

African American Minnesota

U.S.-born African Americans in Minnesota carry the history of enslavement, the Great Migration, the destruction of Rondo, Northside Minneapolis, policing, and the murder of George Floyd. Minnesota ranks high on quality of life and produces some of the worst racial gaps in the country in education, wealth, homeownership, and criminal legal contact; this has been called the Minnesota Paradox.

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Black history is Minnesota history

The Minnesota Historical Society's Black History, Black Voices resources invite readers to explore Black Americans' contributions to the state. Learning about community life and leadership alongside injustice makes room for a fuller history—and for people whose lives cannot be reduced to disparities.

- **Explore Black History, Black Voices** — <https://nrhp.mnhs.org/blackhistory-blackvoices>

A different starting point

How might your description of a neighborhood change if residents' knowledge and priorities came first?

Community overview

African immigrants and refugees—including Liberian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Ghanaian, Somali, Oromo, and other communities—come from different nations, languages, and class backgrounds, and may have different relationships to 'Black' identity in the United States. These communities are not interchangeable.

Names and terms

Black; African American

Also used: Black Minnesotan; African immigrant communities by their own names

Ask which term the person uses. Do not assume that guidance written for Somali Minnesotans applies to an African American family from Chicago.

History and place

Origins and the Founding of a People

African Americans came into being through one of the largest forced migrations in history, and then through life in North America that no other large enslaved population in the Americas matched: the community grew here.

Across the Atlantic

Between 1525 and 1866 about 12.5 million enslaved Africans were carried across the Atlantic. About 388,000 were brought directly to British North America and the United States. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, about four million people lived in slavery in the United States, with about 488,000 free Black Americans, mainly in the North and in free communities in the South.

West and Central Africa

People came mainly from West and West-Central Africa: Senegambia (Wolof, Mandinka, Fulani); Sierra Leone and the Windward Coast (Mende, Temne, Vai); the Gold Coast (Akan, Asante, Fante); the Bight of Benin (Yoruba, Fon, Ewe); the Bight of Biafra (Igbo, Ibibio, Efik); and West-Central Africa (Kongo, Mbundu, Ovimbundu, Loango). Igbo, Kongo, and Akan were among the largest groups in the British colonies.

They spoke many languages. They practiced traditional African religions, and some practiced Islam. They came from agricultural societies with music, foodways, naming traditions, craft, and knowledge that survived the Middle Passage.

What they brought

That inheritance is not a museum label. It is in the music, the church, the food, the names, and the way family is held. History here is literacy for the meeting. It is not a speech you give the household.

The Geography of African America

For the first 250 years of African American history — roughly 1660 to 1910 — the vast majority of African Americans lived in the South: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, Texas, and Maryland — on plantations, in cities, and after 1865 as sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and small landowners. In 1910, about 90 percent of Black Americans lived in the South.

After the Great Migration

Then came the Great Migration, taken up in the next chapter. By 1970, only about 53 percent of African Americans lived in the South. By 2020 the share had stabilized at roughly 55 percent as the Reverse Migration (1970s–present) brought Black Americans from Northern cities back to Atlanta, Charlotte, Houston, Dallas, and other Southern metros of the New South.

Regions now

Pew Research Center's Facts About the U.S. Black Population:

The South, about 55 percent — especially Atlanta, Houston, Dallas–Fort Worth, Washington, D.C., Miami, Charlotte, the Mississippi Delta, the Black Belt, the Carolinas, the historic Tidewater.

The Midwest, about 17 percent — Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland, St. Louis, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Minneapolis–St. Paul, Kansas City, Columbus.

The Northeast, about 17 percent — New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Boston, Newark, Pittsburgh, the Hudson Valley.

The West, about 10 percent — Los Angeles, Oakland–San Francisco, Seattle, Las Vegas, Phoenix, Denver, San Diego, Sacramento.

Largest concentrations include New York City (about 2 million), Atlanta (about 2 million), Chicago (about 1.5 million), Washington, D.C. (about 1.5 million), Miami, Dallas, Houston, Detroit, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, Baltimore.

The Great Migration — Foundational Demographic Event

The Great Migration (1916–1970), per the National Archives, was “one of the largest movements of people in United States history. Approximately six million Black people moved from the American South to Northern, Midwestern, and Western states roughly from the 1910s until the 1970s. The driving force behind the mass movement was to escape racial violence, pursue economic and educational opportunities, and obtain freedom from the oppression of Jim Crow.”

It is the foundational demographic event of modern Black America.

What it transformed

Geography — from 90 percent Southern to roughly 55 percent Southern.

Urban character — from rural agrarian to urban industrial, then urban post-industrial.

Economic structure — from sharecropping and domestic service to factory work, then later professional, white-collar, and entrepreneurial occupations.

Cultural production — the Harlem Renaissance (1920s), Chicago blues (1940s), Motown (1960s Detroit), Philly soul (1970s), New York hip-hop (1970s), Los Angeles gangsta rap (1980s), Atlanta trap (2000s). Every major Black cultural movement traces to the Migration.

Political power — Black voters in Northern and Midwestern cities became decisive in U.S. elections, shifting from Republican (Lincoln's party) to Democratic (1936–present) and producing the modern civil rights coalition.

Family structure — Migration disrupted Southern extended family networks while creating new urban kinship and community structures.

Harvard's Great Migration in-focus piece (March 2026): “Between 1916 and 1970, the promise of non-agricultural work, higher wages, educational opportunities, and an escape from racial violence led six million courageous Black Americans to uproot their entire lives and migrate to industrial cities in the West and North.”

Minnesota and African American History

Minnesota's African American population is modest in absolute terms — about 350,000 Black Minnesotans as of 2024, or about 6 percent of the state — and culturally significant and historically deep.

Places

Minneapolis — especially North Minneapolis (the Near North side: Hawthorne, Jordan, Near North, Willard-Hay, Sumner-Glenwood, Harrison), the Black cultural and demographic heart of Minneapolis since the 1910s. MNopedia: the Near North community “has had a major African American presence since the

early 1900s.”

South Minneapolis — historically a smaller Black community; Bryant, Bryn Mawr, Field-Regina-Northrop, Powderhorn, Phillips, and Central have all had significant Black populations. The murder of George Floyd at 38th and Chicago in May 2020 put South Minneapolis at the global epicenter of racial justice consciousness.

St. Paul — Rondo was the historic Black community of St. Paul, destroyed by I-94 construction in the 1960s — a generational trauma Black St. Paul still commemorates annually with Rondo Days (the third Saturday of July). Frogtown, Summit-University, and Dayton’s Bluff continue to have significant Black populations.

Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center, Robbinsdale, Crystal, New Hope — rapidly diversifying first-ring northwest suburbs, now home to large and growing Black communities, both African American and East African. Eden Prairie, Plymouth, Maple Grove — outer-ring suburbs with growing Black middle-class populations. Duluth, St. Cloud, Rochester — smaller but distinct Black communities, often university or healthcare related.

Minnesota’s Black history includes

Dred and Harriett Scott — enslaved by Dr. John Emerson at Fort Snelling (1830s–1840s); Dred Scott v. Sandford (1857) was a critical step toward the Civil War.

Roy Wilkins — born in St. Louis, raised in St. Paul; long-time executive secretary of the NAACP.

Lena O. Smith — Minnesota’s first Black female attorney (1921); civil rights pioneer.

Nellie Stone Johnson — labor and civil rights leader; first Black person elected to a city office in Minneapolis (1945).

Prince Rogers Nelson — born in North Minneapolis, 1958; one of the greatest musicians in American history.

August Wilson — playwright, raised in Pittsburgh, spent significant years in St. Paul; two Pulitzer Prizes.

Sharon Sayles Belton — first Black woman mayor of Minneapolis (1994–2001). Melvin Carter III — first Black mayor of St. Paul (2018–present). Andrea Jenkins — first openly transgender Black woman elected to public office in the United States (Minneapolis City Council). Keith Ellison — Minnesota Attorney General; first Muslim elected to Congress (2007); prosecuted the George Floyd case. Toni Carter, Rena Moran, and other contemporary African American political leaders. East African Minnesotans in public office, including Ilhan Omar, have their own community pages; shared race in the United States is not shared culture.

Walter “Fritz” Mondale and Hubert Humphrey — white Minnesota political leaders whose civil-rights advocacy was profoundly shaped by Black Minnesota organizing.

The 2020 murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, the subsequent uprising, and the global Black Lives Matter mobilization centered Minnesota in American racial discourse. Minnesota’s racial story is now globally known. The state’s African American community navigates both the legacy of the Migration generation and the weight of being where Floyd died.

The Civil Rights Movement and Beyond

Knowledge of this history is basic literacy. The 1619 Project, the National Museum of African American History and Culture (Smithsonian, opened 2016), and recent historical scholarship have brought this history into clearer focus. It is not “in the past.”

Key moments

Brown v. Board of Education (1954). Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955–56), Rosa Parks. Little Rock Nine (1957). Greensboro sit-ins (1960). Freedom Rides (1961). March on Washington (1963), MLK’s “I Have a Dream.” Civil Rights Act (1964). Selma to Montgomery March (1965). Voting Rights Act (1965). MLK assassination (4 April 1968). Black Power Movement (1965–1975). Black Panther Party (1966). Black Arts Movement (1965–1975). The election of Barack Obama (2008). Black Lives Matter (2013–present). The 1619 Project (2019). The murder of George Floyd and the 2020 uprising. Vice President Kamala Harris (2021).

The record

A DHS badge is not automatically help. Civil rights statutes did not close the record. Floyd is not closed for a Black household in this state. This chapter does not replace Somali, Liberian, or Nigerian briefs.

