

Alaska's Cultures

African American / Blacks

After the Civil War, many of the black men who migrated to Alaska were seafarers who worked in the whaling and fur trade in the North Pacific and who remained to take up residence in the Alaska territory. The discovery of gold brought more blacks to Alaska. For four years, the one hundred fifty-eight black members of Company L, 24th Infantry, US Army were stationed at Dyea and Skagway to preserve law and order and to show the flag. Some members stayed.

World War II brought an influx of blacks to Alaska as the military began work on the Alaska Highway and to fortify Alaska. Black military engineers and port battalions were assigned to Alaska. More than 3,000 black engineers worked on the Alaska Highway. Black battalions were also assigned to the Aleutian Islands during the Aleutian campaign.

Since statehood, many blacks in Alaska have been associated with the military. They have been stationed at Elmendorf Air Force Base, Fort Richardson (Anchorage), Eielson Air Force base, Fort Wainwright (Fairbanks), Fort Greely (Delta Junction) or with the Coast Guard in Juneau, Ketchikan or Kodiak. Many members of the military select Alaska as their place of permanent residence and choose to remain in the state when retiring. Over the years, the African-American population levels have fluctuated with the number of military personnel assigned to each base in Alaska.