

OMAHA CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY TIMELINE

CIVIL RIGHTS HISTORY TIMELINE OF OMAHA

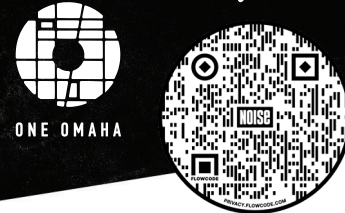
Disclaimer: This is not an exhaustive civil rights history timeline. There have been many efforts by marginalized groups throughout history to fight for rights. Here we focus on the arrival of Black people in Omaha and the significant events impacting their treatment. An explicit photo of Will Brown's body is included in this timeline.

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 **BFF** 



LET US RECOGNIZE THE LAND ON WHICH THE CITY OF OMAHA WAS BUILT HAS BEEN HOME TO THE OMAHA, PONCA, SIOUX, PAWNEE, AND MISSOURIA TRIBES. OMAHA CITY, INCORPORATED ON FEBRUARY 2, 1857, IS NAMED AFTER THE UMO'HO' (OMAHA) TRIBE. OMAHA MEANS "THE PEOPLE WHO MOVE AGAINST THE CURRENT" OR "UPSTREAM."

DUE TO SIGNIFICANT TREATY ALTERATIONS BY THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT, MUCH OF THE OMAHA TRIBE WAS MOVED TO THE BLACKBIRD HILLS, PRESENT-DAY THURSTON COUNTY, NEBRASKA. FOLLOWING THEIR DISPLACEMENT, MASSACRES OF BISON LEFT THE TRIBE WITH LITTLE FOOD, TRADING MATERIALS, AND ANCESTRAL TRADITION. DOCUMENTATION FROM THE 1850S INDICATED THE INDIGENOUS TRIBES WERE PRESENT WITHIN THE NEWLY FORMED CITY, YET LIVING IN DESTITUTE POVERTY.

TODAY, THE LARGEST POPULATION OF OMAHA PEOPLE LIVE IN MACY, NEBRASKA WITHIN THEIR RESERVATION.

2019 Lincoln playwright Christopher Maly's "The Blues of Knowing Why" contextualizes the racial climate in Omaha around the 1969 killing of Vivian Strong in a sold-out run at The Union for Contemporary Art.

2019 Omaha playwright Beaufield Berry's "Red Summer" reshapes out the human story of 1919 lynching victim Will Brown in sold-out performances at the Blue Barn Theatre.

2019 The Omaha Community Council for Racial Justice and Reconciliation forms to hold a series of forums and vigils in memory of the victims of racial violence and works toward community healing, commemorating the 100 and 50 years, respectively, of the Will Brown and Vivian Strong tragedies.

2020 As protests erupted in the wake of the death of George Floyd, Black Omaha resident James Scurlock is shot and killed by white bar owner Jake Gardner in the Old Market. Gardner is released from custody despite video evidence and a documented history of racism. A grand jury was convened in the case and a series of public marches, vigils, tributes, and listening sessions framed needed reforms, echoing similar calls for change nationwide. After being indicted, Gardner died of a self-inflicted gunshot in Portland, Oregon.

2020 President Donald Trump responds to protests in Washington D.C. with excessive police force and military presence.

2020 In the wake of a social movement led by young people, longstanding symbols of racism and division are being removed in different parts of the country, including Omaha.

2020 Trump is voted out of office and Joe Biden is elected the next president of the United States.



1999 Mandatory busing in Omaha ends when OPS adopts an open enrollment policy.

2007 The Omaha World-Herald publishes a special report "Poverty Amid Prosperity" that details the gap between intense poverty in Omaha's Black community and the comparative comfort and wealth of white neighborhoods. It sets in stark relief the two Omahas many refer to: one black and one white, one poor and one rich.