Culture and everyday life

People, place, and perspective

This brief is about African Americans — also called Black Americans. It is the cultural community whose history in this country runs through enslavement in what became the United States, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Movement, and Black life in Minnesota today.

Who this is

Descendants of Africans enslaved here, and the community that grew from that history across four centuries. About 42.9 million people nationwide (U.S. Census, July 2024), or about 12.6 percent of the country.

Some people in this community use other names for the same historic lineage. This brief uses African American and Black American.

Who this is not

It is not a brief about every Black person in Minnesota. Somali, Nigerian, Liberian, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Ghanaian, Haitian, Cuban, and other African and Afro-Caribbean communities have their own pages. Census “Black” mixes those stories. This page does not.

How to read this

Read it as an orientation. A church mother, a physician in St. Paul, a teenager in North Minneapolis, a producer in Atlanta, and a law professor share a history. They do not live one life. There is no single Black culture. Always defer to the person in front of you.

The facts that follow are meant to help you meet people well — how family is named, what respect looks like, what a greeting carries, what a form may land on. Counts are dated. History is here so the meeting is clearer, not so you deliver a lecture.

What shaped this culture includes West and Central African inheritances; enslavement in North America (1619–1865); Reconstruction and Jim Crow; the Great Migration (1916–1970); the Civil Rights Movement and what followed; and a cultural life — music, literature, church, food, language, sport — that has shaped the United States and the world.

Family

The African American family has been among the most resilient and the most embattled institutions in Black America — surviving slavery's deliberate destruction of family bonds, Jim Crow's economic and political subjugation, the Great Migration's geographic dispersal, mass incarceration's removal of millions of fathers and brothers, and persistent structural inequality. The Black family has continually reinvented itself in forms that have sustained the community.

Kinship, not only biology

Niara Sudarkasa, cited in EBSCO on African American families: commitment to the family is the most important factor in the socialization of African American children. Reliance on the extended family for emotional, social, and financial support is well documented, and reflects both lasting African inheritances and the experience of slavery. “It takes a village to raise a child” names shared family and community responsibility.

Because of Them We Can on Black traditions: family has nothing to do with biology alone. Black folks have a long history in kinship. People who may not have been blood were family. There are no such things as half-siblings or step-parents in that grammar, and aunties and cousins may or may not be biologically related.

The Black family is extended, fictive, and flexible. Multi-generational households are common, especially with grandparents. Play cousins, play aunties, play uncles — non-biological kin treated as family. Big Mama / Mama / Madea — the matriarchal grandmother who anchors families. First cousins are often more like siblings. Othermothers, a term from Patricia Hill Collins — women who take active roles in raising children not biologically theirs. Co-parenting across households — children raised by multiple households and relatives.

Ask who should be in the room.

What the numbers miss

African American families are far from homogeneous in structure. In the early twenty-first century more African American children have been born to unwed mothers than to married women — a fact often misread. Many children formally counted as living with a single mother are being raised by extended kinship networks including grandmothers, aunts, fathers (even if not co-residing), godparents, and community elders.

A University of Minnesota study on African American family structure: two distinctive features are well known — Black children have been more likely than white children to reside without one or both parents,

and Black households have had a consistently higher percentage of extended households. From 1880 through 1960, Black children were two to three times more likely to reside without one or both parents than were white children. Those patterns reflect the legacy of slavery, economic exclusion, mass incarceration, and different cultural values around extended-family commitment and shared child-rearing.

Black matriarchs

The Black grandmother — Big Mama, Mama, Madea, Grams, Grandma, Granny, MawMaw — is one of the most powerful figures in African American culture. She often raises grandchildren during parents' absence or in addition to parents; holds family wisdom and history; anchors Sunday dinners, holidays, and major events; provides moral and spiritual guidance; cooks the family recipes. Big Mama's house as the family gathering place appears across Black literature, film, and lived experience.

Fatherhood

The portrayal of “absent Black fathers” is significantly misleading. CDC and academic studies, especially the 2013 NCHS report, find Black fathers more likely than white or Hispanic fathers to be involved in daily activities with their children when controlling for whether they live with the children. Many fathers who do not live with the children's mothers maintain active involvement.

Mass incarceration of Black men has produced real father-absence at scale. The community has responded with father figures — uncles, grandfathers, coaches, pastors, mentors; Black fatherhood activism including the Million Man March (1995); and many Black men raising children alone.

Authority and children

Patterns of authority in two-parent African American households are more frequently egalitarian, with flexible rather than traditional gender roles. Children's responsibilities have long been driven by age and birth order rather than gender. That egalitarianism is partly West African inheritance, partly necessity — Black women have always had to work outside the home — and partly post-Civil Rights and feminist evolution.

Child-rearing has historically been strict, loving, and oriented toward survival in a hostile world. High expectations: respectful, helpful, well-behaved, representing the family well. Corporal punishment has been more accepted in some Black families than in some other communities — “whoopin” for serious misbehavior — and is increasingly contested in younger generations. Mandatory reporters still distinguish physical discipline from abuse, with cultural literacy. “You'll have to be twice as good” is a message many Black children receive. Education as the path to freedom. Religious upbringing — Sunday school, vacation Bible school, youth choir. Traditional “children are seen and not heard,” increasingly relaxed. Love expressed through care, food, and presence as much as verbal affirmation in some families.

Marriage and homegoing

Marriage rates among African Americans are lower than among other racial groups, for economic, demographic (gender imbalance tied to mass incarceration), and cultural reasons. Black marriage celebrations are often elaborate and multi-generational. Jumping the broom — a wedding ritual dating to slavery, when enslaved people could not legally marry — has been revived; many Black couples include it. Co-parenting and partnership across multiple households are normalized.

African American funerals — homegoing services in the Christian tradition — are among the most distinctive cultural events. Because of Them We Can: nobody does homegoing services like Black folks. The death of a community member is sacred. There will be gathering and songs; it may be two to eight hours; there might be a color theme; professional, preferably Black-owned funeral homes matter.

The wake or viewing — open casket, family receives mourners, often the night before. The funeral — often two to four hours, with multiple speakers, choirs, soloists, scripture, eulogy. The repast — after burial, an enormous communal meal at the church or family home. Color theme — families sometimes specify (all white, blue, the deceased's favorite color). The obituary — often long, detailed, an act of family honor. Birthdays and death anniversaries are remembered.

Elders

Elders — Mother [Name], Big Mama, Granddaddy, Mr./Mrs. [Name], the OG — are revered. The Black church mother holds particular authority. Sending elders to nursing homes carries stigma, though it is increasingly accepted out of necessity. Adult children are expected to provide care, financial support, and frequent visits. Daughters, granddaughters, nieces, and church sisters often shoulder elder support.

The Heart of the People

W.E.B. Du Bois, the foundational African American sociologist and intellectual (1868–1963), wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903):

“The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife — this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American.”

Double consciousness

Being both Black and American — sharing in the American story while standing outside the dominant white narrative of it — is foundational to African American identity. Understanding African American culture means understanding this double consciousness: the ongoing tension and synthesis between full participation in American life and the maintenance of a distinct, valued, deeply rooted Black cultural identity.

Not one life

What follows is a generalization. Individual variation always supersedes it. Diversity within Black America — across region, class, age, education, religion, sexuality, generation, urban and rural, political orientation — is vast. Always defer to the person in front of you.

Core Concepts

These concepts and values recur across African American culture. They express themselves differently across regions, classes, religious communities, generations, and individual circumstances. They are hypotheses — not a script for the person in front of you.

Blackness

To be Black in America is to live in a culture where racial identity has been a central organizing fact of social existence since 1619. Blackness is at once a racial ascription imposed by a society that categorized people of African descent as “other”; a self-claimed identity affirmed through Black is Beautiful (1960s), natural hair, African heritage, and distinct cultural forms; a political solidarity that crosses class, region, religion, and generation; and a cultural inheritance of music, language, food, religion, family, art, sport, and intellectual tradition.

Blackness is not monolithic, and it is shared. African Americans of all classes, regions, and walks of life recognize each other across difference through the Black nod — the silent acknowledgment between Black strangers in white spaces — the shared vocabulary of references, the common touchstones of Black history.

The race

Older Black Americans, especially those raised before the 1970s, often refer to “the race” — Black people collectively. The usage carries a Du Boisian sense of collective consciousness: that one is responsible to and for the race, that individual successes and failures matter to the race, that one carries the race into white spaces. Racial uplift, sometimes called the “talented tenth” mentality after Du Bois’s controversial term for the educated Black leadership class, shapes much Black middle-class life: “making the race look good,” “representing,” “lifting as we climb” (the motto of the National Association of Colored Women, 1896).

Soul

Soul is one of the most important and least translatable Black cultural concepts. Coined in the 1960s but reflecting a much older sensibility, soul names distinctive emotional depth, expressive authenticity, communal feeling, and spiritual resonance. Soul food, soul music, soul brother / soul sister, having soul — the concept pervades Black self-description. To have soul is to be authentic, to feel deeply, to express truthfully, to be in genuine connection with the community and the ancestors. To lack soul is to be cold, fake, disconnected, or assimilated past recognition.

Respect

Respect is among the most important values in Black social life. To be disrespected — by police, employers, teachers, strangers, family — is a foundational injury. Respect is earned and also fundamentally owed: every human being deserves baseline respect for their personhood. “Respect my Black” names the demand for acknowledgment of full humanity.

