

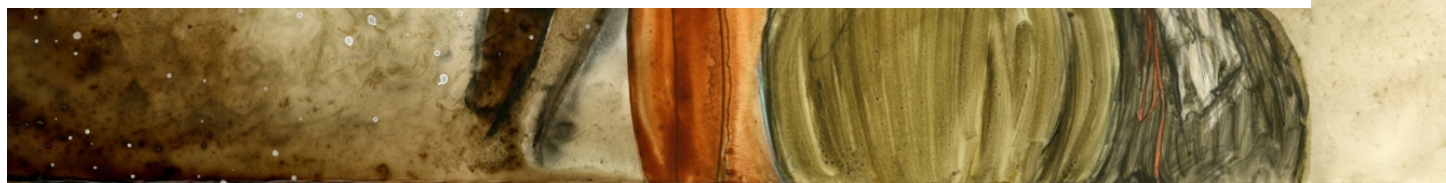


# THE GREAT MIGRATION: WHEREVER PEOPLE MOVE, HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

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# ABOUT THIS PROJECT

During the summer of 2013, eight Omaha Public Schools teachers each developed an iBook on a topic of Omaha and Nebraska history as it relates to African American History. The four 3rd grade books are: Then and Now: A Look at People in Your Neighborhood; Our City, Our Culture; Civil Rights: Standing Up for What's Right to Make a Difference; and The Great Migration: Wherever People Move, Home Is Where the Heart Is. The four 4th grade books are: Legends of the Name: Buffalo Soldiers in Nebraska; African American Pioneers; Notable Nebraskans; and WWII: Double Victory.

Each book was written by a local Omaha author, and illustrations were created by a local artist. Photographs, documents, and other artifacts included in the book were provided by local community members and through partnership with the Great Plains Black History Museum.

These books provide supplemental information on the role of African Americans in Omaha and Nebraska history topics. It is important to integrate this material in order to expand students' cultural understanding, and highlight all the historical figures that have built this state. Each book allows students to go beyond the content through analysis activities using photos, documents, and other artifacts. Through these iBooks, students will experience history and its connections to their own cultures and backgrounds.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

The Great Migration: Wherever People Move, Home is Where the Heart is describes the Great Migration as it pertains to Omaha's history. Topics covered include jobs, culture, historical events, and local figures. This book was written by local author Leo Adam Biga, who primarily writes as a journalist. The piece itself is written similarly to a newspaper article, and interviews with local community members informed the majority of the story. The book itself mimics elements of a newspaper. The two-column layout provides a newspaper look, and photographs and real newspaper articles are provided as artifacts throughout.

This book will encourage students to compare the experiences of the people in the story to their own lives. There are several activities along the way that allow students to reflect critically on the content of the story. They will explore and analyze photos, newspaper articles, maps, and graphs. Students will examine not only the period of the Great Migration, but also the culture brought to Omaha and other parts of the North because of the Great Migration.



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# FREEDOM



# FREEDOM

Freedom means many things to many different people. For some, freedom means the right to be treated equally under the law. Others value the importance of being free to speak one's mind. Freedom also means the ability to move and travel without limits. Indeed, freedom is about all of these things.

For African Americans, it was important that they be free to move to a place they would be able to express their beliefs, be treated equally under the law, and enjoy other benefits of an open **society**. With the end of slavery, African Americans began leaving the U.S. South for greater freedom and opportunity in the North and West.

There's a long history of masses of people moving from one area of America to another. One of the largest internal movements occurred from the 1910s through the 1960s when millions of African Americans fled the South for other regions during the **Great Migration**.

During both World Wars, the movement of African Americans out of the South rose to such high levels that it became known as the Great Migration. One of the destinations for black people leaving the South was Omaha. African Americans came here not only to enjoy greater freedom but also to take advantage of employment and educational opportunities.

Imagine living some place where you're made to feel less than a full citizen or even less than human simply based on the color of your skin. For many years African Americans living in the South were treated unfairly and cruelly because they were the black minority and whites were the ruling majority.

