



Terry Lee Williams

Utah's First African American
State Senator

African American Community
Lesson Plan
4th grade

Rebecca Kirkman | Utah Historical Society | March 2024

Terry Lee Williams

1st African American Senator in Utah

Primary Source Activity

Utah Core Standards:

Standard 4.5.5: After studying examples of individuals or groups making positive changes in Utah, propose positive steps individual students or groups of students can implement (for example, raising awareness through digital media, energy and resource conservation, letter writing, fundraising).

Standard 4.SL.2: Clearly summarize information presented in various formats and media and explain how the information pertains to the topic.

Standard 4.R.11: Compare a primary and secondary source on the same event or topic.

Essential Question:

What was the experience of Terry Lee Williams as the first African American Senator in Utah?

I Can Statement:

I Can: write a summary of the experiences of Terry Lee Williams as the first African American Senator in Utah.

Materials Needed:

[Primary Sources Slides](#)

- BYU Daily Universe Newspaper - Copied or Projected
- S.B. 0121 Law

Student copies of 1st African American Senator graphic organizer

Teacher Background:

See [Introduction to African American Community](#)

[Terry Lee Williams Oral History](#) (optional use)

Opening

Project or provide copies of the Martin Luther King Jr. Day Law S.B. 2021. Have the students do See, Think, and Wonder. First, have the students look at the law, and tell what they see. Then read the lines 18 and 19 of the law, and have the students tell what they think about it. Then have the students come up with questions they have about the source. Why was it important for Utah to change the name of the holiday to recognize this civil rights leader?

Procedure

1. Why did Frank Montoya, Jr., think that it was important to recognize Martin Luther King Jr. Day as a state holiday?
2. Read at least the first paragraph of the BYU newspaper article. If time permits,

- select one or more paragraphs to read as a class.
3. Have the students list the reasons why this author thought it was important for Martin Luther King Jr. Day to be a state holiday.
 4. Transition into the lesson by passing out the 1st African American Senator graphic organizer. The teacher can explain that they are going to be learning more about the Martin Luther King Jr Holiday in Utah and a person who helped pass the bill for it to be a holiday.
 5. As a class, read the paragraph at the top of the page. Then explain to the students they will watch an interview with Terry Lee Williams. As they watch, they need to fill in three things that they have learned, two things they found interesting, and one question they still have.
 6. Watch the video clip and have the students fill out their papers.
 7. After the video clip, do a Think-Pair-Share. Have the students turn to their neighbors and share the three things they learned. Then call on a couple of students to share with the class. Repeat the process for the other sections as well.
 8. Determine if it would be better to read the oral history selection together as a class or if students could do it in pairs.
 9. After reading the oral history selection, have the students answer the questions. The final question will have them write a summary of the experiences of Terry Lee Williams.

Assessment

The student summary could be a formative assessment. See the rubric below.

Closing

The educator can have the students share the summary they wrote about Terry Lee Williams.

References

- “Conversation With Utah's First Black State Senator.” 2022. ABC4 Utah.
<https://www.abc4.com/news/conversation-with-utahs-first-black-state-senator/>.
- Harris, Matthew L., and Madison S. Harris. 2020. “The Last State to Honor MLK: Utah and the Quest for Racial Justice.” Issuu.
https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/utah_historical_quarterly_volume88_2020_number1/s/11140096.
- Kelen, L.G, & Stone, E.H. (2000). Missing Stories: An Oral History of Ethnic Minority Groups in Utah. Utah State University Press. Logan, UT.

Rubric

4 Above Proficiency	3 Proficient	2 Approaching Proficiency	1 Emerging Proficiency	0 Incomplete/No Evidence
Clearly summarizes the experiences of Terry Lee Williams	Clearly state the experiences of Terry Lee Williams	Attempts to state the experiences of Terry Lee Williams	Unclear attempt to state the experiences of Terry Lee Williams	No response is given or the response is incomplete or not relevant to the topic
Includes only essential, relevant details	Include important details but some might be missing	Includes some relevant details but critical information is missing	Contains irrelevant details	
Demonstrates a clear understanding of the information	Demonstrates adequate understanding of information in the text	Demonstrates a basic understanding of the information	Demonstrates little to no understanding of the information	

Lesson Resources

Primary Sources: Making Martin Luther King, Jr. Day a State Holiday in Utah

Source 1: Newspaper article in support of the holiday, 1986. This was published on the Opinion page in the BYU student newspaper. It is a letter to the editor.