Interpersonal respect is signaled through titles and last name (Mr. Johnson, Mrs. Brown, Sister, Brother) until invited otherwise; listening when elders speak; acknowledging people’s presence; not embarrassing people in public; honoring lineage. Aretha Franklin’s “Respect” (1967) became an anthem because it articulated this demand.

Ubuntu

W.E.B. Du Bois devoted considerable time to cooperative economics, an approach rooted in African traditions such as ubuntu — often translated as “I am, because we are.” African American thinkers have embraced the South African / Bantu concept as articulating a sensibility that runs through Black American

life: individual flourishing through collective flourishing.

Making a way out of no way

A foundational Black American expression — the recognition that African Americans have survived and even thrived through 400 years of conditions designed to destroy them. The capacity to endure, adapt, improvise, and find joy in hardship is celebrated as a core cultural strength. Black resilience is not stoic suffering but creative survival — making something out of nothing, turning pain into art, dancing at the funeral, laughing through the storm. The Black church song “We’ve Come This Far by Faith” captures it: faith as lived practice of getting through what should not have been gotten through.

Black Excellence

A term that crystallized in the 2010s but expresses a much older sensibility — the celebration of Black achievement in fields where systemic barriers have made achievement extraordinarily hard. It is not assimilationist. It is affirmative: look what we have done despite everything. Invoked at graduations, weddings, professional milestones, and communal — our excellence, not just mine.

Code-switching

The practice of shifting language, demeanor, accent, and presentation between Black and non-Black spaces is a near-universal experience for Black Americans navigating predominantly white institutions. It can mean speaking African American Vernacular English at home and Standard American English at work; wearing professional hair in white workspaces and natural hair at home; adjusting humor, references, tone, volume, body language. It is a survival skill, an art form, and often a source of fatigue. Younger generations increasingly resist it, asserting the right to show up as fully Black in all spaces.

The hustle

Entrepreneurial, multi-job, side-business resourcefulness is a recognized cultural pattern, rooted in centuries of exclusion from mainstream employment and capital. Hustle culture is celebrated in hip-hop. The concept honors economic creativity born of necessity.

Sankofa

The Akan (Ghanaian) word sankofa — “go back and fetch it,” symbolized by a bird looking backward — has been adopted across the African American cultural community as a touchstone for knowing one’s history and honoring ancestors in order to move forward. It appears on Black cultural institutions, in HBCU graduation regalia, in Black bookstores, and in everyday discourse about heritage.

The ancestors

Honoring those who came before — particularly the enslaved generations whose labor and survival made the present possible — is a quietly central practice. “The ancestors are watching” or “do it for the ancestors” invokes their moral presence. Pouring libations — a small amount of water, juice, or alcohol on the ground while naming ancestors — is observed at weddings, funerals, Kwanzaa, and other significant events. Visiting historic Black sites (Tuskegee, Selma, the cotton fields of the Black Belt, the African Burial Ground in New York, the Whitney Plantation, the National Museum of African American History and Culture) is a contemporary form of pilgrimage.

Joy as resistance

Black joy — celebration, pleasure, laughter, dance, beauty, and play — is increasingly named as resistance. To be joyful as a Black person in a society that has tried for centuries to make Blackness synonymous with suffering is itself a political act. The cookout, the family reunion, the wedding, the homecoming, the praise dance, Saturday morning music — all are expressions of joy as resistance.

The Talk

The conversation Black parents have with their children, particularly Black boys, about how to interact safely with police is a tragic and central cultural ritual. Every Black American parent has some version of it: keep your hands visible; do not run; do not reach for your wallet; address officers as Officer and Sir/Ma'am; do not argue; comply first, complain later; come home alive. That the Talk is universal is itself a commentary on the racialized texture of American life.

The cookout

Cultural shorthand for Black community gathering and inclusion. To be “invited to the cookout” means to be accepted as a welcome guest in Black social life. Because of Them We Can: whether Labor Day, Memorial Day, or Independence Day, it means a cookout. No gathering is more sacred; there must be a Spades table.

The Black vote

Black Americans are the most politically cohesive racial-ethnic voting bloc in U.S. politics — voting Democratic at rates around 85–95 percent in presidential elections since 1964. That cohesion reflects the Civil Rights Movement and the Voting Rights Act (1965); shared experience of structural racism across class; the strength of Black political institutions — the Black church, the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congressional Black Caucus, the Divine Nine, Black media; and lived political consciousness around policing, housing, education, healthcare, and economic justice.

Pride in Black institutions

Fierce pride in institutions built within and against a hostile society: HBCUs — Howard, Spelman, Morehouse, Hampton, Tuskegee, Fisk, Florida A&M, North Carolina A&T, Xavier, Dillard, and 100-plus others. Black churches, taken up in Religion. The Divine Nine — Alpha Phi Alpha, Alpha Kappa Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Delta Sigma Theta, Phi Beta Sigma, Zeta Phi Beta, Sigma Gamma Rho, Iota Phi Theta — central to Black professional and political life. Black-owned businesses — barbershops, beauty salons, restaurants, funeral homes, banks, newspapers, radio stations, publishing houses. Black media — Ebony, Jet (historic), Essence, The Root, BET, The Defender, The Amsterdam News, hundreds of Black newspapers, podcasts, YouTube channels. The NAACP (1909), the National Urban League (1910), SCLC (1957), Black Lives Matter (2013), the Movement for Black Lives.

Religion

The Black church is, per PBS American Experience: The Black Church, “a safe haven for black Christians in a nation shadowed by the legacy of slavery and a society that remains defined by race and class” — and it has been so for over 300 years.

Religious demographics of African Americans: Christian about 73 percent; religiously unaffiliated (“nones”) about 22 percent; non-Christian religious (Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, and others) about 4 percent.

The Black church

The most significant institution in African American history. Born in the Invisible Institution — the secret worship of enslaved Africans in brush arbors, slave cabins, and clearings — and formalized in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Black church has been a spiritual center; a political center (Frederick Douglass, Martin Luther King Jr., Fannie Lou Hamer, Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, Raphael Warnock — all Black pastors and church leaders); a social-welfare institution providing food, housing assistance, childcare, education when no one else would; an economic institution (church banking, real estate, mutual aid); a cultural producer (spirituals, gospel, ring shouts, call-and-response preaching, whooping, the praise dance); and an educational institution (Sunday schools, church schools, the founding of HBCUs by Black denominations).

Major Black Christian denominations

African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church — founded by Richard Allen in 1816 in Philadelphia after Allen and other Black members of St. George’s Methodist Church walked out in protest of segregated worship. Doctrinally Methodist, with distinctive theology and praxis. About 2.5–3 million members globally.

African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) — founded 1821 in New York. Sometimes called the Freedom Church — included Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth. About 1.4 million members.

Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) — founded 1870, split from the Methodist Episcopal Church South. About 800,000 members.

National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. — founded 1895; the largest African American religious denomination, about 7.5 million members. Independent Black Baptist churches combining deep biblical preaching with Black liberation themes.

National Baptist Convention of America, International — split from NBC-USA in 1915; about 3.5 million members.

Progressive National Baptist Convention — founded 1961 in support of the Civil Rights Movement and Martin Luther King Jr.; about 1.5 million members.

Church of God in Christ (COGIC) — founded 1907 in Memphis by Charles Harrison Mason; the largest Black Pentecostal denomination, about 6.5 million members. Fervent worship, speaking in tongues, a strong holiness tradition. Other Pentecostal Black denominations include Apostolic, Holiness, and various COGIC offshoots.

Black members of historically white denominations: significant numbers in the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, the Roman Catholic Church (especially in Louisiana, Maryland, parts of the Southwest, and among Caribbean-origin families), the Lutheran Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA).

Non-denominational and megachurches are increasingly important — T.D. Jakes’s Potter’s House, various neo-Pentecostal churches.

Distinctive features of Black worship

Call-and-response between preacher and congregation: “Can I get an Amen?” — “Amen!”; “Won’t He do it?” — “Yes He will!” Extended preaching — sermons of 45 minutes to 90-plus minutes are normal. Whooping — the rhythmic, melodic, climactic preaching style. Gospel music — choirs, praise teams, soloists, the Hammond B3 organ, drums, electric bass. The praise dance / liturgical dance. Speaking in tongues, especially in Pentecostal and COGIC traditions. Being “slain in the spirit.” “Catching the Holy Ghost” — ecstatic worship including dancing, shouting, weeping, jumping. Long services — two to four hours is normal; longer for revivals, watch nights, homegoing services. The altar call. Tithes, offerings, and love offerings — multiple collections per service. Sunday best, including church hats — the iconic Black church crown — on older women. The praise leader. “First Lady” — the pastor’s wife, herself a significant ministry figure.

Watch Night services on New Year’s Eve — a tradition dating to 31 December 1862, the night before the Emancipation Proclamation, when enslaved people gathered to wait for freedom.

Islam — the Black Muslim tradition

Islam has a deep history in African America. An estimated 10–20 percent of enslaved Africans brought to North America were already Muslim — from West African Muslim regions (Mali, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone). Practice was largely suppressed; fragments survived — names like Bilali Muhammed on Sapelo Island, Georgia; Job Ben Solomon; Yarrow Mamout.

In the twentieth century Islam was reclaimed and reinvented: the Moorish Science Temple (1913), founded by Noble Drew Ali; the Nation of Islam (1930), founded by Wallace Fard Muhammad, led by Elijah Muhammad (1934–1975), with figures like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Louis Farrakhan — combining Islamic identity with Black nationalism and a distinct theology. After Malcolm X’s pilgrimage to Mecca in 1964, he and many followers transitioned to mainstream Sunni Islam. Warith Deen Mohammed led much of the NOI into Sunni Islam in the late 1970s.

