



K A N S A S

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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Celebrating the Achievements of Black Kansans

The following column is by Governor Kathleen Sebelius:

Every February, we celebrate Black History Month. It's an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of African Americans in science, art, literature, politics and all occupations and professions.

As we honor their successes, it's also important to point out that many of these individuals called Kansas home.

The great poet Langston Hughes, for example, spent his childhood in Lawrence, before going on to be part of the Harlem Renaissance.

The artist Aaron Douglas was born in Topeka. He went on to celebrate African American life and culture in his murals, leading one historian to call him the "father of Black American art."

Gordon Parks has photographed the most beautiful women in the world, covered war zones and slums, and been celebrated as an author, poet and screen writer. He just announced that he wanted his final resting place to be his hometown of Fort Scott, Kansas.

In 1950, Topekan Gwendolyn Brooks became the first African American to win a Pulitzer Prize, while Edward McCabe of Nicodemus became the first African American to hold statewide office in a northern state when he was elected Kansas state auditor in 1882.

The stories of these and other famous black Kansans can be found at the Kansas State Historical Society's website, at http://www.kshs.org/people/african_american.htm.

Our state is also home to many historic sites that played an important role in black history, including two National Historic Sites.

Monroe School in Topeka is now the Brown vs. Board of Education National Historic Site. It tells the story of the Topeka parents who brought a case on behalf of their children to integrate Topeka schools, and changed the future of education in America.

And in Nicodemus you can learn about the struggles and successes of the former slaves who came to the prairie seeking a new life after the end of the Civil War.

Our state was founded by abolitionists who fought slavery in America, and then settled and populated by individuals who sought to enlighten the lives of those around them through art or science, or by continuing to lift the shackles of segregation and prejudice.

Their contributions have added richness to our history, and to American history. While their numbers are not as large as in many eastern states, they have left an indelible mark on the past and helped to shape the future. We are proud to recognize these fellow Kansans.

Note: African American Community Day at the Capitol is February 23rd, call 785.296.4874 for details.

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