Source 2: Utah Senate Bill 0121. This shows how Utah lawmakers changed the name of the holiday in the year 2000.

The Rev. King deserves to be recognized by Utah

To many Americans, the late Rev. Martin Luther King was a hero of historic proportions. He led an oppressed people to a better way of life. He raised Americans' consciousness. He was a man deserving of special recognition.

As a tribute to his selfless ways and remarkable leadership, the United States has set aside a day, Jan. 20, to honor him. To date, 45 of the Union's 50 states have followed suit.

The five uncommitted states — Nevada, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Utah — cite various reasons for not recognizing the holiday.

In Utah, opponents of a "Martin Luther King Day" claim that the addition of one more holiday to the 12 Utahns already celebrate would cost upward of \$2 million dollars in revenue.

"Besides, I don't think Dr. King has been proven by history yet to be a

historically great man," said State Representative John Sykes (R-Salt Lake), an opponent of the holiday, during a Dec. 8 broadcast of KUTV's *Take Two* talk show.

Not true, proponents of the holiday counter. "The state will probably even generate more money during the holiday than it would lose, like it does during other holidays," said the Rev. France Davis of the Calvary Baptist Church.

As for being a historically great man, King was as historically vital to this nation's well-being as were Washington and Lincoln.

So why not a holiday?

Opposing arguments, as espoused by Rep. Sykes, which are seemingly based on economical and historical premises, are flimsy; they are an excuse for a deeper prejudice. As one caller during the talk show sug-

gested, Utahns, for the most part, have been pressured into accepting civil rights.

Come on. Since when is respecting the rights of all Americans something we must be pressured into? The push for civil rights needn't have taken place at all if all men were treated equally.

King led an oppressed people in tumultuous times. He became a symbol of their hope. Yet, a Martin Luther King Day wouldn't be a holiday of remembrance only for black Americans — it would be for all Americans.

It would be a chance for them to reflect on the life and times of a historically great man who, like great men before him, was able to rise above the turmoil of his times to make this nation a better place.

— Frank Montoya, Jr.

Frank Montoya Jr., "The Rev. King Deserves to be Recognized by Utah," *Daily Universe*, January 14, 1986, <https://archive.org/details/dailyuniverse3974prov/page/n7/mode/2up>

Senate Bill S.B. 0121.

This shows how Utah lawmakers changed the name of the holiday in the year 2000 from Human Rights Day to Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

Why was it important for Utah to change the name of the holiday to recognize this civil rights leader?

1 DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY
2 2000 GENERAL SESSION
3 STATE OF UTAH
4 Sponsor: Pete Suazo
5 AN ACT RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS IN GENERAL; CHANGING THE NAME OF
6 HUMAN RIGHTS DAY TO DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY; AND MAKING
7 TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS.
8 This act affects sections of Utah Code Annotated 1953 as follows:
9 AMENDS:
10 63-13-2, as last amended by Chapter 49, Laws of Utah 1989
11 *Be it enacted by the Legislature of the state of Utah:*
12 Section 1. Section 63-13-2 is amended to read:
13 63-13-2. Legal holidays -- Personal preference day -- Governor authorized to declare
14 additional days.
15 (1) (a) The following-named days are legal holidays in this state:
16 (i) every Sunday;
17 (ii) January 1, called New Year's Day;
18 (iii) the third Monday of January, [~~observed as the anniversary of the birth of~~] called Dr.
19 Martin Luther King, Jr. [~~also known as Human Rights~~] Day;
20 (iv) the third Monday of February, h [~~observed as the anniversary of the birth of George~~
21 ~~Washington and Abraham Lincoln, also known as President's Day~~] CALLED WASHINGTON AND
21a LINCOLN DAY h ;
22 (v) the last Monday of May, called Memorial Day;
23 (vi) July 4, called Independence Day;
24 (vii) July 24, called Pioneer Day;
25 (viii) the first Monday of September, called Labor Day;
26 (ix) the second Monday of October, called Columbus Day;
27 (x) November 11, called Veterans' Day;




Link to [Primary Sources Google Slides](#)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Terry Lee Williams
1st African American Senator in Utah
What was his experience?

Terry Lee Williams was the first African American Senator in the Utah State Senate from 1981-1986. He introduced the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday bill in 1985. It didn't pass. He presented it again in 1986. It passed, but the holiday was called Human Rights Day in Utah. After 14 years of effort, in 2000, Human Rights Day was changed to Martin Luther King Jr. Day.

As you watch the interview with Terry Williams fill in the chart below. Link to video: [ABC 4 Interview with Utah's 1st Black Senator \(2017\)](#)

<p>Three things I learned from the video.....</p> 	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p> <p>3.</p>
<p>Two things I found interesting.....</p> 	<p>1.</p> <p>2.</p>
<p>One question I still have.....</p> 	<p>1.</p>

Read this selection of Terry Williams' experience from *Missing Stories: An Oral and Ethnic History of Minorities in Utah*, and answer the questions below.

“[After I got into the Utah legislature] I was not afforded the same respect and access [to the system] as others. I mean, it was like I had no business here....So when I arrived, I met legislators who didn't believe a black person could walk and talk intelligently at the same time. I mean, I was speaking the same language they spoke, I was coming up with the same kinds of ideas, and they were amazed, just amazed, I could do that....”

What they really felt was that they didn't like Martin Luther, Jr. They didn't believe the civil rights movement did anything for Utah. I heard that many times [off the Senate floor]. They believed that this black minister, beginning out of Montgomery, did something good for blacks in the South. But that's it. They didn't know Dr. King spoke up on their behalf as well as everyone else's and that the passage of the [national] Civil Rights Act of 1964, opening public accommodations in hotels, motels, and tourism, was to their benefit, too.

When it came right down to it, they didn't want to create Martin Luther King Day by displacing Columbus Day or the emancipator's [Abraham Lincoln's] holiday. That was blasphemy to them. They didn't believe this black man did anything [of that stature] for this country, much less the state of Utah.”

1. What were some of the challenges he faced as a Senator?
2. How many times did the legislature consider the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday before it passed?
3. What legacy or impact did Terry Lee Williams have on Utah?
4. Write a summary of Terry Lee William's experience as the first African American Senator in Utah. Include his experiences with the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Bill.

References

Kelen, Leslie G., and Eileen H. Stone. n.d. "Terry Lee Williams Story." UEN. Accessed April 18, 2023. <https://www.uen.org/lessonplan/download/28709?lessonId=22382&segmentTypeId=2>

ANSWER KEY

Answers May Vary

Terry Lee Williams

1st African American Senator in Utah




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As you watch the interview with Terry Williams fill in the chart below.

Link to video: [ABC 4 Interview with Utah's 1st Black Senator \(2017\)](#)

Answers will vary

<p>Three things I learned from the video.....</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. 1st African American Senator in Utah State Senate 1981-19862. Fought for Martin Luther King Jr. holiday bill3. The first Supreme Court Woman Justice swore him into office
<p>Two things I found interesting.....</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Many of the Senators have never met a black person before2. Coretta Scott King came to speak at BYU and spoke in favor of the holiday
<p>One question I still have.....</p> 	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Why did people oppose the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday?

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1. What were some of the challenges he faced as a Senator?
Not respected, not the same access to the same system, people thought he couldn't walk and talk at the same time, people were prejudiced against him because of his race
2. How many times did the legislature consider the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday before it passed?
3 times
3. What legacy or impact did Terry Lee Williams have on Utah?
Answers will vary
4. Write a summary of Terry Lee William's experience as the first African American Senator in Utah. Include his experiences with the Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday Bill.
Answers will vary