Today: approximately 2–3 million Black Muslims in America, divided roughly between Sunni (majority), the Nation of Islam (smaller), and other traditions. About 20 percent of all American Muslims are Black. Notable Black Muslims include Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Mahershala Ali, Ice Cube, Lupe Fiasco, Andre 3000, Mos Def / Yasiin Bey. Somali American Muslims in Minnesota have their own brief.

African traditional religions and conjure

Some African Americans practice or draw on African traditional religions — particularly Yoruba Ifá, Akan religion, Vodun, and Caribbean diaspora forms like Cuban Santería, Haitian Vodou, and Brazilian Candomblé. The Ifá movement has grown, with Yoruba priests (babalawos, iyanifas) initiating American practitioners. The orishas — Yemoja, Oshun, Shango, Obatala, Eshu, Ogun — are venerated.

Conjure or hoodoo — the African American folk magical-religious tradition — has been continuously practiced since slavery, often alongside Christianity. It draws on African (Kongo and West African), Indigenous American, and European folk magical traditions: herbal remedies, rootwork, mojo bags, candles, oils, prayers, consultation with rootworkers or two-headed doctors.

Religious “nones”

About 22 percent of African Americans are religiously unaffiliated, per Pew. Younger Black Americans are increasingly secular — a generational shift. Culturally Christian sensibilities — invoking God in conversation, praying at meals, attending church for funerals and weddings — remain widespread even among the formally unaffiliated.

Greetings

African American greetings combine mainstream American norms with distinctive Black cultural patterns. They vary by region, age, class, gender, and context.

Verbal greetings

Hey — universal informal. Hey, sis / Hey, sister — among Black women, especially in church and community. Hey, bro / Hey, brother — among Black men, with social and political resonance. What's up? / What's good? / Wassup? — among friends. What's happenin'? — older and Southern. How you doin'? / How are you? — standard polite. How you been? — for someone not seen recently. Greetings, family / Greetings, kings and queens — politicized or Afrocentric register. Peace / Peace, my brother or sister — politicized; especially among Muslim Black Americans and older Black nationalist circles. As-sal ġu +ö Æ ykum — Muslim Black Americans (Nation of Islam and Sunni). Hotep / Asé — Afrocentric / Egyptian-revival greeting in some communities. Good morning, family — church and community, especially Sunday. Hey, baby / Hey, sugar / Hey, honey / Hey, sweetie — older Black women to family, friends, and even strangers, especially Southern. Hey, son / Hey, daughter — older Black adults to younger people.

Physical greetings

The handshake — firm, direct eye contact, accompanied by verbal greeting. The hug — between friends, family, church members; Black hug culture is generous; long, full-body hugs are normal between close friends and family. The dap — fist bump, hand clasp, or elaborate sequence between Black men: the pound (knuckle bump); the soul shake (clasping thumbs with bent fingers); multi-step handshakes, especially between close friends, fraternity brothers, or those with shared affiliation.

The Black nod — a quick chin-up nod between Black strangers, especially in predominantly white spaces. The nod says: I see you. We are family. We are here. One of the most cherished Black micro-cultural practices.

Side-hug or cheek kiss — between close women friends, between male and female friends, in some church communities. Hand on shoulder or arm during conversation — normal warmth.

Address and honorifics

African Americans, especially older generations and Southern speakers, use titles more readily than unmarked American norms. Mr., Mrs., Miss plus last name — standard adult address, especially for elders. Mr. or Miss plus first name — affectionate-but-respectful address often used by children for adults they know well (“Mr. James,” “Miss Tasha”) — a distinctively Southern Black usage. Sister / Sis plus name — in church, between women of similar status. Brother / Bro plus name — in church, between men; also politically resonant. Mother [Name] — for elderly women, especially church mothers. Deacon, Reverend, Pastor, Bishop, Elder, Minister — religious leaders, addressed by title. Auntie / Uncle — for older adults,

family or family-friends. Big Mama / Mama / Madea — for grandmothers (Madea = “Mother dear”). Granddaddy / Granddad / Papa / Big Daddy — for grandfathers. Cuz / Cousin — for cousins or close friends. Doctor / Professor — for credentialed professionals. Honey / Baby / Sugar / Sweetheart / Love / Dear — used affectionately, often by women, even to strangers.

Calling a Black elder by first name without title is widely considered disrespectful. Children especially are taught to use Mr./Mrs./Miss with adults. Wait to be told “Just call me [first name].” Sidney Poitier in *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) — “They call me MISTER Tibbs!” — captured the cultural significance of proper title, especially for Black men in racially hostile contexts.

Eye contact and body language

Direct eye contact between equals is normal and respectful. Sustained eye contact can also be confrontational — mean-mugging, the stare-down — depending on context. Younger people sometimes lower their gaze when an elder is talking, as a sign of respect. Black body language is often expressive — hand gestures, head movement, full-body engagement in conversation.

Naming Conventions

African American names are themselves a cultural story — of forced renaming under slavery, of post-emancipation reclamation, of religious devotion, of the Black Power era’s African name revival, and of the contemporary creative naming tradition.

Historical patterns

Before emancipation, enslaved African Americans were often given names by their enslavers — common European names (John, James, Mary, Sarah), classical names meant to be cruelly ironic (Caesar, Pompey, Hercules, Cato), or sometimes day-names from West African traditions (Quashee/Kwasi, Quamino/Kwame, Phibbi/Afua). Distinctive Black names existed even before emancipation — Booker, Perlie, Pres, Titus, Alzo, Wash. Around 3 percent of Black Americans had distinctive Black names during the antebellum period, a share that mirrors the percentage observed after the Civil War.

After emancipation, freed African Americans often took surnames for the first time legally — sometimes a former enslaver’s name, sometimes a chosen name (Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Freeman, Freeborn). Biblical names were used widely — Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Sarah, Naomi, Ruth. Grand classical and aspirational names — Imperial, Caesar, Demetrius, Aphrodite, Cleopatra.

The 1960s–1970s African name revival

The Black Power and Black Arts movements catalyzed a revival of African and African-inspired naming. Swahili names — Jamal (“handsome”), Aisha (“life”), Tamika, Kenyatta (after Jomo Kenyatta), Imani (“faith”), Kwame (Akan day-name), Asante, Habari, Salaam. Arabic names — Malik (“king”), Aaliyah (“rising”), Jamaal, Tariq, Khadijah, Ayesha, Hakeem, Rasheed. Yoruba names — less common but present. These names spread widely in the 1970s–1990s and remain prominent.

Distinctive Black American names

Beginning in the 1960s and accelerating in the 1980s–2010s, African Americans developed a distinctive creative naming tradition: unique prefixes (La-, De-, Sha-, Ra-, Le-, Ke-, Ka-, Ja-, Ty-, Tre-); unique suffixes (-isha, -ique, -ay, -elle, -ese); apostrophes and creative spellings (D’Angelo, De’Andre, La’Quan,

Mo'Nique); reclaimed and invented names (Lakeisha, Tanisha, Latasha, Shaniqua, Quentin, Quincy, Trevon, Devontae, Daquan, Aaliyah, Marquise, Tyrese).

The Conversation: although the names have evolved, distinctive Black names trace to the earliest days of the United States. Since none of these Black names are derived from African languages, they constitute a unique African American cultural practice that originated during enslavement.

These names — sometimes mocked as “ghetto names” — are a creative African American cultural tradition of long standing: innovation, family pride, and self-determination. They have also produced documented hiring discrimination. Bertrand and Mullainathan (2004) showed identical résumés with names like Lakisha or Jamal received 50 percent fewer callbacks than those with names like Emily or Greg. The names are not the problem. The racism is.

Religious names and surnames

Black Muslim Americans often use Arabic names — Muhammad, Ali, Hassan, Hussein, Khalid, Aisha, Fatima, Khadijah, Mariam — and many converts take new Arabic names upon embracing Islam: Muhammad Ali, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Malcolm X (rejecting “Little” as a slave name), Yasiin Bey (formerly Mos Def).

Most African Americans bear surnames descended from English, Scotch-Irish, and other European-origin family names — often the names of former enslavers. Common surnames include Williams, Johnson, Brown, Jones, Davis, Miller, Wilson, Moore, Taylor, Anderson, Thomas, Jackson, White, Harris, Martin, Thompson, Robinson, Clark, Walker, Hall, Allen, Young, King, Wright, Scott, Green, Adams, Baker, Nelson, Carter, Mitchell, Roberts, Phillips, Campbell, Parker, Evans, Edwards, Collins, Stewart, Morris, Murphy, Cook, Rogers, Reed, Cox. Some African Americans have adopted new surnames as acts of self-determination.

Most African American women adopt a husband's surname upon marriage, though hyphenation and keeping maiden names is increasingly common, especially among professionals. Ask how to say a name. Do not Anglicize or simplify creatively spelled names. Mocking a Black name is a documented form of racism.

Dates of Significance

African American national holidays and observances sit on the civic calendar and also keep a memory the civic calendar did not always hold.

The year

1 January — New Year's Day; Watch Night on 31 December commemorates the 1862–63 vigil before the Emancipation Proclamation.

Third Monday in January — Martin Luther King Jr. Day, federal since 1986; day of service; marches, speeches, gospel concerts.

February — Black History Month, recognized annually since 1976 (originally Negro History Week, 1926, founded by Dr. Carter G. Woodson). Schools, churches, museums, workplaces observe.

March (variable) — Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee; anniversary of Bloody Sunday (7 March 1965) at the

Edmund Pettus Bridge.

4 April — anniversary of MLK's assassination (1968); solemn observance.

19 May — Malcolm X's birthday; observed in Black nationalist and Muslim communities.

25 May — George Floyd Memorial Day; anniversary of Floyd's 2020 murder; observed in Minneapolis and beyond.

June — Black Music Month / African American Music Appreciation Month, established by President Carter in 1979; celebrates Black musical contribution.

19 June — Juneteenth, federal since 2021.

4 July — Independence Day, celebrated with awareness of Frederick Douglass's "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" (1852). Cookouts, fireworks.

28 August — March on Washington anniversary (1963); MLK's "I Have a Dream."

26 December–1 January — Kwanzaa.

Juneteenth

A federal holiday commemorating the emancipation of enslaved African Americans. The name combines June and nineteenth. It is celebrated on the anniversary of General Order No. 3, issued by Major General Gordon Granger on 19 June 1865, proclaiming freedom for enslaved Africans in Texas — two and a half years after the Emancipation Proclamation of 1 January 1863.

Made a federal holiday in 2021 after decades of advocacy. Widely celebrated with red foods — red velvet cake, red drink (strawberry soda, hibiscus, red Kool-Aid), watermelon, red beans, BBQ. Red symbolizes resilience and the blood of ancestors. Family reunions, picnics, parades, community festivals, gospel, blues, jazz, hip-hop, the reading of the Emancipation Proclamation and General Order No. 3.

Rondo Days in St. Paul (third Saturday of July) is Minnesota's most prominent African American heritage festival.

Kwanzaa

A week-long celebration honoring African heritage and culture, 26 December to 1 January. Created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga. Based on seven core principles, the Nguzo Saba:

26 December — Umoja, Unity: unity in family, community, nation, and race.

27 December — Kujichagulia, Self-Determination: to define ourselves, name ourselves, create for ourselves.

28 December — Ujima, Collective Work and Responsibility: build and maintain our community together.

29 December — Ujamaa, Cooperative Economics: build and maintain our own businesses.

30 December — Nia, Purpose: restore our people to traditional greatness.

31 December — Kuumba, Creativity: leave our community more beautiful than we found it.

1 January — Imani, Faith: believe in ourselves, our people, our struggle.

The setup includes the kinara (seven-branched candleholder); seven candles — one black (center, the people), three red (struggle, the blood), three green (future, hope); mazao (fruits and vegetables, harvest); mkeka (straw mat, tradition); muhindi (ears of corn, one per child); kikombe cha Umoja (the Unity Cup, used for libations honoring ancestors); zawadi (gifts, often educational or cultural); karamu (the communal feast on 31 December — African and African American foods). Kwanzaa is not a religious holiday. Christians, Muslims, and secular Black Americans celebrate it.

Life-cycle events

Birth: baby showers, often with church involvement; baby dedication or christening common. First steps, first words, first day of school — frequently celebrated. Cotillions — formal debutante balls for young Black women, historically important in Black middle-class communities, still observed in many cities. Rites of passage programs — church- or African-cultural-organization-based. Sweet 16 for girls. Graduations — high school and college are major family events; HBCU graduation has special cultural significance. Wedding: mainstream American forms plus jumping the broom, gospel, the wedding-day cookout vibe. Homegoing: see Family.

Cultural festivals and Minnesota dates

Essence Festival of Culture (New Orleans, July) — the largest African American cultural festival in the United States; founded 1995. Afro-punk Festival (Brooklyn). Black Pride events — major in D.C., Atlanta, Philadelphia, and other cities. HBCU homecoming weekends. Soul Train Awards, BET Awards, NAACP Image Awards.

Minnesota: Rondo Days (St. Paul, third Saturday of July) — commemorates the Black St. Paul neighborhood destroyed by I-94; parade, music, food, family reunion. Black History Month programming at the Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery, Penumbra Theatre (St. Paul), the Hennepin History Museum. Juneteenth celebrations at Theodore Wirth Park, North Commons, Lake Bde Maka Ska, and elsewhere. George Floyd Square memorial at 38th and Chicago in South Minneapolis — informal year-round gathering site.

Etiquette

Greet everyone individually when entering — handshakes, hugs, daps, nods. Skipping greetings is rude. Greet elders first. Honor the visit; Black visits are often leisurely. Bring something when visiting — wine, dessert, a side dish, flowers, or a small gift. Remove shoes if you see shoes by the door (some households; not universal).

Dining

Wash hands before meals. Wait for grace — almost universal in Christian Black households. The eldest, the host, or a designated person says grace; everyone bows their head and says Amen. The host serves or invites guests to serve themselves. Pass dishes. Compliment the cook generously and specifically. Try a little of everything; refusing dishes can offend. Don't take too much the first time through; leave food for others; come back for seconds. "Make a plate to go" — Black hosts almost always send guests home with leftover food in foil-covered plates. This is a sign of love; accept it.

Soul food

Soul food is one of the most popular and recognizable cuisines coming out of the United States. For centuries Black Americans have passed on recipes that have marked special occasions. Origins mostly from Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama — the Deep South. The term was coined in the 1960s — popularized by Malcolm X's autobiography (1965) and the Black Power movement, which celebrated African American foodways as resistance and identity. The cuisine draws on West and Central African, European, and Indigenous American influences synthesized through slavery and Southern Black agriculture.

Major dishes: fried chicken — buttermilk-brined, seasoned, breaded, fried. Collard greens — slow-cooked with smoked turkey, ham hock, or bacon; vinegar; potlikker for cornbread. Mustard greens and turnip greens, similar preparation. Cornbread — iron-skillet, sweet or savory by region. Macaroni and cheese — the baked, multi-cheese, custardy Black version, often the table centerpiece. Black-eyed peas — New Year's Day staple for good luck; often with rice (Hoppin' John). Sweet potato pie — the Black alternative to pumpkin pie; Thanksgiving and special-occasion staple. Pound cake. Peach cobbler. Banana pudding — vanilla wafers, sliced bananas, vanilla custard, whipped cream. Red velvet cake — especially for Juneteenth. Catfish — cornmeal-breaded, fried. Smothered pork chops — pan-fried, then braised in onion gravy. Oxtails — slow-braised, often with rice and gravy. Ham hocks, neck bones, pig feet. Chitlins / chitterlings — cleaned and slow-cooked pig intestines; deeply traditional, less commonly cooked now. Red beans and rice — Louisiana. Gumbo, jambalaya, étouffée — Louisiana / Creole. Grits — breakfast and main-dish staple. Biscuits and gravy. Fried green tomatoes. Okra — stewed, fried, or in gumbo. BBQ — pulled pork (Carolinas), brisket (Texas), ribs (Memphis, Kansas City); Black BBQ traditions are foundational to American BBQ. Cornish hens. Yams / candied yams — sweet potatoes baked with brown sugar, butter, cinnamon. Hot sauce on nearly everything — Texas Pete, Frank's, Crystal, Louisiana, Tabasco.

Drinks: sweet tea — iced tea heavily sweetened; the Southern Black staple. Red drink / Kool-Aid — strawberry or red-flavored, Juneteenth tradition. Homemade lemonade, often with mint. Watermelon water. Coffee — strong, often with cream and sugar. Cognac, Hennessy, brown liquor — culturally significant adult drinks. Champagne and sparkling wine for celebrations.

Personal space, time, dress, gifts

Black culture allows close physical proximity — standing close, hugs, hand on shoulder, gestures. Eye contact — direct between equals; younger may lower gaze with elders. Hair is not for touching without explicit invitation. Touching Black hair or skin as if a novelty is a known cultural offense and crosses into racist objectification.

CPT (Colored People's Time / Black People Time) is a self-deprecating joke about the flexibility of Black time at social events. Family gatherings, parties, BBQs, even some church services can start "late" by unmarked-mainstream norms. This is cultural, not personal disrespect. Work, business, and medical appointments are typically on time. Funerals, the ceremony portion of weddings, graduations, and formal events are more punctual.

Sunday best for church — suits, ties, dresses, hats, polished shoes. Church hats / crowns — elaborate hats worn by Black women in church; an iconic tradition. Black formal wear is often sharp, well-tailored,

elegant. Natural hair, locs, braids, twists, weaves, wigs — all are valid; no one Black hairstyle is more authentic than another.

For visits: dessert, fruit, wine (if not a non-drinking household), or a small thoughtful gift. For birthdays, graduations, weddings: cash in a card, gifts, money trees or money leis. For funerals: flowers, cash to family (a love offering), food brought to the home. Christmas exchange is common; Kwanzaa zawadi may be modest and educational.

What respect looks like here

Use Mr./Mrs./Miss plus last name with adults until invited otherwise. Honor elders — stand when they enter; let them eat first; defer in conversation. Listen actively — Black culture is highly verbal; people expect to be heard. Relationships often precede transactions. Accept hospitality. Compliment generously — children, food, dress, accomplishments. Recognize the Black church's centrality even if you are not religious. Most people prefer Black or African American; some prefer one or the other; ask. Pronounce names correctly.

The n-word is not yours to use — not because you have heard Black people use it, not because it is in songs, not because you have Black friends. “I don’t see color” lands as erasure of identity. Comparing African Americans to other communities as a lesson (“Black people should do what [another group] did”) misunderstands history. “Black-on-Black crime” as a deflection from racism conversations is a known rhetorical tactic. Tokenizing — asking the Black person in the room to speak for all Black people — closes the meeting. Black middle-class accomplishment is not “exceptional” in a way that implies most Black people are not capable. Not every Black person dances, sings, plays sports, likes watermelon, likes rap, or fulfills any other stereotype. Black spaces — church, family gathering, barbershop, salon — are entered by invitation and respect.

Learn on your own time. A Black colleague is not an unpaid tutor on racism.

Communication

African American Vernacular English (AAVE) — also called Black English Vernacular, Black Vernacular English, or, in older or politicized contexts, Ebonics — is a legitimate, systematic, rule-governed dialect of American English spoken, in varying degrees, by many African Americans. It is not “broken English,” “incorrect English,” or “slang.” Linguistically it is as systematic as any other dialect.

AAVE

Features include habitual be: “He be working” means he works regularly, different from “He is working” (right now). Copula deletion: “She nice” = “She is nice.” Multiple negation: “I ain’t never done nothing” = “I have never done anything” — standard in many world languages including French and Spanish. Pronunciation features: “th” to “d” or “f” (“dis” for “this”; “wif” for “with”). Ain’t as a multipurpose negative. Distinct vocabulary, much of which has spread into mainstream American English (cool, jazz, hip, dig, bad meaning good, fresh, slay, woke, lit, savage, the GOAT, salty, no cap, finna, on God).

Code-switching between AAVE and Standard American English is a cultural skill most Black Americans navigate fluently. Calling AAVE “broken” or “wrong” is linguistically uninformed and culturally insulting.

Direct, expressive, high-context

Black American communication tends to be expressive — emotionally rich, verbally engaged, gesturally vivid. Direct in spirit, with rules of respect and indirection in some contexts (especially with elders, in church, or with authority). High-context — meaning carried in tone, body language, what is unsaid, and shared cultural reference. Performatively rich — storytelling, signifying, the dozens, jokes, proverbs, biblical references.

Call and response

The back-and-forth between speaker, preacher, or performer and audience is foundational. In church: “Can I get an Amen?” — “Amen!” In music: lead singer’s call, choir’s or audience’s response. In conversation: storytellers expect verbal engagement — Mmm-hmm, That’s right, Sho ’nuff, Tell it, Go ahead, Preach. Silent listening can read as disengagement.

Signifying, the dozens, roasting

Signifying — clever indirect speech, often with hidden meanings, double-entendres, or insults; an African American oral art form documented by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). The dozens / snapping / yo mama jokes — competitive ritual insults, traditionally between Black men, testing wit and resilience; not a real insult but a verbal sport. Roasting — extended joking insult of someone in a friendly way. Reading — sharp, devastating critique, often with origins in LGBTQ+ Black ballroom culture. Shade — subtle, indirect insult.

Storytelling and humor

Black culture is profoundly storytelling-oriented — from African oral tradition through enslaved narratives, sermons, blues lyrics, hip-hop, family stories at Sunday dinner, and contemporary Black literature. Long, vivid, emotionally rich storytelling is normal; rushing past someone’s story is rude.

Black humor is wickedly sharp, often dark, observational, and self-aware. The legacy of slavery, segregation, and ongoing racism is processed through humor. The Apollo Theater, *In Living Color*, *Def Comedy Jam*, *The Chris Rock Show*, Tyler Perry’s plays, Black Twitter — a continuous tradition. “Black don’t crack”; “the white man’s ice ain’t colder”; many proverbs. Self-deprecation is balanced with fierce dignity. Some Black humor is in-group only — non-Black people repeating Black jokes can land badly.

Silence

Silence can be companionable among intimates; reproving — a parent’s silent look; tense — unspoken disagreement; sacred — in church, before prayer.

AAVE speakers usually communicate well in Standard English contexts; do not assume an interpreter is needed. For older or rural Southern Black Americans whose AAVE is heavy, some context-sensitive accommodation may help. For Black Caribbean immigrants (Haitian Creole, Jamaican Patois, and others) — professional interpreters as appropriate; those communities have their own pages.

Pronouncing African American names correctly is a basic act of respect. Ask, listen, repeat back, get it right.

The Black LGBTQ Community

Black LGBTQ Americans navigate multiple, sometimes intersecting marginalizations: anti-Black racism, including within white-dominant LGBTQ spaces; homophobia and transphobia, including within some Black communities and some Black churches (though this is rapidly evolving); higher rates of HIV, violence (especially against Black trans women), and economic precarity.

Culture and gathering

Vibrant cultural production — ballroom culture (the Houses, voguing, Paris Is Burning, Pose); Black LGBTQ writers (James Baldwin, Audre Lorde, Essex Hemphill, Roxane Gay); artists and performers. Black Pride events exist in D.C., Atlanta, Philadelphia, Chicago, and other cities.

Use the name and pronouns. Outing someone to family or church is not culture. The people-page rule is the workplace rule.

Black Hair, Beauty, and Bodies

Black hair is a site of cultural expression, political meaning, and ongoing resistance. From West African traditions of elaborate braiding patterns (oral tradition holds that escape-route maps were sometimes braided into hair during slavery), through suppression of natural hair under slavery and Jim Crow, through the political statement of the 1960s–70s Afro, through the natural hair movement of the 2010s–20s, Black hair is loaded with meaning. The National Museum of African American History and Culture’s “Strands of Inspiration” is literacy here.

Forms

Natural hair — worn in its natural texture, not chemically straightened; the contemporary natural hair movement has grown significantly. Locs / dreadlocks — associated with Rastafarian tradition, Afrocentric identity, and increasingly mainstream Black culture. Braids — box braids, cornrows, knotless braids, micros, Senegalese twists, Marley twists — protective and beautiful. Twists — Bantu knots, two-strand twists. Relaxers (perms) — chemical straighteners; widespread historically; declining as natural hair has grown. Weaves and wigs — adding hair extensions; long tradition; legitimate; should not be mocked. Edges — the small hair at the hairline, often laid down with edge control. Wash days — the long process of washing, conditioning, and styling Black natural hair, often weekly or every other week. Hair salons and barbershops are cultural institutions and gathering places.

The CROWN Act — state-level legislation in many states, including Minnesota — protects against hair-based discrimination in employment and schools. Hair is not for touching. Hair is not a professionalism test.

Beauty and colorism

Generations of European beauty ideals have been resisted with movements like Black is Beautiful, Black Girl Magic, the natural hair movement. Colorism within the Black community — historic preference for lighter skin tones; the “paper bag test”; ongoing tension; light-skin versus dark-skin discourse. Body diversity — celebration of Black women’s curves, Black men’s bodies; tensions with Eurocentric thin-ideal pressures.

A lawyer in a loc and a scientist in a lab coat are not opposites. They may be the same person on different Tuesdays.

Music — The Cultural Heartbeat

Per the Carnegie Hall Timeline of African American Music and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, Black American music is one of the most globally influential cultural traditions. A playlist is not engagement. The record is literacy.

Genres and origins

Spirituals — enslaved African Christians, eighteenth–nineteenth century; later the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Work songs and field hollers — enslaved labor. Blues — Mississippi Delta, 1890s–early 1900s; Robert Johnson, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf. Ragtime — 1890s–1910s; Scott Joplin. Jazz — New Orleans, 1910s; Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane. Gospel — 1920s, urban Black church; Thomas Dorsey, Mahalia Jackson, James Cleveland, Aretha Franklin, Kirk Franklin. Rhythm and blues — 1940s; Ruth Brown, Big Mama Thornton, Ray Charles, Sam Cooke. Doo-wop — 1950s; The Drifters, The Coasters, The Platters. Soul — 1960s; Otis Redding, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder, Curtis Mayfield, Al Green. Motown — 1960s Detroit; The Supremes, The Temptations, Smokey Robinson, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, the Jackson 5. Funk — late 1960s; James Brown, Sly and the Family Stone, Parliament-Funkadelic, Earth, Wind & Fire. Disco — 1970s; Donna Summer, Gloria Gaynor, Chic. Hip-hop / rap — South Bronx, 1973–; DJ Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, Run-D.M.C., Public Enemy, N.W.A., Tupac, Notorious B.I.G., Jay-Z, Nas, Outkast, Kendrick Lamar, Drake, Cardi B, Beyoncé. Go-go — 1970s Washington, D.C.; Chuck Brown. House — late 1970s Chicago; Frankie Knuckles. Techno — 1980s Detroit; Juan Atkins, Derrick May. New jack swing — late 1980s; Teddy Riley, Bobby Brown. Neo-soul — 1990s–2000s; D’Angelo, Lauryn Hill, Erykah Badu, Maxwell, Jill Scott. Trap — 2000s Atlanta; Gucci Mane, Future, Young Thug, Migos, 21 Savage. Afrobeats and amapiano — 2010s–, influences crossing back from African and South African scenes.

Memory and politics

From “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (the Black national anthem, James Weldon Johnson, 1900) through Sam Cooke’s “A Change Is Gonna Come” (1964), Marvin Gaye’s What’s Going On (1971), Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” (1989), to Kendrick Lamar’s To Pimp a Butterfly (2015) and Beyoncé’s Lemonade (2016), Black music has been a primary art form for narrating Black experience.

Minnesota

Prince Rogers Nelson (1958–2016) — Minneapolis-born, architect of the Minneapolis Sound, one of the greatest musicians in American history. The Time, Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis, Janet Jackson (with the Minnesota production team), Morris Day, Sheila E. — Minneapolis was a major Black music center in the 1980s.

Sports

Black Americans are enormously over-represented in major American professional sports. NBA: about 70 percent Black. NFL: about 58 percent Black. MLB: declining Black presence; about 7 percent Black (down from about 19 percent in 1981). Track and field, boxing, tennis, golf: significant Black presence — Tiger Woods, Serena and Venus Williams, Simone Biles. HBCU sports — particularly football, basketball, and track.

Sports as a path has been both a source of opportunity and a source of myth — overemphasis on athletics as Black opportunity at the cost of other paths. The kid may not play. Sport is not the only excellence. A scientist and a linebacker can be siblings. Minnesota names include Andre Iguodala, Devean George, Khalid El-Amin, Maya Moore.

Literature and Letters

The Black literary tradition is among the richest in American letters. This is not a people without letters. You do not need to quote a novel in the lobby. You do need to know the record exists.

The record

Slave narratives — Frederick Douglass (Narrative of the Life, 1845), Harriet Jacobs (Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, 1861), Olaudah Equiano (1789).

Reconstruction and Harlem Renaissance — W.E.B. Du Bois (The Souls of Black Folk, 1903), Booker T. Washington, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston (Their Eyes Were Watching God, 1937), Claude McKay, Countee Cullen, Jean Toomer (Cane, 1923).

Mid-twentieth century — Richard Wright (Native Son, 1940), Ralph Ellison (Invisible Man, 1952), James Baldwin (The Fire Next Time, 1963; Go Tell It on the Mountain, 1953), Lorraine Hansberry (A Raisin in the Sun, 1959).

Late twentieth century / Black Arts Movement — Toni Morrison (Nobel laureate; Beloved, Song of Solomon, Sula), Maya Angelou, Alice Walker (The Color Purple), Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, Gwendolyn Brooks, Rita Dove.

Late twentieth and twenty-first century — August Wilson (Pulitzer Prize; significant years in St. Paul), Ta-Nehisi Coates, Jesmyn Ward, Colson Whitehead (multiple Pulitzers), Tracy K. Smith, Tayari Jones, Roxane Gay, N.K. Jemisin, Kiese Laymon, Imani Perry, Hanif Abdurraqib, Saeed Jones, Jericho Brown. Haitian American and other Afro-Caribbean writers have their own pages; shared race is not shared literature.

Population size is not culture size.

Art and Visual Culture

Harlem Renaissance visual artists — Aaron Douglas, Augusta Savage, Jacob Lawrence, Romare Bearden. Civil Rights era — Charles White, Elizabeth Catlett, Norman Lewis. Contemporary — Kara Walker, Kehinde Wiley, Amy Serrano, Mickalene Thomas, Mark Bradford, Theaster Gates, Hank Willis Thomas, Glenn Ligon, Carrie Mae Weems, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Kerry James Marshall.

Film — Spike Lee, Ava DuVernay, Barry Jenkins, Jordan Peele, Ryan Coogler, Lena Waithe. Television — Issa Rae, Donald Glover, Shonda Rhimes.

You are a guest. Pay. A festival is not consultation. A design is not a logo for the department. Penumbra Theatre in St. Paul is a major Black theater.

Diaspora and Adjacent

While “African American” typically refers to people in the United States, the cultural community has global

reach.

In the world

Cultural exports — jazz, hip-hop, soul food, Black film and literature — are global. African American expatriates — historically in Paris (Josephine Baker, James Baldwin, Richard Wright), in Ghana (W.E.B. Du Bois moved there during Kwame Nkrumah’s presidency), in contemporary Berlin, Mexico City, Lisbon, Bali. Pan-African connections — Du Bois, Marcus Garvey, Kwame Ture / Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis. Family ties to Africa — increasing DNA-based genealogy connecting African Americans to specific West African ancestries; Year of Return pilgrimages to Ghana (2019) and similar programs.

Recent African immigrants

African Americans and recent African immigrants (Nigerian, Ghanaian, Senegalese, Ethiopian, Somali, and others) share race and often have distinct cultures, accents, religious traditions, and economic patterns. Tensions: competition for limited “Black opportunity” slots; cultural misunderstandings; immigration-narrative differences. Connections: shared experience of anti-Black racism; coalition politics; intermarriage; Pan-African cultural events. Generational shifts: children of African immigrants growing up alongside African Americans often blend identities. Those communities have their own pages. This page does not swallow them.

Afro-Caribbean communities

African Americans and Afro-Caribbean immigrants (Jamaican, Haitian, Trinidadian, Cuban, Bahamian, and others) similarly share race and have distinct national-origin cultures. Long-established Afro-Caribbean communities in New York, Miami, and Boston have produced political and cultural figures who navigate both identities — Colin Powell (Jamaican parents), Susan Rice (Jamaican father), Eric Holder (Barbadian father). Open those pages.

Minnesota’s Black population

Minnesota’s Black population is more recently immigrant-heavy than the national average — Somali, Liberian, Ethiopian, Sudanese, and other African immigrant communities are significant. The historically rooted African American community in North Minneapolis, Rondo St. Paul, and South Minneapolis is distinct from these newer communities and increasingly intermingled. Census “Black” mixes those stories. This page does not.

Services, opportunity, and participation

Education

Educational attainment among Black Americans has risen significantly and still lags white attainment. About 30 percent of Black adults 25 and older have a bachelor’s degree, versus about 40 percent of white adults (Pew). The Black–white wealth gap and educational gap persist despite massive educational investment.

HBCUs

Historically Black Colleges and Universities are a particular point of pride — Howard, Spelman, Morehouse, Hampton, Fisk, Tuskegee, Florida A&M, North Carolina A&T, Xavier, Dillard, and 100-plus others. HBCU homecoming weekends are major cultural events. HBCU alumni networks are powerful. African American Studies / Black Studies as academic disciplines emerged in the late 1960s and have grown.

School as a gate and a ladder

Education as the path to freedom is a deep parental investment. “You’ll have to be twice as good” is a message many Black children still receive. Under-resourced schools, harsher discipline, and racialized tracking are structure. An English-only IEP is a gate. A parent who needs a language is not illiterate.

A degree is not exceptional in a way that implies most Black people are not capable. Scientists, teachers, tradespeople, and people the school failed are the same portrait. Athletics is not the only path.

Other Considerations

Anti-Black racism remains a daily lived experience for African Americans across all classes, regions, and contexts. This is not history. It is current.

Forms

Police violence — Black Americans are killed by police at rates approximately 2.5 times white rates. Cases that have shaped contemporary consciousness include Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, Philando Castile (Falcon Heights, Minnesota), Daunte Wright (Brooklyn Center, Minnesota), George Floyd (Minneapolis), Breonna Taylor.

Mass incarceration — Black Americans are about 13 percent of the population and about 38 percent of the prison population.

Wealth gap — median Black household wealth is approximately one-eighth of median white household wealth.

Housing discrimination — redlining (historical), continued steering, predatory lending, gentrification.

Healthcare disparities — Black maternal mortality about three times the white rate; lower life expectancy; under-treatment for pain; mistrust grounded in Tuskegee, Henrietta Lacks, and ongoing experiences.

Educational disparities — under-resourced schools, harsher discipline, racialized tracking.

Employment discrimination — résumé-name studies; “Black tax” (extra effort required); double consciousness at work.

Microaggressions — daily slights, comments, assumptions.

Trauma and mental health

Racial trauma is real, accumulating, and intergenerational. Historical trauma — slavery, Jim Crow, lynching, the Tulsa Race Massacre (1921), countless others. Ongoing trauma — police killings, discrimination, anti-Black hate crimes. Vicarious trauma — through media exposure to anti-Black violence.

Cultural attitudes toward mental health: significant stigma, particularly in older generations — “Black

people don't go to therapy," "give it to God," "we got family." Religious framing of mental health — depression as spiritual struggle, anxiety as faithlessness. Distrust of the healthcare system, grounded in real history. Concern about being labeled in ways that affect family, work, custody. Growing acceptance in younger generations — increasing therapy use, Black mental health advocacy, organizations like the Loveland Foundation and the Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation (Taraji P. Henson).

Race is relevant to mental health. Experiences of racism are real. Black or culturally competent providers — Therapy for Black Girls, Therapy for Black Men, the Association of Black Psychologists — matter when people want them. Church community, family, music, and ancestral practices are cultural strengths, not a substitute for care.

Follow law. Still see a family. Do not out anyone.

Health and Healthcare

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services African American Culture guide: there is a high incidence of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and obesity among African Americans. African Americans account for one-third of all patients receiving dialysis in the United States, three times the rate of whites.

Conditions

Black Americans have higher prevalence and worse outcomes in many conditions. Hypertension — affects about 55 percent of Black adults; earlier onset. Diabetes — about 13 percent prevalence; higher than the white rate. Heart disease and stroke — higher mortality. Kidney disease — three times the dialysis rate. Maternal mortality — about three times the white rate; Black women die in childbirth at devastatingly high rates regardless of income or education. Sickle cell disease — primarily affects the Black population; chronic and serious. HIV/AIDS — disproportionate impact. Cancer — higher mortality for prostate, breast, colorectal cancers. Mental health — under-diagnosed, under-treated. Infant mortality — Black infant mortality is about 2.3 times the white rate.

The trust gap

Mistrust of the healthcare system is real and well documented — rooted in historical abuses (Tuskegee Syphilis Study 1932–1972; Henrietta Lacks 1951; J. Marion Sims's surgical experiments on enslaved women) and continued differential treatment. Black pain is famously under-treated. Believe reported pain. Listen to symptoms. Build trust over time. Family and faith leaders may be in the room if this family wants them. Referrals to Black or culturally competent providers when people want them. Faith-based and community resources when this family names them.

A rate is not the person. A physician, a nurse, and a patient in the same clinic can all be this page.

Business and Work

African Americans have a long tradition of entrepreneurship despite enormous structural barriers.

