

Exodusters: Hope for The West

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GUIDING QUESTION: How did the settlement of all-Black towns empower African Americans to shape their own independence and success despite the realities of hardship and racialized oppression?

➤ OVERVIEW

After analyzing secondary and primary sources, students will determine how the Homestead Act (1862), in conjunction with the 1866 Civil Rights Act and Fourteenth Amendment (1868), contributed to the development of all-Black towns in the West. By researching one town, students will examine the western expansion and homesteading in the West from the perspective of individuals, often referred to as Exodusters, who fled oppression in the South for the promise of new freedom they hoped to find in all-Black towns in the West.

➤ OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this activity, students will be able to

- Describe how political, social, and economic factors related to racial oppression in the post-Civil War South gave rise to the Exoduster migration;
- Evaluate how the promise of prosperity and opportunities created by the Homestead Act, the 1866 Civil Rights Act, and the Fourteenth Amendment impacted the development of all-Black towns in the West; and
- Connect major events and people within the Exoduster migration, explore the communities they settled in, and explain their legacies.

➤ STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS TO COMMON CORE

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CONNECTIONS TO C3 FRAMEWORK

- › D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts.
- › D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context.

➤ DOCUMENTS USED

PRIMARY SOURCE COLLECTIONS

“Black Homesteaders Project” Primary Source Collection

National Park Service

<https://npgallery.nps.gov/SearchResults/812830b1e0d1411cb6a6437035932991?view=grid>

Chronicling America

Library of Congress

<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>

SECONDARY SOURCES

Article, “African American Homesteaders in the Great Plains”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/african-american-homesteaders-in-the-great-plains.htm>

Article, “Blackdom New Mexico”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/blackdom-new-mexico.htm>

Article, “Dearfield Colorado”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/dearfield-colorado.htm>

Article, “DeWitt Nebraska”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/dewitt-nebraska.htm>

Article, “Empire Wyoming”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/empire-wyoming.htm>

Article, “Nicodemus Kansas”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/nicodemus-kansas.htm>

Article, “Sulley County Black Homesteader Community”

National Park Service

<https://www.nps.gov/places/sully-county.htm>

Video, “Historical Context: Exodusters,” 2024 [4:34]

National History Day

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9u2ssAMb7uE>

› TEACHER-CREATED MATERIALS

- › Exoduster: Hope for the West Mini Exhibit Student Research Packet
- › Project Assessment Rubric

› ACTIVITY PREPARATION

- › Make one copy of the Exoduster: Hope for the West Mini Exhibit Student Research Packet for each student.
- › Organize students into groups of three to six students each. The assignment has three components, so in larger groups, students will work in pairs to complete some or all of the tasks.
- › Arrange the classroom for group work.
- › Organize materials (paper, pens, scissors, tape, glue) students can use for creating resources.
- › Allocate space for exhibits (maximum size 40" wide x 30" inches deep). These can be table-top surfaces or wall space.
- › Gather 3x5" index cards (one for each student).

› PROCEDURE

ACTIVITY ONE: INTRODUCTION (15 MINUTES)

- › Show the introductory video “Historical Context: Exodusters” [4:34] to the students.
- › Lead a brief discussion to solidify student understanding of how the Homestead Act opened up new opportunities for immigrants, women, and members of minoritized populations to own land and encouraged the promise and development of all-Black communities.
- › Specify that all-Black communities and the contributions of Black Americans are integral to the history of the development of the American communities, education, and businesses, and the reshaping of the West.

ACTIVITY TWO: RESEARCH (45 MINUTES)

- › Divide students into groups of three to six students each and assign them one of the following communities:
 - » Blackdom, New Mexico
 - » Dearfield, Colorado
 - » DeWitt, Nebraska
 - » Empire, Wyoming
 - » Nicodemus, Kansas

Teacher Notes:

- ▶ Read the article “Migration and Movement History” in this resource to help set the lesson in the context of modern scholarship.
- ▶ Remind students that whenever possible, we want to listen to people in history and use primary sources to learn about the experiences of those who lived during that time.
- ▶ When conducting this lesson, take time to teach your students how to use proper terminology (Black migrants, African American laborers) and not to use collective terms (like “Blacks”) to describe a group of people based solely on their race. Read the article “What’s in a Word? Being Thoughtful about Terminology in Historical Writing” in this resource for additional support.