The **discrimination** blacks faced were remnants from the days of slavery. Blacks were denied the same educational, housing, job, voting, and recreational opportunities as whites. The threat of physical violence was real.

These were reasons enough for blacks wanting to leave the South. Other reasons included the hard times that the South experienced in the first half of the 20th century, where most blacks made their living working the land. When crop failures and natural disasters occurred there, some blacks felt they had no choice but to leave to find better fortune in other parts of the country.

## Reflect:

Can you think of a time you were treated unfairly?

How would it feel to have less rights than someone else because of how you look?



# COMING AND GOING







## JOBS

Blacks left the South to take advantage of the better paying jobs open to minorities in other parts of the nation. In Omaha, the railroads and the **packinghouses** were the main job magnets that pulled people here.

### Photograph Analysis:

- 1: Study the photograph above for 2 minutes
- 2: What is going on in the photo? What is the setting in the photo? How would you describe the setting to a friend?
- 3: Who are the people and what are they doing? Make a list of your observations.

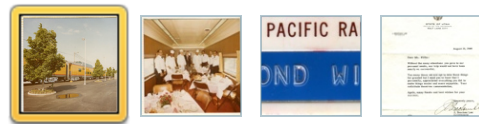


Black men could find work as Pullman **Porters**, baggage handlers and cooks with the railroads, and as **laborers** in packing plants. Porters dressed in crisp uniforms and prided themselves on giving great customer service to passengers on trains. Packinghouse workers performed physically demanding and dangerous duties. These jobs paid well enough that a black man could support his family and even buy a home.

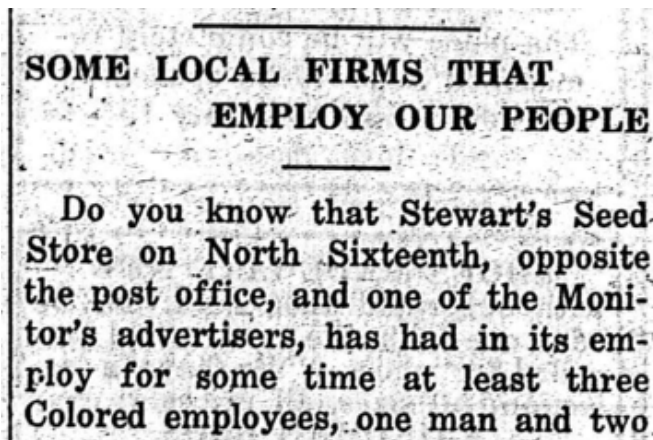


Artifact courtesy of Raymond Willis, Jr.

## The railroad industry provided many jobs for black men



Black women found work as domestic help in well-to-do people's homes, where they worked as maids, housekeepers, or nannies. Some cleaned offices. Black women were also employed as cooks, laundresses, cleaning help, and aides in hospitals and nursing homes.



Omaha Monitor, June 6, 1917

The Omaha Monitor would promote businesses that hired members of the black community.



It was very important for the black community to promote businesses that not only would serve black customers, but would also hire them for jobs.

### Reflect:

Why was this important to members of the community when looking for a job?

How did writing about these businesses in the newspaper help the black community?

# OMAHA'S GROWTH

The Great Migration had dramatic effects on the communities African Americans left and the communities they moved to. For example, the first wave from 1910 to 1920 doubled Omaha's black population.

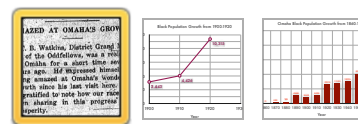
Newcomers were not always warmly welcomed where they moved. Early on in Omaha, blacks lived in **multicultural** neighborhoods throughout the city. However, outbreaks of racial violence, including the 1919 **lynching** of a black man, Will Brown, gradually confined blacks to a few neighborhoods on the North and South sides.