The tradition

Pre-emancipation free Black entrepreneurs — barbers, caterers, sailors, craftsmen. Reconstruction and Jim Crow — Black banks (founded after emancipation), insurance companies, newspapers, funeral

homes, beauty businesses. Madam C.J. Walker — first self-made American female millionaire, Black hair-care empire. Black Wall Street (Greenwood, Tulsa, Oklahoma) — destroyed in the 1921 massacre. Mid-century — Motown Records, Johnson Publishing (Ebony, Jet), soul-food restaurants, BET (Bob Johnson). Contemporary — Oprah Winfrey, Robert F. Smith, Tyler Perry, Rihanna's Fenty, Jay-Z's Roc Nation, Magic Johnson's businesses.

Style and networks

Black American business culture varies by region, industry, and individual. Trust matters; relationships often precede transactions. Respect for hierarchy — titles, formal address. Directness is common. Multiple meetings before commitments. Code-switching in predominantly white business environments. Strong networks: National Black MBA Association, National Society of Black Engineers, National Association of Black Journalists, the Divine Nine. The Links, Incorporated — elite Black women's service organization. Jack and Jill of America — Black middle-class family organization. HBCU alumni networks — extensive, multi-generational.

Staff are not unpaid culture tutors. Identity is not a staffing plan. A financial analyst, a scientist, a plant worker, and a county case manager are the portrait.

Government and politics

African Americans are among the most politically engaged racial-ethnic groups in the United States. High turnout in presidential elections; about 85–95 percent Democratic. About 10,000-plus Black elected officials at all levels; growing Congressional Black Caucus. Activism: NAACP, Urban League, Black Lives Matter, the Movement for Black Lives, SCLC, the National Action Network, reparations advocates. Key issues: voting rights, criminal justice reform, healthcare, education, housing, reparations.

Healthcare Encounters

Address respectfully — Mr./Mrs./Miss plus last name until invited otherwise. Take pain seriously — Black pain is under-treated; believe reports. Listen. Family — adult children, spouses, faith leaders — may be involved if this family wants them. Many Black patients integrate faith into healthcare decisions.

Trust and maternal health

Medical mistrust is rooted in real history; build trust over time. Be especially vigilant with Black pregnant patients; the mortality gap is documented and lethal. Gender match if they want it.

Mandated reporting still exists. Help-seeking that becomes a child-welfare petition is a pattern some communities already know. Book the language they ask for. Ask who should be in the room.

Population Statistics

U.S. Census, 2024, dated: total Black population (alone or in combination) 42,951,595 — 12.63 percent of the country. Single-race non-Hispanic Black about 32 million. Multiracial Black about 5 million. Hispanic Black about 2 million. Foreign-born Black (immigrants) about 5 million, about 10 percent of the Black population. Median age 35 years. Population growth since 2010 about 15 percent.

Geography

South about 55 percent. Northeast about 17 percent. Midwest about 17 percent. West about 10 percent.

Largest metro Black populations: New York about 3.7 million; Atlanta about 2.1 million; Chicago about 1.6 million; Washington, D.C. about 1.6 million; Miami about 1.2 million; Houston about 1.2 million; Dallas–Fort Worth about 1.1 million; Philadelphia about 1.1 million; Los Angeles about 1.0 million; Detroit about 1.0 million.

Minnesota, 2024

Total Black population about 350,000-plus — about 6 percent of the state. Hennepin County about 190,000. Ramsey County about 80,000. African American (descendants of U.S. slavery) on the order of 200,000. Black immigrants (Somali, Liberian, Ethiopian, and others) on the order of 150,000-plus. Major concentrations: Minneapolis, St. Paul, Brooklyn Park, Brooklyn Center. Date it. Census “Black” is not this page’s peoplehood.

Key indicators, national, dated

Median household income (2024): Black about \$53,000; white (non-Hispanic) about \$80,000. Poverty rate: Black about 17 percent; white about 7 percent. Bachelor’s degree (25+): Black about 30 percent; white about 40 percent. Homeownership: Black about 44 percent; white about 74 percent. Life expectancy: Black about 74 years; white about 78 years. Infant mortality: Black 10.6 per 1,000; white 4.5 per 1,000. Maternal mortality: Black about 50 per 100,000; white about 19 per 100,000. Incarceration: Black about five times the white rate.

A rate is not the person. Date the vintage you cite.

Recommended Resources

Learn on your own time. A colleague is not an unpaid tutor.

Books — foundational

W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845). Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861). Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (1952). James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), *Notes of a Native Son* (1955), *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Sula* (1973). Alex Haley, *Roots* (1976). Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Alice Walker, *The Color Purple* (1982). Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969). Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010). Isabel Wilkerson, *The Warmth of Other Suns* (2010) — the foundational Great Migration history; *Caste* (2020). Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (2015). Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning* (2016), *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019). Imani Perry, *South to America* (2022). Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey* (1988). Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). bell hooks, *Ain’t I a Woman?* (1981).

Public doors

Pew Research Center: *Facts About the U.S. Black Population*. National Museum of African American History and Culture (Smithsonian). The 1619 Project (New York Times). The Great Migration — National Archives; Harvard. Carnegie Hall Timeline of African American Music. Kwanzaa — NMAAHC. The Black Church — PBS American Experience.

Minnesota

Minnesota African American Heritage Museum and Gallery (Minneapolis). Penumbra Theatre (St. Paul). The Coalition for Black Mental Health Equity in Minnesota. Rondo Avenue, Inc. — organizers of Rondo Days. George Floyd Square at 38th and Chicago (South Minneapolis). Liberty Community Church, Shiloh Temple, Greater Friendship Missionary Baptist, Fellowship Missionary Baptist, St. Peter's AME — among many key Black congregations. Minnesota Compass — Cultural Communities: African American. The Minneapolis Spokesman-Recorder — historic Black newspaper. Insight News.

Near North African American Community, Minneapolis — MNopedia. North Minneapolis Houses of Worship — University of Minnesota.

Black-owned media

The Root, Essence, Ebony, theGrio, NPR's Code Switch, Capital B News, the Black Press Association of America.

Always defer to the people in front of you over the page in front of you.

"Lift every voice and sing, till earth and heaven ring..." — James Weldon Johnson, the Black National Anthem.

Connections to human services

Workplace culture and service delivery are both candidates.

Child welfare: African American children in Minnesota have been far more likely than white peers to be placed out of home. If you work that system, active efforts are documented work with the family's people, culture, and values — not a box after a removal. Kin search is not flavor.

Health and disability programs: under-treated pain, maternal risk, dialysis, mental-health stigma, Tuskegee as living memory. A waiver assessment that does not believe reported pain is a structural failure. Church and family can be supports this family names. They are not your case plan by default.

Language and 'professionalism': AAVE is not broken English. Black hair is protected in Minnesota by the CROWN Act. A dress and speech code that punishes locs, braids, or AAVE is not neutrality.

Workforce: do not harvest Black staff or the Black ERG as the community, the trainer, or the racial conscience of the unit. EOAD is a door for discrimination. This page is not that door.

Notices and comment: an eList and an English PDF is not how this community was reached. Empty follow-up calls are theater. Pay partners. Report back.

Legislation, funding, rule: you cannot advocate for a channel you will not study. This cultural intelligence exists so the 40% has a people in it — not a paternalistic program designed in a building that never learned the household.

Practice considerations

Color-blind approaches can hide the unequal results a process continues to produce, including disproportionate out-of-home placement. Minnesota law on African American family preservation requires

active efforts and family cultural values in case planning; a training is not a substitute.

What to ask

- Who is family here: extended kin, fictive kin, church, community? Who should be in the room?
- What has happened before with this agency or with police-involved referrals that we should know?
- What would make this process feel fair to you?

Access considerations

- Case plans that do not recognize a grandmother, aunt, or other important kin may exclude meaningful family support. Check how the form defines family.
- Plain language in notices; appeal rights explained in person.
- Review who is denied, delayed, or placed by race in your program's own data before you design.

Who to involve

- Equity Director or administration steward.
- Black-led community organizations named by the family or listed in the relevant program resources, with compensation and report-back.
- The policy or legal owner for any question about the family-preservation statute; this program does not interpret it.

Assumptions to examine

- Do not assume 'Minnesota Nice' neutrality is neutral for this family.
- Do not fold African immigrant households into this brief, or this family into an immigrant brief.
- Do not read directness as hostility or quiet as agreement.
- Understand the state's documented racial disparities before making decisions that affect families.

More context for your work

Child welfare and family preservation

African American children in Minnesota have been about twice as likely as white peers to be placed in out-of-home care. The Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act requires active efforts and incorporation of the family's social and cultural values in case planning and reunification. That is statute; verify the current text with the policy owner.

Kinship and family preservation

Extended kin, fictive kin, churches, and community care can be central sources of family support. Ancestral and spiritual practices vary and may include Baptist, COGIC, Muslim, African traditional, or no religious practice. Ask the family what matters to them.

Observances at work

Observance	When	At work
Juneteenth	June 19	Observed as a holiday; do not schedule required sessions.

Continue the connection

- **Community engagement or co-design effort** — program page </paths/gp-3>
- **Policy, form, or notice change** — program page </paths/gp-2>
- **New program or service concept** — program page </paths/gp-1>
- **Equity Analysis Toolkit** — program page </learn/equity-toolkit>
- **Community engagement and connections** — program page </learn/community-connections>
- **Learning and resources** — program page </learn>

Sources

- **Minnesota African American Family Preservation and Child Welfare Disproportionality Act** — Verify current statute text with the policy owner; this program does not interpret it.
- **Minnesota Compass, Black or African American profile** — Include the source date when citing this information. <https://www.mncompass.org/>