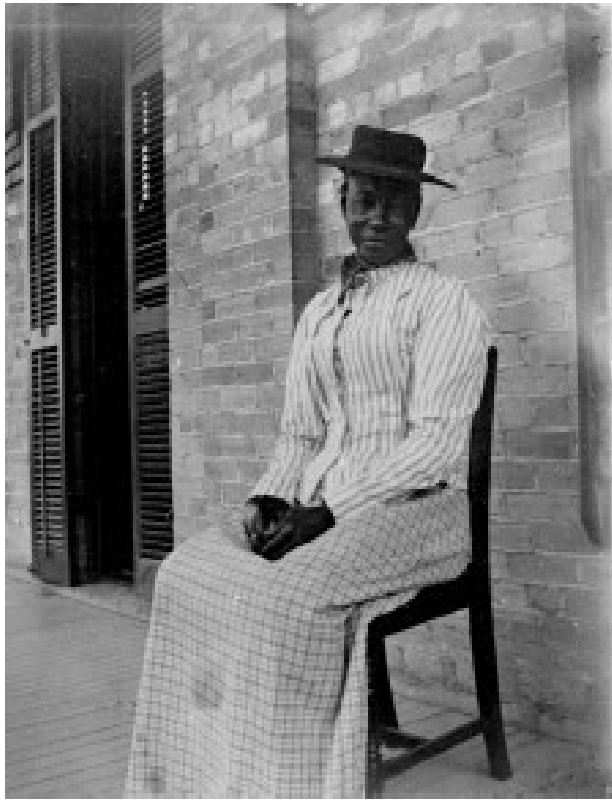




### The African-American Texans



*Tillie Brackenridge on the porch of Mrs. William Vance's residence at Navarro and Travis Streets in San Antonio, where she was employed, c. 1900— Tillie formerly was a slave in James Vance's elegant home on East Nueva Street and told of seeing Robert E. Lee, a frequent visitor of the house.*

By all counts, most Africans who arrived in Texas before 1860 were brought in as slaves. A few came as free people, indentured servants, or escaped slaves—all categories established by other people. Whatever the case, their story is linked directly to Spanish and Anglo-American settlement which largely defined Texas.

Slavery—the ownership of human beings by others to perform labor—is as old as civilized humanity and has been carried on as a systematic process by all earlier major cultures for economic, though brutal, reasons. Until the modern era, humans were the most efficient source of intelligent power. Except for the brute force of oxen and elephants, camels and horses, llamas and dogs, humans provided the energy to plant and build for masters who could force the labor.

Most of the first Africans in the New World were brought by European entrepreneurs. The Spanish did enslave Indians in the service of agriculture, mining, and personal needs. But as the natives died of overwork or disease or managed to move on, Europeans began kidnapping Africans to fill their places. Significant numbers of Africans were soon to be found in the New World reaches of the Spanish empire, including the frontier province of Texas. Many of these were of mixed heritage, and some individuals bought or were granted freedom. Spanish law, unlike later United States law, allowed freed people legal rights except government office employment.

At the time of the Mexican Revolution of 1821, the new government made slavery illegal. Anglo-Americans who chose this decade to enter Texas from the east brought in “indentured servants” around the edges of Mexican law. After the Anglo-American revolution of 1836, Texas became slave-holding territory for the next quarter century.

And in all these years, whether legally possible or not, some blacks became free, and a few came as freedmen...a very few.

Also, in all of these years, individuals of African heritage distinguished themselves as soldiers, explorers, educators, builders, and settlers.

Many African-American residents of Texas today descended from Blacks brought by Anglos before 1860 largely to East Texas, then an agricultural extension of the United States' South. In the later 19th and 20th centuries, Blacks came to urban areas in all parts of Texas. The distribution of Blacks in Texas reflects this story: most live in the north-east and southeast quadrants of the state, many still rural, the larger number in metropolitan areas.

The early story of African-American settlement is also reflected in the names given to, or taken by, the people. Earlier Africans, as slaves from dark-skinned cultures, were called blacks—Negroes. By no means “uncultured,” these became the stereotypical blacks to Europeans: los negros esclavos. Europeans used the Spanish word, or “Moor,” or the names of areas of Africa from which slaves were taken. Thus, “Negro” became a hated word for later generations. “Afro-American” and “African American” are modern terms, indicating a great truth: many African traditions were stripped from the people in a deliberate way. A forcible relocation into another culture, a large and more powerful culture, results in much loss. This, of course, is true for all groups entering Texas in relatively small numbers, into any “host” culture anywhere, whether by force or not.

Yet all groups retain something of their heritage, and so did Africans. But succeeding generations were, for better or worse, greatly changed...into Americans.

The term “Black,” a simple translation, is now widely accepted, particularly by younger generations, as a proper political and cultural term.