**Migrants** came to Omaha as individuals, couples, families, and groups. They came by bus, train, and automobile. Often, one family member would make the move, find employment and housing, and after getting settled would send for another relative.

## Omaha's Black Population Growth



Omaha Monitor, June 6, 1917



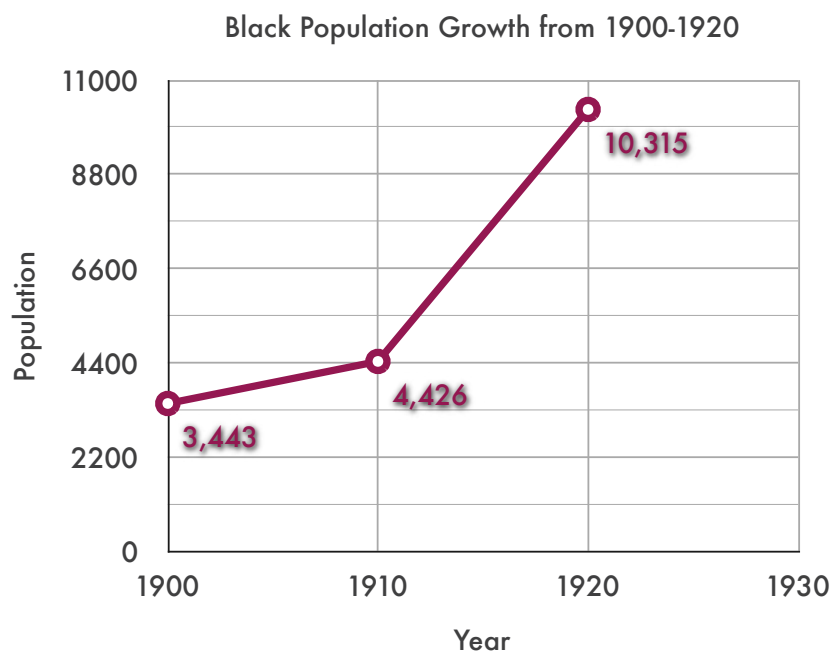


## Omaha's Growth

### Question

Look at the graph below.

How much did Omaha's black population grow from 1910 to 1920?



- ☐ A. 989
- ☐ B. 14,741
- ☐ C. 5,889

Answer: C

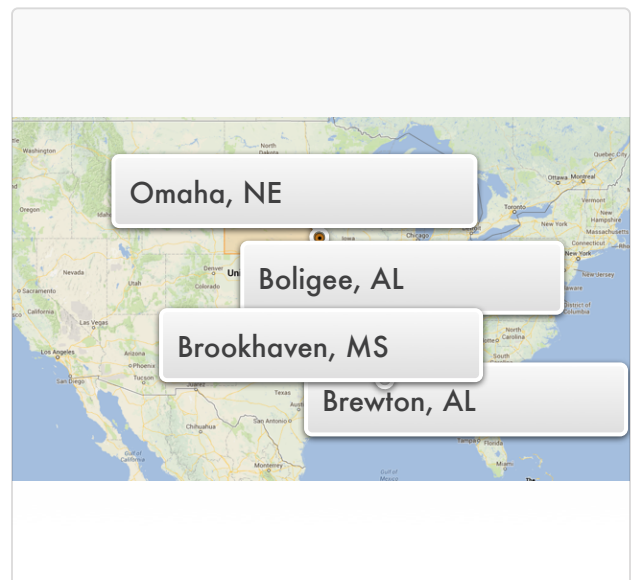


Photo courtesy of The Durham

## ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY

Blacks largely came here from Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. A group of Christians from Brewton, Alabama, **established** Pilgrim Baptist Church in Omaha in 1917 during that first big migration movement. These church founders helped build a thriving **congregation**, which their descendants kept alive. Today, Pilgrim is nearly a century old and still going strong.

A half-century later the migration had slowed quite a bit, but was still in progress. Two women who left the South in the 1960s to make new lives for themselves in Omaha are Luriese Moore and Lorraine Jackson. Moore came from Boligee, Alabama. Jackson came from Brookhaven, Mississippi.