- » Sulley County Black Homesteader Community, South Dakota
- > Distribute one Exoduster: Hope for the West Mini Exhibit Student Research Packet to each student. Explain to the students that they will be learning about the people and development of their assigned community.
- > Explain that students will use resources from the National Park Service and the Library of Congress to research and create a mini-exhibit telling the history of the community they are researching.
- > Begin by asking students to read the article “African American Homesteaders in the Great Plains” and respond to the guided reading question.
- > Direct students to use the graphic organizer in the research packet to organize their research. They can compile research using:
 - » the links to their assigned community at the end of the “African American Homesteaders in the Great Plains” article;
 - » the Black Homesteaders Project Primary Source Collection; and
 - » Chronicling America (chroniclingamerica.loc.gov).
- > Circulate and assist as needed.

ACTIVITY THREE: CREATING A MINI EXHIBIT (45 MINUTES)

- > Museum exhibits tell stories through a collection of documents and artifacts. To tell the history of each community, groups will need to consider and include elements of each of the following aspects of the history of each community, including the:
 - » racialized oppression in the post-Civil War South leading to the Exoduster Migration;
 - » promise of new lands, greater freedom, and prosperity in the West;
 - » physical, economic, and societal hardships of building and sustaining the community;
 - » community’s prosperity and success; and
 - » community’s legacy.
- > Direct each student group to create three different types of sources from the list below that collectively tell the story of the community they researched. Students may select from the following options:
 - » Diary or journal
 - » Newspaper article
 - » Photo album
 - » Diorama or model
 - » Advertisement or broadside
 - » Political cartoon
 - » Portrait or sketch that depicts the community and/or community members
- > Each source must contain at least three historical facts about the community they are researching. Students may integrate primary sources into creating elements (such as a photo album). However, there must be student-generated words and explanations to accompany the primary sources.
- > Final exhibits should include:
 - » A one paragraph summary of 60–90 words introducing and providing a **brief** overview of the community.
 - » One paragraph summary of 40–70 words explaining why the Exodusters left the South.

- » Three student-created artifacts based on historical research that integrate at least three facts to tell the story of the community.
- » One 3x5" index card exit slip from each student addressing the following:
 - › In what ways were the dreams and promises of a new life and freedom for the Exodusters fulfilled in the community you researched?
 - › What dreams and promises were not fulfilled and why?

ASSESSMENT OPTIONS

- › Teachers can assess the exit slips attached to the exhibit.
- › Students can create maps to tie the exhibits together and compare and contrast the experiences of the Exodusters who settled in different places.
- › Students can expand these exhibits later in the school year to other surrounding communities to look at the impact of the Great Migration or other historical events or trends.
- › Students can do a gallery walk and leave "comment cards" (sticky notes) to provide positive and constructive feedback on exhibits.



Students interested in this topic might be interested in researching the following for an NHD project:

- ▶ **Reconstruction (1865–1877) and the rise of Jim Crow laws**
- ▶ **The Exodusters**
- ▶ **The Homestead Act (1862), the Civil Rights Act (1866), and Fourteenth Amendment (1868)**
- ▶ **The Tulsa Race Massacre (1921)**
- ▶ ***The Green Book (published 1936–1967)***

To access a PDF containing all of the sources and materials to complete this lesson plan, go to nhd.org/inclusivehistory.

MINI EXHIBIT STUDENT RESEARCH PACKET

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DAY ONE:

After watching the introduction video, explain how social, political, and economic post-Civil War racial oppression impacted the lives of African Americans living in the South and gave rise to the Exoduster migration.

2. Circle the Exoduster community your group has been assigned to research:

- ▶ Blackdom, New Mexico
- ▶ Dearfield, Colorado
- ▶ DeWitty, Nebraska
- ▶ Empire, Wyoming
- ▶ Nicodemus, Kansas
- ▶ Sulley County Black Homesteader Community, South Dakota

3. Read the article, “African American Homesteaders in the Great Plains” ([nps.gov/articles/african-american-homesteaders-in-the-great-plains.htm](https://www.nps.gov/articles/african-american-homesteaders-in-the-great-plains.htm)), and answer the question: *Explain how the passage of Homesteading Act, 1866 Civil Rights Act, and the Fourteenth Amendment affected the lives of homesteaders bound for all-Black communities in the West.*

MINI EXHIBIT STUDENT RESEARCH PACKET (CONT.)

4. As a group you are going to explore the following aspects of the history of the assigned community, including the:

- ▶ racialized oppression in the post-Civil War South leading to the Exoduster Migration;
- ▶ promise of new lands, greater freedom, and prosperity in the West;
- ▶ physical, economic, and societal hardships of building and sustaining the community;
- ▶ community's prosperity and success; and
- ▶ community's legacy.