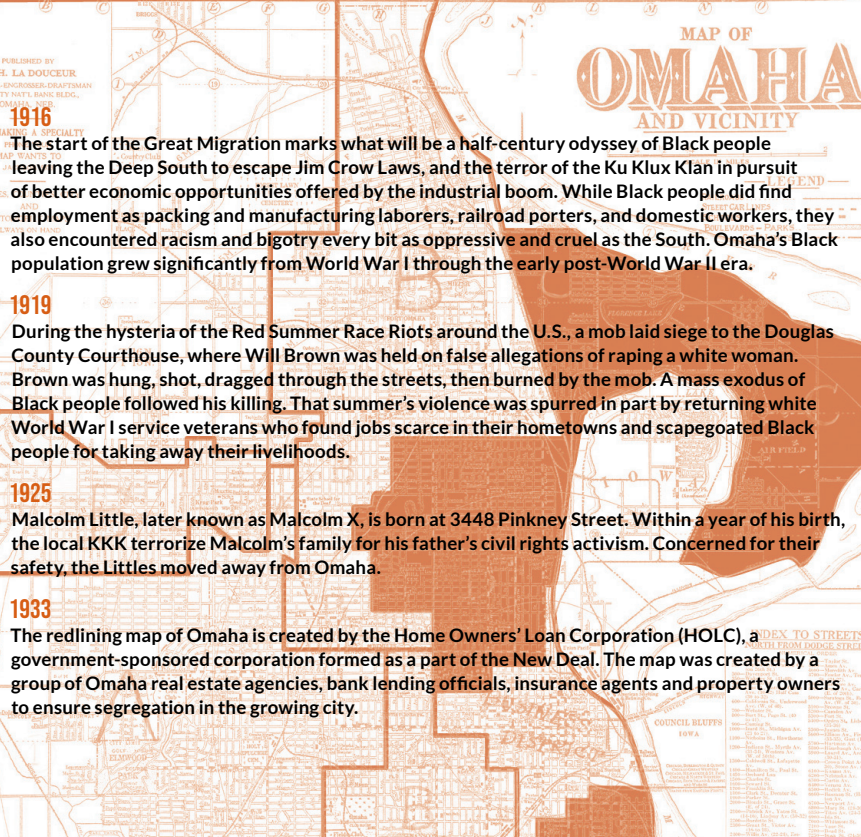
2007 Empower Omaha is launched and its Empowerment Network continues working today to address Black community issues and solutions through both grassroots and broad-based collective efforts.

2013-2014 #BlackLivesMatter is launched on social media after the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the deadly shooting of Trayvon Martin. The movement takes to the streets with demonstrations over the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Eric Garner in New York City in 2014; becoming a rallying cry and catalyst to protest wrongful deaths of Black people by police.

2016-2018 A series of wrongful killings of Black people make headlines and leads to nationwide Black Lives Matter demonstrations that denounce police methods.

2017 Omaha police beat, drag, and repeatedly taze Zachary Bear Heels, a citizen of the Rosebud Sioux tribe who was known to be neurodivergent and off of his medications. He dies while handcuffed and defenseless in police custody.

2019 "Undesign the Red Line" at The Union for Contemporary Art lays out the systemic way in which Black people are restricted to live within certain boundaries by real estate and lending practices.



1970 The Great Plains Black History Museum is formed during the nation's Bicentennial Exchange Building, Calloway and her husband James. Located in the former Webster Telephone Exchange Building, it served as a community center, home of the Urban League of Nebraska, and a temporary home for the Near North Side YMCA.

1993-1994 Twice, the Nebraska Parole Board votes unanimously to recommend Mondo (David Rice) for parole. They were convicted.

1996 The Omaha Police Department adds a helicopter to its law enforcement fleet and regularly deploys it over North Omaha in what many Black residents regard as a blatant "subdue and control" over-policing tactic.

1976 A lawsuit joined by several mothers of children in Omaha public schools to integrate classrooms leads to a 1976 federal court order mandating busing in the Omaha Public School system. While busing ultimately proceeds without violence, an anti-busing campaign attempts to block it.