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## SEEKING A BETTER LIFE

Exactly why migrants left, the mode of transportation they used to get here, and how they did once they arrived differed. But generally speaking everyone wanted a better life, and most found it too. They were motivated to go by the chance for greater equality and freedom and glad to leave behind reminders of slavery.

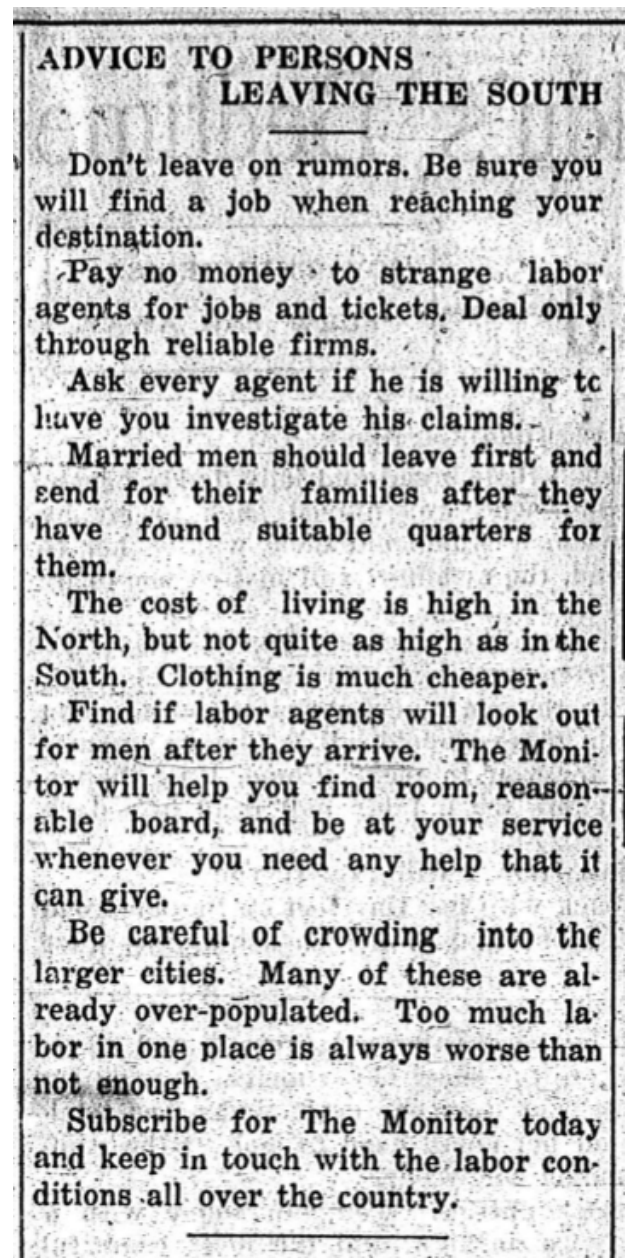
In the South there were separate facilities and sidewalks for the races. "They had one side colored and the other side white," Moore recalled. "You just didn't get in on the white side because you knew where you were supposed to be. There were some stores we couldn't even go in in my hometown, like exclusive stores that sold very fine clothes. It was just a way of life. We didn't like it but it's what was happening."

Jackson, whose grandparents were **sharecroppers**, said blacks would go to town and head right back home because "we were expected to stay in our place. There was no hanging out downtown. You did what you had to do and left because you didn't know what might happen. I mean, you really had to walk careful."

Moore wanted to join the civil rights **protests** happening then but her mother wouldn't let her. Her father transported demonstrators from their rural homes into town to participate in marches and demonstrations. It was a brave thing to do because if the **Ku Klux Klan** caught him doing it he could have been in serious trouble.