Using the following resources, begin your research:

- ▶ Articles from the National Park Service:
 - ▶ Blackdom, New Mexico: nps.gov/places/blackdom-new-mexico.htm
 - ▶ Dearfield, Colorado: nps.gov/places/dearfield-colorado.htm
 - ▶ DeWitty, Nebraska: nps.gov/places/dewitty-nebraska.htm
 - ▶ Empire, Wyoming: nps.gov/places/empire-wyoming.htm
 - ▶ Nicodemus, Kansas: nps.gov/places/nicodemus-kansas.htm
 - ▶ Sulley County Black Homesteader Community, South Dakota: nps.gov/places/sully-county.htm
- ▶ The Black Homesteaders Project primary source collection from the National Park Service: npgallery.nps.gov/SearchResults/812830b1e0d1411cb6a6437035932991?view=grid
- ▶ The *Chronicling America* newspaper database from the Library of Congress: chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/

Use the graphic organizer on the next page to take notes as you gather information.

MINI EXHIBIT STUDENT RESEARCH PACKET (CONT.)

What factors of racialized oppression in the post–Civil War South drove settlers to this community?

Date of founding and the names of founders:

How was the community established?

What did the community promise settlers?

What were the hardships and challenges in the early years?

What did the people do to survive?
How did they make a living?

MINI EXHIBIT STUDENT RESEARCH PACKET (CONT.)

What were the community's successes?

What hardships or challenges did the community face?

What businesses developed in the community? How did these businesses support each other?

What was the legacy of settlers and the impact of this community?

MINI EXHIBIT STUDENT RESEARCH PACKET (CONT.)

5. From the list below, determine what three artifacts to create for your mini-exhibit. Decide which group members will create which item(s):

- ▶ Diary or journal
- ▶ Newspaper article
- ▶ Photo album
- ▶ Model
- ▶ Advertisement
- ▶ Political cartoon
- ▶ Portrait or sketch

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DAY TWO:

1. Briefly review the information you gathered in your research organizer yesterday. Decide which three historical facts need to be included in each artifact to tell the history of the community.
2. Create your artifacts. Refer to the grading rubric to ensure you are meeting project expectations.
3. Lay out the artifacts in the space designated for your group.
4. Respond to the Exit Slip questions on your individual 3x5" cards and attach them to your exhibit. Prompts:
 - ▶ Why did the Exodusters have dreams of “a new life and freedom” and to what extent were they fulfilled in the community you researched?
 - ▶ What dreams and promises were not fulfilled in the community you researched and why?

PROJECT ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

Individual Project Element					
	Excellent	Good	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	Not Present
Historical/Informational Accuracy	Content is historically accurate and strong and includes well-selected factual information to support the topic.	Content is historically accurate and includes factual information to support the topic.	Content includes some historically accurate information, but it may not support the topic and/or may include some inaccuracies.	Historical information is inaccurate or does not support the topic.	No historically accurate information is present.
Required Elements	Project includes all of the required elements, and each element is well-executed and organized.	Project includes most of the required elements, and each element is well-executed and organized.	Project includes some of the required elements, but the elements lack organization.	The project includes few of the required elements and is not organized.	Required elements are not present.
Written Material and Visuals	<p>Text is consistently clear, concise, free of grammatical or mechanical errors, and appropriate to the topic.</p> <p>Visuals and media are consistently connected to the argument and enhance the topic.</p>	<p>Text is mostly clear, concise, free of grammatical or mechanical errors, and appropriate to the topic.</p> <p>Visuals and media are mostly connected to the argument and enhance the topic.</p>	<p>Text is somewhat clear, concise, free of grammatical or mechanical errors, and appropriate to the topic.</p> <p>Visuals and media are somewhat connected to the argument and enhance the topic.</p>	<p>Text contains major grammatical and/or mechanical errors that impede understanding.</p> <p>Text has limited appropriateness to the topic.</p> <p>Visuals and media have limited connections to the argument and may not enhance the topic.</p>	<p>Written and visual materials are not present.</p>
Exit Slip					
Analysis	Student addresses all aspects of the prompt, demonstrates an understanding of the topic, and integrates strong factual evidence to support their analysis.	Student mostly addresses the prompt, demonstrates an understanding of the topic, and integrates factual evidence to support their analysis.	Student addresses some aspects of the prompt, demonstrates an understanding of the topic, and integrates some factual evidence to support their analysis.	Student addresses some aspects of the prompt but lacks understanding of the topic and evidence to support their analysis.	Student did not attempt or did not demonstrate enough analysis to evaluate.

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