Thus, Blacks in Texas, neither a single people nor a group with definite borders, have an immensely interesting history and possess a story that is a large part of Texas.

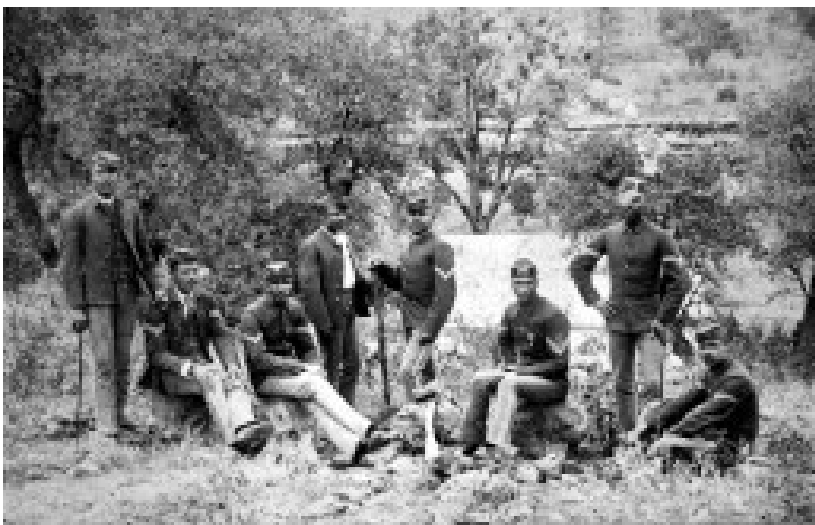
Even considering the overwhelming fact of slavery and its resulting anonymity, many African-American Texans are known for individual contributions.

The first known by name was a personal slave of Andrés Dorantes, a Moor called Estevan, who was one of four to survive the Narváez expedition's disaster in 1528. Estevan, Dorantes, Alonso del Castillo, and Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca survived years in what is today Texas and finally found their way to Mexico to tell their stories. One of these stories—that north of Mexico were cities of gold—fired further Spanish exploration. And one of the later efforts was led by the durable Estevan.

The villa of San Antonio de Béxar—under several names and later with the rank of provincial capital—was always home to blacks who engaged in jobs from agriculture to blacksmithing, teaching to selling merchandise. The Spanish, unlike later Anglos, accepted the facts of intermarriage and individual accomplishment without denying the necessity of slavery.



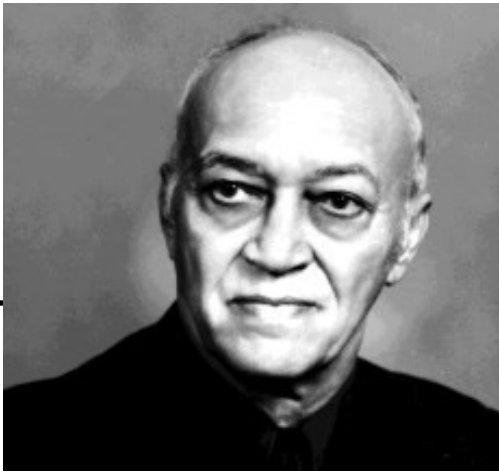
*Samuel McCullough Jr. charging the fort at Goliad, October 1835, from “The Battle of Goliad” by Kermit Oliver*



*“A” Troop, 10th Cavalry, U.S. Army, c.1890— “Buffalo Soldiers”*

After 1836 freedom in Texas was officially denied to blacks in the republic and later the state, but a few free individuals nevertheless called Texas home.

Samuel McCulloch Jr. was one of the first men to be wounded in the Texas Revolution, at Goliad in 1835. Scout Hendrick Arnold led a column of Texan volunteers in the later, successful attack on San Antonio. Samuel G. Hardin fought at San Jacinto. Such individuals, few in number, were either given special legislative permission to remain in Texas or benefited from local law looking the other way.



Dr. J. Mason Brewer

John Mason Brewer is known as a scholar, teacher, historian, folklorist, and storyteller who was perhaps the first Texan to tell the full range of African-American experience from formal historical accounts to the excitement and accuracy of folktales. He spoke of the entire range of Black experience in Texas.

Brewer was born in Goliad in 1896, the son of a cowboy. Schooled in Austin, he advanced through Wiley College to a master's degree from Indiana and a Ph.D. from Paul Quinn College. Combining academic credentials and a very active personal life, Brewer was qualified to observe and speak—as few before—on a broad range of experience.

For more than a quarter century, he worked and taught at East Texas State University. He was a long-time member of the Texas Folklore Society and served as council member and vice president for the American Folklore Society.

His accomplishments range from an academic study of Reconstruction times in Texas—The Negro Legislators of Texas—to collections of African-American folktales and life such as *Dog Ghosts* and *The Word on the Brazos*.

