protest. The Katz Drug store “sit-in” gained national attention and led to other successful demonstrations around the country. Luper served in many positions in the public school system and led the fight for public school integration. During her participation in demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins, she was arrested twenty-six times. Clara Luper is known as the “Mother of the civil rights movement.” Luper was honored by the state in 2012 with the “Clara Luper Corridor,” a monument and section of Oklahoma City at 23rd Street and I-235 to honor her invaluable work in the civil rights movement.

## Bill Pickett

Oklahoma Connection: Bill Pickett moved to Oklahoma in 1908



Bill Pickett (Frederick S. Barde Collection, OHS).

A rodeo pioneer, Bill Pickett was the originator of bulldogging, or steer wrestling. In 1888, Pickett entered his first rodeo and remained a popular rodeo performer into the early 1900s. He joined the Miller Brothers 101 Ranch and Wild West Show in 1905 and was known as the “Dusky Demon.” He often identified himself as an Indian instead of African American so he could enter rodeo events. Pickett also appeared in motion pictures and is credited as the first Black cowboy star. He passed away from injuries sustained by a rogue horse in 1932 at the 101 Ranch.

[Watch a clip from his film \*The Bulldogger\* \(1921\)](#)

## E. Melvin Porter

Oklahoma Connection: E. Melvin Porter was born in Oklahoma



E. Melvin Porter (20246.38.97.6, John Melton Collection, OHS).

E. Melvin Porter, born in Okmulgee, Oklahoma, in 1930, was a staunch civil rights leader and politician in Oklahoma. He served in the US Army before attending Tennessee State University. In 1959 he graduated from the Vanderbilt School of Law. By 1961, Porter was practicing law in Oklahoma City and had become the city’s NAACP president. While president, he often represented Clara Luper and her student protestors and was even arrested with them a few times during civil rights marches. In 1964, E. Melvin Porter became the first African American ever elected to the Oklahoma Senate, a position he held for twenty-two years.

## Bass Reeves

Oklahoma Connection: Bass Reeves was a US deputy marshal in Indian Territory



Bass Reeves (image courtesy of *True West-History of the American Frontier*).

Many considered Bass Reeves the most feared deputy US marshal in Indian Territory. He was born a slave in Arkansas in 1838 but escaped to Indian Territory during the Civil War. An expert marksman, he also had legendary strength. Bass Reeves earned a reputation throughout the territory for his ability to catch outlaws that were difficult for others to track. He sometimes pretended to be someone else in order to get information and arrest fugitives. Being a former slave, Reeves was illiterate; that did not stop him from arresting wanted criminals. He claimed to have arrested more than 3,000 fugitives during his career. Reeves served as deputy US marshal in the Indian Territory for thirty-two years. In 1907, he retired as a US marshal and served as a police officer in Muskogee, Oklahoma, until his death in 1910. Many claim Bass Reeves was the real-life inspiration for the hit television character The Lone Ranger.

## Ruben Rivers

Oklahoma Connection: Ruben Rivers was born in Oklahoma



Ruben Rivers. Photos reads: "Sept. 15, 1944. Somewhere in England thinking of you. Your son, Ruben" (23259.R.35, Oklahoma War Memorial Collection, OHS).

Ruben Rivers fought in WWII and was killed in action while heroically manning a tank against the Germans while the rest of his battalion escaped. He received the Silver Star and Purple Heart for his service but was denied the Medal of Honor because of his race. His family was presented with his Medal of Honor in 1997. In 2005, a memorial was raised at Fort Hood, Texas honoring Rivers and his 761st Tank Battalion. He was inducted in the Oklahoma Military Hall of Fame in 2006.

## Juanita Kidd Stout

Oklahoma Connection: Juanita Kidd Stout was born in Oklahoma



Juanita Kidd Stout  
(20699.2001.101.11, State Museum  
Collection, OHS).

Juanita Kidd Stout is the first African American woman to serve in a State Supreme Court. She was appointed in the state of Pennsylvania. Originally a music teacher, Stout began college at the age of sixteen and eventually left her teaching career to pursue a law degree at the University of Iowa. Stout was inducted to the Oklahoma Women's Hall of Fame in 1983. In 2012, the Philadelphia Criminal Justice Center was renamed the Juanita Kidd Stout Center for Criminal Justice in her honor.