Moore left Alabama for Omaha after graduating high school and marrying. "I had never left the South before," she said. "I came here on the bus. When I left Alabama I had to sit in the back of the bus and then by the time we got to St. Louis (Missouri) we could sit anywhere we wanted."

Venturing North to start a new life stirred "mixed emotions" in her. She was recently married at the time, and her husband moved ahead of her to get work at a packinghouse.



Omaha Monitor, June 2, 1917

This article explains some things blacks should think about before moving North. Have you ever moved to somewhere new before? What plans did you have to make before moving?





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# MAKING A NEW START

Moore found life far different here than it was down South. "The **integration** and everything was all new to me. It was just totally different from where we were. I didn't see the (colored only or white only) signs we saw in Alabama. You could just go anywhere you wanted to here. You could go to any store."

However, not everything was open to everybody. Until the 1970s blacks could only live in certain areas and some businesses refused to serve or hire them. But things were far more limiting in the South.



Omaha Star, 1950s

A group of protestors outside Reeds Ice Cream Plant.



Jackson said the stories she heard about the way things were up North made enough of "an impression" she decided "it was right for me to go." She came by train. From Mississippi to Illinois, blacks had to ride in separate cars. When they reached Chicago, they could sit anywhere on trains headed West, East or further North. Lorraine headed West to Omaha.

Both she and Moore became **beauticians** and raised families here. The women, who were able to go into business for themselves here, say they encountered some racism in Nebraska, but overall they feel they made a good choice in coming to the Midwest.

Both have returned to the South almost every year. Their families still own land there. They marvel at how the South has changed. "I can't believe all the mixed marriages there. And the white people are at the black church," said Jackson. "I never dreamed I would be seeing this. We've got a black mayor there in our hometown. I'm just shocked because I never thought it would ever happen, but it has."





## Picketing Continues At Reeds

Another evening of picketing Reeds Ice Cream Plant is conducted by the Omaha DePorres Club. Shown picketing are a group of the famous Rattlers Club and DePorres Club members. The DePorres club has spearheaded a community effort to get Negroes employed at Reeds.

A DePorres spokesman this week urged people to not buy Reed's Ice Cream anywhere. He also said there is a need for more pickets. Those interested are to contact Denny Holland or George Barton.

The club has stated it will continue its efforts until Negroes are employed at Reeds.

### Article Analysis:

- 1: Read this Omaha Star article about protests at Reeds Ice Cream Plant.
- 2: List 3 important things the author said in the article.
- 3: Explain why you think this article was written. What **evidence** in the article helps you know why it was written? Find sentences from the article to support your reasoning.
- 4: List 2 things this article tells you about life in Omaha in the 1950s.
- 5: Write a question to the author that you have after reading this article.



# DRAWING ON THE OLD TO MAKE NEW





## DRAWING ON THE OLD TO MAKE NEW

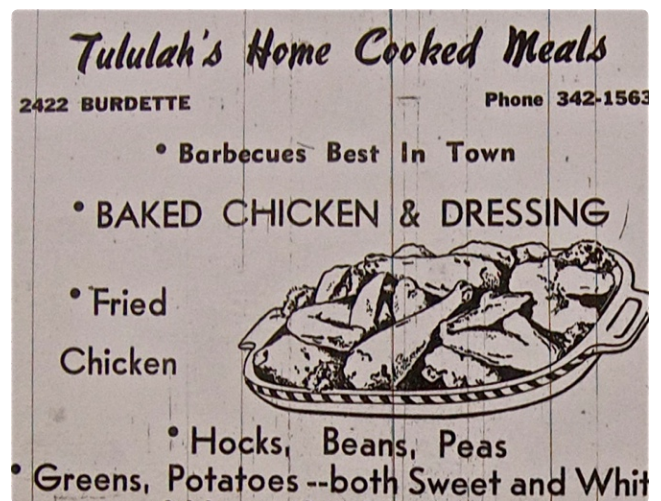
African American migrants often feel a strong connection to the South, where their roots are. Their families hold regular reunions, sometimes in their childhood hometowns. Many blacks who left the South have reversed their migration and moved back. Moore said, "Boligee means so much to me because of how my dad risked his life. He could've got killed doing what he was doing, just to get the vote. He always preached to us, 'Hey, when y'all get the chance to vote you vote,' and I've never missed voting."

