

High School Lesson Plan: United States History Studies Since Reconstruction

African American Women Trailblazers

Introduction: A number of African American women from Texas can be considered trailblazers in their fields, exerting national influence and paving the way for women who followed.

Objective: In this one-day lesson, students will become familiar with African American women who demonstrated leadership and courage long before the civil rights and women's rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s. They will gain an understanding of the social issues and changes brought on by new educational and economic opportunities for women in the early 20th century. They will gain an understanding of the early development of the women's rights and civil rights movements that built a foundation for women's and civil rights gains of the mid-20th century.

TEKS Requirements U.S. History Since Reconstruction

(5) History. The student understands significant individuals, events, and issues of the 1920s. The student is expected to:

- (A) analyze causes and effects of significant issues such as immigration, the Red Scare, Prohibition, and the changing role of women; and
- (B) analyze the impact of significant individuals

(7) History. The student understands the impact of the American civil rights movement. The student is expected to:

- (B) identify significant leaders of the civil rights movement.

(18) Citizenship. The student understands efforts to expand the democratic process. The student is expected to:

- (A) identify and analyze methods of expanding the right to participate in the democratic process, including lobbying, protesting, court decisions, and amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

(19) Citizenship. The student understands the importance of effective leadership in a democratic society. The student is expected to:

- (A) describe qualities of effective leadership.
- (B) evaluate the contributions of significant political and social leaders in the United States.

(20) Culture. The student understands how people from racial, ethnic, and religious groups adapt to life in the United States and contribute to our national identity. The student is expected to

- (A) explain actions taken by people from racial, ethnic, and religious groups to expand economic opportunities and political rights in American society.
- (D) Identify the political, social, and economic contributions of women to American society.

(25) Social studies skills. The student communicates in written, oral, and visual forms. The student is expected to:

- (D) create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

(26) Social studies skills. The student uses problem-solving and decision-making skills, working independently and with others, in a variety of settings. The student is expected to:

- (B) use a decision-making process to identify a situation that requires a decision, gather information, identify options, predict consequences, and take action to implement a decision.

Procedures

The teacher:

1. Shares information on four African American trailblazers of the early 20th Century (see brief biographies below).
2. Reviews the material on the four women, highlighting their major achievements in different fields and the ways these women exerted leadership in forging new paths for African Americans and women.
3. Distributes the “What Makes a Leader?” discussion sheet and asks students to break into small groups. The students are asked to come to a consensus on four qualities that characterize a leader, and then give examples of each quality from the lives of at least three of the women trailblazers. A representative from each group gives a presentation.
4. Distributes the “Leave or Stay: What Would You Do?” discussion sheet for students to complete individually. With show of hands, students “vote” if they would leave or stay. Students are asked to explain their decisions.
5. Distributes the “Yesterday and Today” essay assignment for each student to write a brief in-class essay.
6. Distributes the “Cause and Effect: Create a Timeline” for students to complete at home. Distributes one of the four brief biographical sheets on the trailblazers, depending on which woman the student chooses to write about.

Student Handouts:

- Discussion sheet “What Makes a Leader?”
- Discussion sheet “Leave or Stay: What Would You Do?”
- Essay assignment “Yesterday and Today”
- At-Home assignment “Cause and Effect: Create a Timeline”
- “Trailblazer” biographies (Students take home biography of selected trailblazer)