Brewer was also the first author and speaker to use Black American dialect extensively in front of and to all audiences, particularly when dealing with folklore. Occasionally, he drew mixed reactions, from blacks and whites alike, because of the prejudicial feeling against the English dialects commonly spoken by Texas Blacks.

Brewer succeeded in defending Black American vernacular as a literary dialect, but, above all, he presented the lives of African-American Texans truthfully with neither heroic overstatement nor apology. And he did this with much beauty.

Others were never freed in any real sense. Chloe Stevens, born in 1794 and brought to Liberty County in the 1820s, was near the battle of San Jacinto and helped care for the wounded of both sides. She died in San Antonio in 1901 at the age of 107,

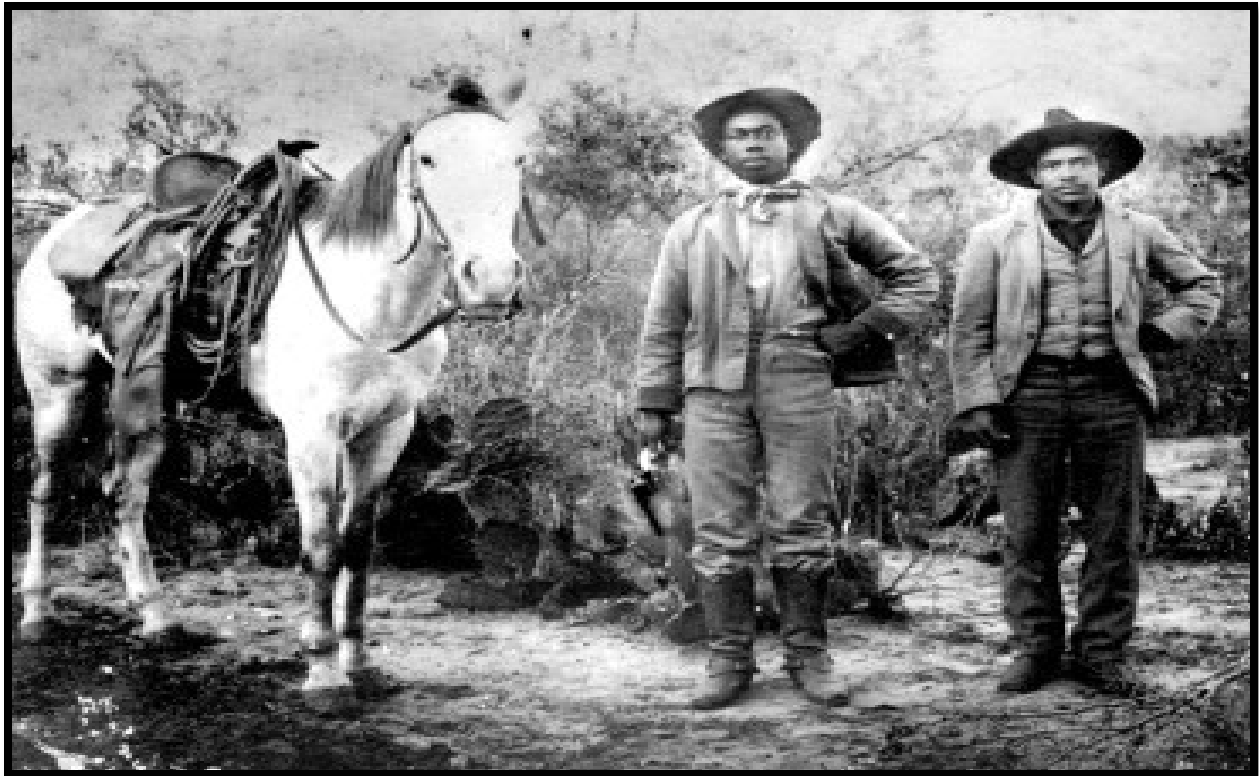
Most individuals were given the hard task of crossing from slavery before the Civil War to technical freedom thereafter.

Many blacks found military service a logical career. In Texas, and in much of the post-Civil War West, the Buffalo Soldiers became a frontier tradition. Black soldiers of the 9th and 10th Cavalries and the 24th and 25th Infantries protected settlement areas against Indian and renegade attack until near the turn of the century. The origin of the name “Buffalo Soldiers” is not known for certain. Some soldiers, in the cold of high plains winters, wore buffalo-hide robes and ponchos; some blacks had curly hair; and the soldiers had the determination and speed of the native animal. Certainly the name was given by the Plains Indians, perhaps for all these reasons.

And some men could become cowboys. A few, such as Daniel Webster “80 John” Wallace, eventually owned their own ranches and herds. Wallace died a millionaire in 1939.

Also, after the Civil War, black families proved durable enough to weather the restrictive civil laws that replaced literal slavery for the next three generations. The tradition of sharecropping—although economic slavery in most cases—still provided a bridge for some African Americans to a future not imagined by earlier generations. Others knew skills such as metalworking and pottery making or had learned a similar trade under slavery and could practice it with profit. After June 19, 1865, Emancipation Day in Texas and a day still celebrated, men could set themselves up as weavers, potters, blacksmiths, masons, and carpenters.

Today, no field of modern human endeavor lacks the names of African Americans.



*Black cowboys on the Rio Grande Plain, c. 1900.*



*Opera singer and actor Jules Bledsoe, when he was appearing in Showboat at the National Theater in Washington, D.C. February 1930— Born in Waco, Bledsoe studies music in Chicago, Paris, and Rome. After his first Broadway hit, Showboat, he sang in Europe and became well known. In his career he performed in operas, musicals, and motion pictures; he was also a pianist and composer. Bledsoe was just 45 years old and at the peak of his career when he died unexpectedly in Hollywood in 1943.*

# African American Texans & Forced Migration

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_

## What is Forced Migration?

The “push-pull” theory says that people migrate because things in their lives *push* them to leave, and things in a new place *pull* them. Although many people choose to move to find better jobs, to be nearer to family or to live under a preferred political system, others are forced to move. *Forced migration* occurs when a person is made to leave their home involuntarily. Examples of forced migration include people that are moved through slave trade, people that move under threat of violence or persecution, and people that are displaced as a result of natural disasters. Many people move because of political, social, environmental and economic reasons, but those that move as a result of *forced migration* believe they have no other option but to move.

Other than the reasons provided, list three reasons why you think people migrate?

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Define *forced migration* in your own words.

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## African American Texans

Using **Texans One and All: The African-American Texans**, answer the following questions about why Africans moved to Texas and what their life was like in the state.

Define *slavery* and explain why some people used slave labor.

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When did slavery first become illegal in Texas? Why was this overturned 15 years later?

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During the time when slavery was illegal in Texas, did slavery cease to exist in the state? Explain your answer.

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What kind of work were African Americans able to do after slavery ended in 1865?

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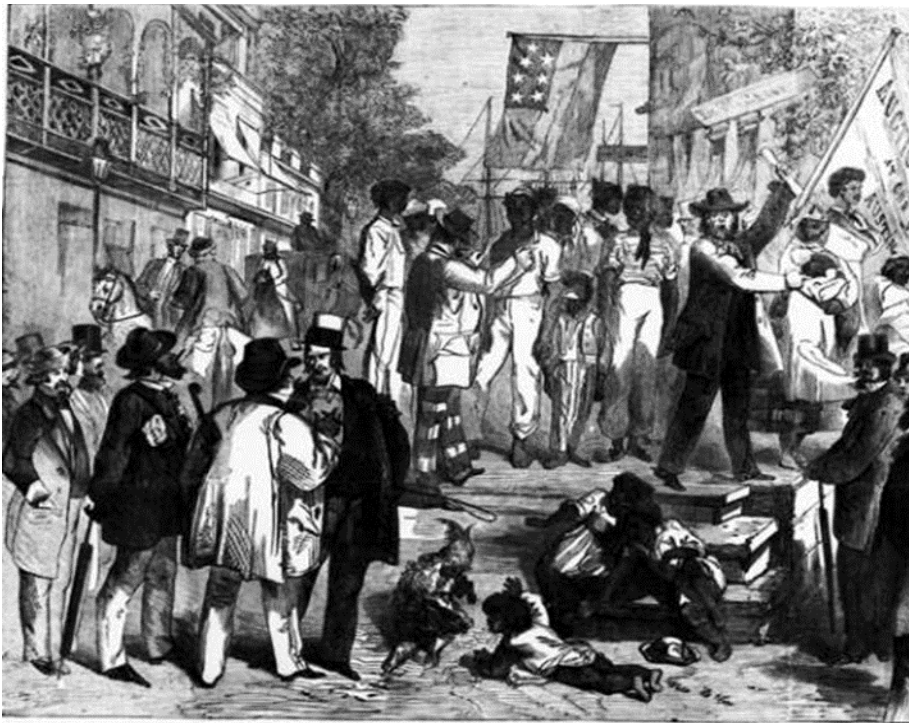
The reading says, “The tradition of sharecropping – although economic slavery in most cases – still provided a bridge for African Americans to a future not imagined by earlier generations.” What do you think the author means by this statement?

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### Historical Image Analysis

Look at the historical image below and answer the questions that follow.



How does this image relate to the concept of *forced migration*? Explain what evidence you have to support your statement.

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There are two distinct groups of people in this image. In the space below, identify each group and describe the role of each and how you think they might be feeling.

How does this image make you feel?

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UTSA Special Collections Library General Photograph Collection, Image 073-1319

### Summarize What You Learned

Write 3 sentences to summarize what you learned about *forced migration* and African-American Texans.

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