## Opaline Wadkins

Oklahoma Connection: Opaline Wadkins moved to Oklahoma in 1940



Opaline Wadkins (Oklahoma  
Publishing Company Photography  
Collection, OHS).

Opaline Wadkins organized the first school in Oklahoma City to train African American nurses and helped desegregate the University of Oklahoma College of Nursing. She was the first African American to receive a master's degree in public health at the University of Oklahoma. Wadkins also established well-baby and diabetic clinics for American Indians in Southwestern Oklahoma which cut the death rate of American Indian infants in half.

## Julius Caesar Watts Jr.

Oklahoma Connection: J. C. Watts Jr. was born in Oklahoma



J. C. Watts Jr. was born on November 18, 1957, in Eufaula, Oklahoma. After serving as the quarterback for the University of Oklahoma's Sooners through two conference championships, Watts graduated with a degree in journalism. In 1994, he became the first African American to serve in the United States Congress from the state of Oklahoma. He served from 1995-2003.

[Watch an interview with J.C. Watts Jr.](#)

J. C. Watts Jr. (Oklahoma Publishing Company Photography Collection, OHS).

## Glossary

**African Americans:** Americans of African descent.

**All-Black towns:** Communities established by African Americans after the Civil War to build private businesses and escape mistreatment.

**civil rights movement:** African Americans fought to achieve equality as citizens in American society

**courage:** Doing what needs to be done even if you are afraid.

**discrimination:** Similar to racism, but applies to judging and mistreating people based on their religion, background, class, ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc.

**equality:** When everyone is treated equally or the same.

**fairness:** Treating people equally.

**freedmen:** African Americans who were not enslaved but set free by their masters or after the Civil War.

**Grandfather clause:** A voting law that made it harder for African Americans to vote by requiring them to prove their grandfather had voted in the past, which was almost impossible.

**hero:** A person who does something extraordinary for others.

**integration:** Allowing whites, Blacks, and all races to be together.

**Jim Crow laws:** Laws that made segregation legal.

**Ku Klux Klan (KKK):** A racist secret society.

**lynching:** When a group of people murder someone, usually by hanging, without first giving them a trial.

**mob:** A crowd of angry people.

**National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP):** An organization that fought for African American civil rights.

**protests:** When an individual or group of people publically show that they disagree with something they feel is wrong.

**race:** A group of people defined by others based on common physical features such as skin color.

**racism:** When someone thinks they are better than someone else based on the color of their skin.

**resistance:** Going against something.

**respect:** Treating others the way you would want to be treated.

**riot:** A crowd of angry people that become violent and often destroy property.

**slavery:** Being forced to work without pay.

**segregation:** When Blacks and whites are kept separate, either by law or by custom.

**violence:** A physical attack.

## Activities

### Clara Luper Radio Show Activity

Use the link below to listen to clips from Clara Luper's radio show:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL2cTTbGugbsbZgpNIR0wmosvBEXdP0S7F>

After listening to a few minutes of at least two of the radio shows, answer the following questions:

1. What are the similarities of the radio shows you listened to?
2. What are the differences of the radio shows you listened to?
3. What is significant about Clara Luper?
4. Why do you think her radio show was so important?
5. Compare Clara Luper's radio shows with radio of today. What is the same? What is different?



## Oklahoma Civil Rights Word Search

C T A C Z L E L E P O H N U D Y V L G G  
 L D L T X J K N O A P O K T I O H S K Y  
 P R C R E H S I F L E U P I S A D A J L  
 V E J X C Z U N O S I L L E H P L A R U  
 D T X G Z V D A H K V F R R I U H M B P  
 I R L A N R E P U L A R A L C N A J A R  
 S U J H O I O M C F Z O X F R E O B N T  
 C O C Z U W K Q S K J Z S A P L R I N Q  
 R C L J A N K R C I Y T I R Z L E L I K  
 I E A T S C T K E T C L D C V A X L N Q  
 M M N E N Q Z C O H R A F E Z R Z P G M  
 I E D Q D M O I E O T Y R R Q H T I I H  
 N R R U W E R N A P L U D H V A W C U H  
 A P U A W L C D L G S B L P T I W K W G  
 T U N L T L N B N L Y E E N S L U E O V  
 I S H I Z L U F N B A Y R F I M P T W S  
 O H S T H G I R L I V I C M U T A S P A  
 N P S Y F K P R O T E S T D A G R E J J  
 W B Z A V U B L Z Q D L W F Y C R A R D  
 D I Y R E V A L S K J R P I Y S O C M D

Ada Sipuel Fisher

Dreams

Racism

Allen

Equality

Railroad

Banning

Bill Picket

Civil Rights

Clara Luper

Discrimination

Hope

Jazz

Land Run

Protest

Martin Luther King Jr.

Ralph Ellison

Respect

Riot

Supreme Court

Slavery

## Lunch or Playground Activity

Sometimes at lunch we sit with our same friends every day. On the playground or during free time, we play or hang out only with our friends. However, when we do not make an effort to be friends with other people, we lose the opportunity to learn about other people and make new friends. When we meet and talk with others, we learn to respect and appreciate other people, and maybe even make new friends! Visit the website link below to start this activity at your school:

<http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/>

From “Teaching Tolerance,” Southern Poverty Law Center <http://www.tolerance.org/mix-it-up/what-is-mix> (accessed October 18, 2016).

## Coloring Pages

Use the website below to download and print coloring pages of Oklahoma’s own civil rights heroes!

<http://www.okhistory.org/kids/remember.php>



**CLARA LUPER (1923-2011)**

Mrs. Luper was a teacher who led by example. Before 1958, many businesses would not serve food to African Americans. In August of 1958, she and her students started a “sit-in” at a restaurant in Oklahoma City. The students just sat in seats knowing that they would not be served any food. Soon the business owners agreed to serve African American customers. It was the first time that African Americans could eat in downtown restaurants. She and her students would “sit-in” at many more businesses.

## Reading Primary Documents Activity

Primary sources are writings, recordings, or artifacts from a particular time period a historian is studying. These are first-hand interpretations of events that happened in that particular time period. For this activity, you will use two different newspapers as your primary documents, comparing and contrasting the two. The links to the articles are:

“\$2,500,000 of Negro Property is Destroyed”

<https://gateway.okhistory.org/ark:/67531/metadc152335/> (*The Black Dispatch*, June 3, 1921)

“75 Dead in Race War” (right column of paper)

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov> (search for the *Chickasha Daily Express*, June 1, 1921)

Before reading the articles, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Who wrote this article?
2. What is the author’s perspective?
3. Why was it written?
4. When was it written?
5. Is it a reliable source? Why or why not?

Read the articles objectively, and answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. Who is the editor of the *Black Dispatch*?
2. According to the *Black Dispatch*, what started the riot in Tulsa?
3. According to the *Tulsa World*, what started the riot in Tulsa?
4. What is different about the accounts in each paper?
5. What are the similarities?
6. Do you think these are reliable sources? Why or why not?

## **Create an Oklahoma Holiday**

In 1981, Hannah Atkins helped Oklahoma make Martin Luther King Jr. Day a state-wide holiday in honor of his legacy in the civil rights movement. Based on the biographies and stories you read on this website, choose an Oklahoma civil rights leader you believe deserves their own special day. Research the leader of your choice and create a poster that symbolizes their contribution to Oklahoma and why you think they should have their own holiday. Present your poster to your class or a partner. Be sure to view other students' posters and ask questions. At the end of class, have other students vote on who they think should have their own Oklahoma holiday and who had the most creative poster.

## **Struggle and Hope Watching and Writing Activity**

Use this link to get to the short films:

<https://www.youtube.com/struggleandhope2016>

Watch two to three short films on the towns of your choice, then answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What do these towns have in common, besides that they were founded as All-Black towns?
2. Why were these towns founded?
3. How many people live in these towns now?
4. Why do you think it is important to learn about these towns?

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### **Films and Videos:**

#### *Children of the Civil Rights*

Documentary based on Clara Luper and her students' efforts to desegregate Oklahoma City, available for purchase at: <http://www.childrenofthecivilrightsfilm.com>

#### *Freedom Riders*

PBS Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DcvsWXrS2PI>

#### *The Night Tulsa Burned*

History Channel Film

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yLwVxyD7A98>

#### *Struggle and Hope* film series

<https://www.youtube.com/struggleandhope2016>