1976 Major protests and uprisings occur along North 24th street in response to police brutality, segregation, the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the killing of Vivian Strong, and the arrival of George Wallace (a staunch segregationist with racist views), who at the time, was running for president.

1976 Ernie Chambers is elected to the Nebraska Legislature to represent predominantly Black legislative District 11. Term-limited from running in 2008 and 2020, he served for 46 years. For many decades, Chambers was the lone Black state senator in the Unicameral.

1971 The Nebraska State Historical Society approves a historical marker for the Malcolm X birth site, but takes 16 years to install the first sign to honor a Black individual born in Nebraska.

1971-1972 After a struggle to find support, Black students and community members win the day when the UNO Black Studies Department begins operations in the 1971-1972 academic year.

1976 Despite their pleas of innocence and controversial evidence against them, David Rice (Mondo) and Edward Poindexter are convicted for the 1970 bombing murder of Omaha police officer Larry Minard. Mondo and Ed's affiliation with the Black Panthers made them targets of the Omaha Police.

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1954 The U.S. Supreme Court's Brown v. Board of Education ruling rejects the idea of separate but equal education in the nation's public schools, but obscures that responsibility for cities and states by stating they must integrate schools "with all deliberate speed." This vagueness would allow Omaha to drag its feet on integration for the next two decades until compelled by a federal court.

1956 Goodwin's Spencer Street Barbershop opens and becomes an informal home to many civil rights leaders. Nebraska's civil rights lion, the young Ernie Chambers, was a barber here in the 1960s.

1958-1960 The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. speaks at a national Baptist conference in Omaha and preaches at Salem Baptist Church in North Omaha. Later, in October of 1960, Dr. King comes back to Omaha for the Western Baptist Bible College conference. At the Civic Auditorium, he gives a speech called "The Church in National Affairs," in which he predicts that "within five years we will see a breakdown of the massive resistance to integration."

1963 A group of Black ministers from North Omaha forms an organization called the Citizens Civic Committee for Civil Liberties, or 4CL. The group rallies throughout the city to demand civil rights for all African Americans through picketing, stand-ins during city council meetings, and other efforts.

1964 Malcolm X returns to his hometown of Omaha to speak to an invited audience at the Civic Auditorium. This same year, Congress passed the Civil Rights Act.

1965 Malcolm X is assassinated. Later that year, the Voting Rights Act is passed.

1966 In Omaha, the city's first intentionally mixed race neighborhood, New Horizons, is developed just southeast of 108th and Blondo by Dr. A.B. Pittman, architect Golden Zenon, and architect-civil engineer J.Z. Jizba. Black families who stepped out of redline boundaries experienced trauma ingraining with white neighborhoods, facing potential threats and hate crimes. New Horizons was developed as a safe sanctuary for families of different races to live together.

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1916 The start of the Great Migration marks what will be a half-century odyssey of Black people leaving the Deep South to escape Jim Crow Laws, and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan in pursuit of better economic opportunities offered by the industrial boom. While Black people did find employment as packing and manufacturing laborers, railroad porters, and domestic workers, they also encountered racism and bigotry every bit as oppressive and cruel as the South. Omaha's Black population grew significantly from World War I through the early post-World War II era.

1919 During the hysteria of the Red Summer Race Riots around the U.S., a mob laid siege to the Douglas County Courthouse, where Will Brown was held on false allegations of raping a white woman. Brown was hung, shot, dragged through the streets, then burned by the mob. A mass exodus of Black people followed his killing. That summer's violence was spurred in part by returning white World War I service veterans who found jobs scarce in their hometowns and scapegoated Black people for taking away their livelihoods.

1925 Malcolm Little, later known as Malcolm X, is born at 3448 Pinkney Street. Within a year of his birth, the local KKK terrorize Malcolm's family for his father's civil rights activism. Concerned for their safety, the Littles moved away from Omaha.