African American Trailblazers: Bessie Coleman

Bessie Coleman was the world's first licensed African American pilot. Her daredevil stunts and hair-raising maneuvers earned her the nickname "Brave Bessie." She was born in Atlanta, Texas, in 1892, the twelfth of thirteen children and grew up in Waxahachie. She helped earn money by picking cotton, and washing and ironing other people's laundry. Financial difficulties forced her to quit college after one semester. She moved to Chicago and worked as a manicurist and the owner of a small restaurant. Her lifelong dream was to learn to fly but no American flying school would accept African Americans, so she traveled to France to attend aviation school. She earned her license on June 15, 1921, the first black person in the world to become a licensed pilot. Her first American air show was in 1922 at a field near Manhattan, and she then flew exhibition flights all over the country. She moved to Houston in 1925. During her trips she often gave lectures encouraging young black men and women to enter aviation. On one occasion in Waxahachie she refused to give an exhibition unless blacks were permitted to use the same entrance as whites, and the request was granted. Coleman died in an air accident in 1926. At the time of her death she was one of America's most popular stunt fliers. Over the years recognition of her feats has grown. In 1977 a group of black female student pilots in Indiana organized the Bessie Coleman Aviators Club.

Source: *Handbook of Texas History Online*

Bessie Coleman <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/CC/fcobq.html>

African American Trailblazers: Gwendolyn Bennett

Gwendolyn Bennett, artist and writer, was one of the most versatile figures to participate actively both in the 1920s arts movement known as the Harlem Renaissance and in the 1930s arts alliance formed among African American graphic artists called the Harlem Artists Guild. Born in Giddings, Texas, in 1902, Bennett spent most of her childhood in Brooklyn, N.Y. At Girls' High School in Brooklyn, she was the first African American in the school's literary and drama societies. She attended Columbia University and then Pratt Institute, studying art education. In 1923, at age 21, she published her first poem, "Heritage," and the NAACP publication *The Crisis* published her cover illustration. From 1923 to 1931 her poetry appeared in several magazines and anthologies and she produced five journal cover illustrations. In 1924 she taught art at Howard University and the next year received a fellowship to study art in Paris. In 1926, she and other African American writers and artists of the Harlem Renaissance founded an arts magazine, which carried her first published story, "Wedding Day." From 1939 to 1944, she directed the Harlem Community Art Center and in the early 1940s served on the board of the Negro Playwright's Guild. She retired from public life in the 1940s and died in 1981.

Source: *Handbook of Texas History Online*

Gwendolyn Bennett <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/fbebz.html>

African American Trailblazers: Lulu White

Lulu Madison White, civil rights activist, was born in 1907 in Elmo, Texas. She later moved to Houston and, after her marriage, received a bachelor's degree in English from Prairie View College, then embarked on a teaching career. In 1937, she gave up teaching to devote all of her time to the NAACP and its struggle against the state's white primary law, which barred blacks from voting in Democratic Party primary elections. In 1939 White became president of the Houston chapter. In the 1940s, White served the NAACP as director of the Youth Council, fund-raiser, and organizer of new chapters throughout the state. In 1943, under her fund-raising leadership, the Houston chapter became the largest in the South, and White became the first paid NAACP executive secretary in the South. After the Supreme Court outlawed the white primary in 1944, White was at the forefront of educating blacks to vote. In 1945, White selected the plaintiff, Heman Marion Sweatt, to challenge The University of Texas's refusal to admit blacks into its law school. A 1950 Supreme Court case, *Sweatt v. Painter* led to the integration of the UT law school. White also worked to get equal salaries for black and white teachers. White's friendships with Walter White, Daisy Lampkin, Thurgood Marshall, and Roy Wilkins enabled her to exert influence on the NAACP nationally. In 1949 she became state director of the NAACP and remained in that post until her death on July 6, 1957. The week before her death the national NAACP established the Lulu White Freedom Fund in her honor.