Jackson, Moore, and their siblings all finished school and some went on to college. Looking back on how much they overcame, Jackson said it's "amazing we're successful – I think it was our upbringing. In that time we lived in we had to be strong and respectful. Faith was a big factor, too."

Migrants brought their culture wherever they settled. Traditional African American music and food are now staples in the larger culture. North Omaha became a haven for jazz, blues, and gospel music, soul food, stepping, and Southern slang. Emma Hart of Omaha still uses the treasured family recipes for sweet potato pie, candied yams, collard greens, and cornbread dressing brought here from Arkansas by her family. The **hospitality** southerners are famous for was also brought North.

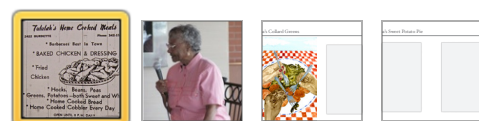
Similarly, migrants and immigrants of other races and **ethnicities** have brought and continue bringing their own sounds and flavors. This infusion or blending of cultures has created a richer stew than what existed before.

The Great Migration changed America by dramatically increasing the black population in cities across the land, thus creating a more diverse society. The migrant experience continues to play out in many locales around the world.



Omaha Star, 1950s

This advertisement for Tululah's shows many traditional foods brought from the South



## SPOTLIGHT: DAN DESDUNES



Dan Desdunes was one of the first major musicians to play in Omaha, and played a major role in North Omaha's jazz scene and musical culture. He is considered the father of black musicians in Omaha.

Desdunes was born in 1873 in New Orleans, Louisiana. He started studying music when he was 17 years old. He learned to play the violin, cornet, trombone, and trap drums. In 1894, at the age of 21, Desdunes traveled as a musician with different theater companies. During this time, he began to learn to play wind instruments.

After he got married in 1904, Desdunes decided to settle in Omaha. He felt there were good musical opportunities in the city. Since Omaha was in the middle of many bigger cities along the Union Pacific Railroad, many musicians would stop here to perform.

In Omaha, he started the Desdunes Band and the Desdunes Jazz Orchestra. The Desdunes Band started in 1915, and Dan Desdunes led the band until his death in 1929. They played annually in the Ak-sar-ben Parade, and other events for the Chamber of Commerce. The Desdunes Jazz Orchestra was one of the first black orchestras to perform in Omaha.

Desdunes also trained many young musicians. He was a music teacher and bandleader for Father Flanagan's Home for Boys during the last eight years of his life. He believed that the study of music made people better citizens.



Photo courtesy of UNL History Harvest

**The Desdunes Band started in Omaha in 1915.**





# Picketing Continues At Reeds



Pilgrim's Daily Vacation Bible School, 1931

## AMAZED AT OMAHA'S GROWTH

T. B. Watkins, District Grand Master of the Oddfellows, was a resident of Omaha for a short time several years ago. He expressed himself as being amazed at Omaha's wonderful growth since his last visit here. He is gratified to note how our race has been sharing in this progress and prosperity.



## LOCAL FIRMS THAT EMPLOY OUR PEOPLE

You know that Stewart's Seed on North Sixteenth, opposite the office, and one of the Monitor advertisers, has had in its employ some time at least three employees, one man and two women? Worth remembering, when you need anything in the way of seeds or flowers or poultry?

You know that the stock clerk at News' Book Shop on Harney opposite Boyd's theatre, is a girl? Well she is, and Mr. Evans says that Miss Blanche that's her name, is one of the efficient young women in his employ.

Do you know that Miss Anna E.

Dear Mr. Willis

Without the material personal needs nearly as successful

Too many times for granted but personally, appreciate the things as solicitude desired

Again, many thanks and best wishes for your success.

## Take a Stand

There were many positive reasons to leave the South and move North. However, the black community still experienced some discrimination in the North.

Make a list of the positive reasons to move North. Then list the struggles still faced in the North.

Think about each list. Next, decide whether you would choose to move North or stay in the South.

Defend your choice by explaining why you chose to move North or stay in the South.

# Picketing Continues At Reeds



Pilgrim's Daily Vacation Bible School, 1931

Dear Mr. Willis

Without the material personal needs nearly as successful

Too many times for granted but personally, appreciate the things as solicitude desired

Again, many thanks and best wishes for your success.

Be careful of crowding into the larger cities. Many of these are already over-populated. Too much labor in one place is always worse than not enough.

Subscribe for The Monitor today and keep in touch with the labor conditions all over the country.

when you need anything in the way of seeds or flowers or poultry?

You know that the stock clerk at News' Book Shop on Harney opposite Boyd's theatre, is a girl? Well she is, and Mr. Evans says that Miss Blanche that's her name, is one of the efficient young women in his employ.

Do you know that Miss Anna E. Logan has been for a number of years in complete charge of the manicuring department of the Thompson & Reel.

Sincerely yours,  
*Pat*

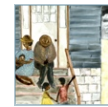




## MEET THE AUTHOR

Leo Adam Biga is an Omaha-based author-journalist-blogger best known for his cultural writing-reporting about people, their passions and their magnificent obsessions. His book "Alexander Payne: His Journey in Film" is the first comprehensive treatment of the Oscar-winning filmmaker. Biga's peers have recognized his work at the local, state and national levels. To sample more of his writing visit, [leoadambiga.wordpress.com](http://leoadambiga.wordpress.com).





## MEET THE ARTIST

Victoria Hoyt is an artist working in Omaha, Nebraska, the city she grew up in. She received her BA from Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter, Minnesota and her MFA from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. You can find her making paintings and things that make her laugh in her North Omaha home studio, or teaching part-time at Metro Community College. To see more of her work, please visit her website at [victoriahoyt.com](http://victoriahoyt.com).

# GLOSSARY

## ANALYSIS

a careful study of something to learn about its parts, what they do, and how they to each other

## BEAUTICIAN

a person whose job is to do hair styling, manicures, and other beauty treatments

## CONGREGATION

a church community

## DISCRIMINATION

the unfair treatment of different groups of people

## ESTABLISHED

started



## ETHNICITY

a group that has a common national or cultural tradition

## EVIDENCE

something that supports an idea to prove the idea is true

## GREAT MIGRATION

the period from the 1910s through the 1960s when millions of African Americans South for other regions

## HOSPITALITY

generous and friendly treatment of visitors and guests

## INTEGRATION

to include a person or group as part of a larger group

## KU KLUX KLAN

a secret organization in the U.S. that is made up of white people who are opposed people of other races

## LABORER

worker

## LYNCH

to kill someone illegally as punishment for a crime

## MIGRANT

a person who moves from one place to another especially to find work

## MULTICULTURAL

including many different cultures



## OBSERVATION

something you notice by reading, watching, or listening

## PACKINGHOUSE

a building where foods and food products are processed and packed

## PORTER

a railroad employee who helps passengers, especially on sleeping cars

## PROTEST

to express strong disapproval of something at a public event with other people

## SHARECROPPER

a farmer, especially in the southern U.S., who raises crops for the owner of a piece and is paid part of the money from the sale of the crops

## SOCIETY

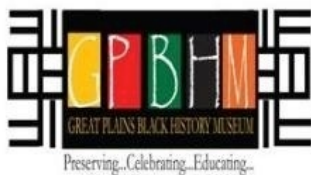
people living together in organized communities with shared laws, traditions,  
and Related Glossary

# NOTES



# NOTES

# This book created in partnership with



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Edited by: Dr. Jared Leighton

Historical Consultant: Dr. Patrick Jones

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