1933 The redlining map of Omaha is created by the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), a government-sponsored corporation formed as a part of the New Deal. The map was created by a group of Omaha real estate agencies, bank lending officials, insurance agents and property owners to ensure segregation in the growing city.

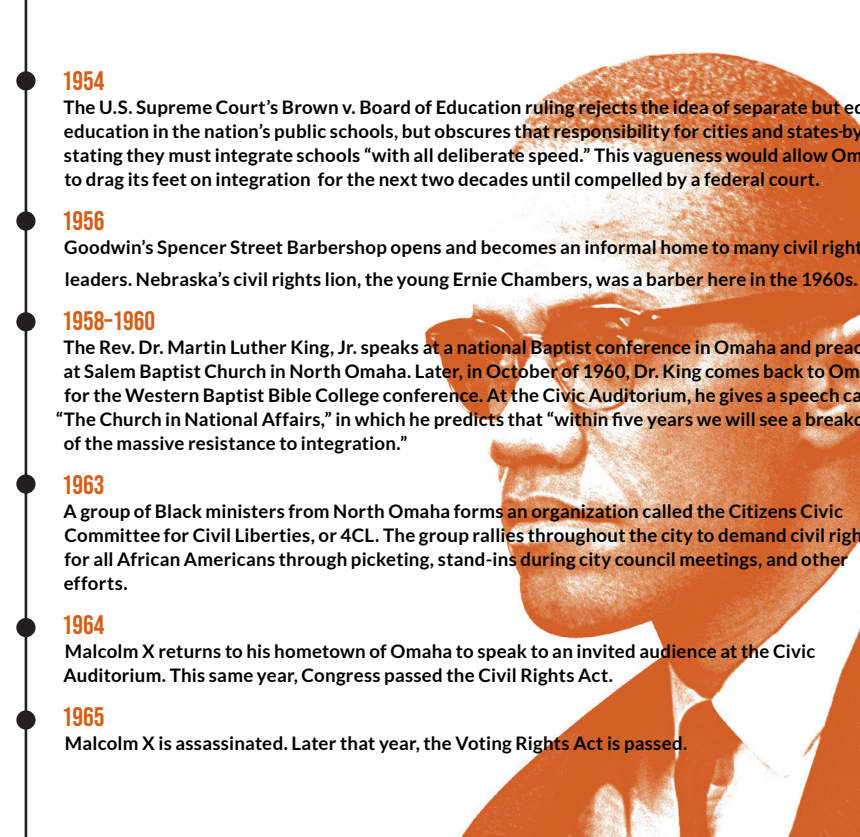
1938 The Omaha Star newspaper, founded by Mildred D. Brown, runs under the banner: "Dedicated to the service of the people that no good cause shall lack a champion and that evil shall not thrive unopposed." The paper takes an active role in advocating for equality. It continues today as the nation's longest-running Black woman-founded and led newspaper.

1940S Omaha's "Sweet Sixteen" refers to 16 Black Omaha residents, including Billy Melton, who served in the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps for nearly the entire duration of World War II. Upon their return, Melton and company are still treated as second-class citizens despite their service during wartime.

1947 The De Porres Club, one of the nation's first interracial civil rights social action groups, is started by Jesuit priest John Markoe of Creighton University. They organized protests, demonstrations, and boycotts of various Omaha businesses and institutions. The group is aided by Omaha Star publisher Mildred Brown, who ensures its activist agenda gets full voice in her paper.

1950 Whitney Young Jr. comes to Omaha to assume the presidency of the Urban League of Nebraska, whose membership he increases and whose work to redress housing and employment inequities grows more bold. He became national Urban League executive director in 1961 and a major architect of the civil rights movement.

1952 The DePorres Club launches a citywide boycott of streetcars and buses to protest the Omaha and Council Bluffs Street Railway and Bus Company's long standing refusal to hire Black drivers.



BLACK LIVES MATTER