Source: *Handbook of Texas Online*:

Lulu B. White <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/WW/fwh75.html>

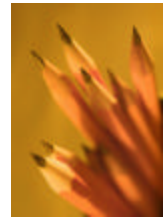
African American Trailblazers: Zelma George

Zelma Watson George, United Nations delegate, social worker, opera singer, and college administrator, was born in Hearne, Texas, in 1903 and as a child lived in Hearne, Palestine, and Dallas. Her father was a Baptist minister and a number of prominent black leaders spoke at her father's Dallas church, including W. E. B. DuBois, Booker T. Washington, Carter Woodson, Mary Branch Terrell, and Walter White. Her family left Dallas when her father incurred the wrath of some white Dallas citizens for his assistance to black prisoners. Threatened by vigilantes, the family moved to Topeka, Kansas, in 1917. After graduating from the Topeka public schools, George enrolled in the University of Chicago. Because the university would not permit her to reside in the dormitory with white women, her father accepted a pastorate in Chicago, and Zelma lived with her family while attending college. She received a bachelor's degree in sociology in 1924, and later studied the pipe organ and voice. She worked as a social worker, college administrator, and community center director. In 1949, she performed in several productions as an opera singer. In the 1950s, she became active in national and international affairs. She was on the executive council of the American Society for African Culture from 1959 to 1971, traveled to Europe and Asia through the Educational Exchange Program, and served as a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations in 1960. She won the Dag Hammarskjöld Award for contributions to international understanding in 1961 and the Dahlberg Peace Award in 1969. In 1982, at the age of 88, she participated in a march against nuclear arms, riding in a motorized wheelchair. She died in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1994.

Source: *Handbook of Texas History Online*

Zelma George <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/fge25.html>

What Makes a Leader?

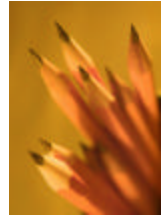


In a small group, come to a consensus on four qualities a leader should have and give examples of how these women exhibited those qualities. Use examples from the lives of at least three of the four women discussed. Give an oral presentation of your group's consensus.

Leadership quality	Woman	Actions that demonstrated the quality

Leave or Stay? What Would You Do?

Bessie Coleman left the U.S. to earn a pilot's license and the family of Zelma George left Texas because of discrimination. Lulu White chose to stay and fight discrimination in voting and education.



If you were not allowed to vote or go to school or pursue your profession or personal life goals because of your race, gender, economic status, or ethnic background, would you move to a friendlier part of the country? Or would you stay and try to change attitudes or laws through your own or organized efforts?

List some of the risks and benefits of both choices.

Decision	Benefit: What would you gain?	Risk: What might you lose?
Leave your home and community		
Stay and work for change		

What would be your decision? Why?

Compare & Contrast: Yesterday and Today

Select an African American woman in today's time that you consider a leader or trailblazer. You may choose from the list below or use another famous person or someone you know personally. Write an essay comparing and contrasting that person's achievements and the obstacles she has overcome with the achievements of one of the women you have studied.

Michelle Obama, First Lady, attorney

Condoleeza Rice, secretary of state

Oprah Winfrey, TV star

Toni Morrison, writer

Halle Berry, actress

Maya Angelou, poet

Sheryl Swoopes, basketball star

Cause and Effect: Create a Timeline

Select one of the women you have studied. Using the information below, create a timeline of your own design, using events below that are related to that woman's field. Using information from your teacher, add to your timeline key dates and achievements from the life of the person you selected.

1892 First African American to sing at Carnegie Hall: Matilda Jones

1903 First successful manned flight

1909 NAACP is formed

1931 First all-black air show in America

1932 Amelia Earhart is first woman to solo across Atlantic

1937 Marian Anderson, African-American singer, performs in front of the Lincoln Monument after being barred from singing at a convention of Daughters of the American Revolution.

1944 Supreme Court strikes down Texas's white primary law.

1945 African American Mary Bethune appointed consultant on interracial affairs and understanding at the charter conference of the United Nations

1950 Gwendolyn Brooks is first African American to win Pulitzer Prize for poetry.

1954 Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court ruling orders public schools to be integrated

1955 Rosa Parks refuses to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus

1992 Mae Jamison becomes first black woman astronaut

2005 Condoleeza Rice is first African American woman Secretary of State

Name an event(s) that enabled or influenced woman you selected:

Name an event(s) she might have influenced:
