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| http://www.dcminnerblues.com/images2/DHBlClarialView.gif       | **Rentiesville, Oklahoma** **Black Town History(NY Times story on Oklahoma's Black Towns, bottom of page))****Down Home Blues Club** *Home of the***DUSK 'TIL DAWN BLUES FESTIVAL September 2, 3, and 4, 2005** **5 pm til 5 am** **30 bands on 3 stages, showcase of the OK Blues tradition - strong on electric guitars and full bands), and bringing in several nationals. This year we have Rosie Ledet the Zydeco Sweetheart and James Peterson - see the Blues Festival Pages (link number three above) for complete details!And the OK BLUES HALL OF FAME***Now Available* for tours and parties, see below...    |
| **http://www.dcminnerblues.com/images/DHBlCllogolimegreen.gif**     | **The Blues Club is also open the first Saturday of each month. DC and the band perform also their friends come and sit in...Free food and Ladies get in free as well! $5 cover open from 9:30 pm til 2 am.** **The Jam Band is an opportunity for musicians with all levels of expertise to jam with DC and Selby. It meets first and third Saturdays of each month - but call first before you drive (918) 473-2411**  |
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| **Inside Down Home Blues Club** **This is the birthplace of D.C. Minner. When D.C. was a boy, this was his grandmother's corn whiskey house. D.C. was first exposed to Blues music here.** |

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|                  **the Down Home Blues Club                   *Now available* for your reunion, party or tour!!                 .....*A Saturday Night Blues Experience*                        at any time of the week you choose                       complete with a live band - Oklahoma's                        Blues Legend D.C. Minnner and band*.....if you prefer.*..                       a meal catered in - catfish dinner or bar-b-que...                       we have beer and pop, water...            *We provide*: club open at hours you choose, live band performing                        a dance for a party or concert or infor-mance,                        with historical info ...security, staff,....              *a historic tour* covering the Historic Black Township of Rentiesville,                        history of the Blues and R & B, inside stories of being performing                        musicians over the years......                      call for dates and rates (918)473-2411,                       or e-mail** **dcminner@mytownisp.com****The Down Home Blues Club; Blues at the root!                      Birthplace of D.C. where was raised in his                      Grandmother Lura's Cozy Corner Juke Joint                       in the historic Black Township of Rentiesville, OK                      ..home of the Dusk 'til Dawn Blues Festival                               A visit to the Blues Club will be                               a wonderful time, *guaranteed!***    |
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|      **RENTIESVILLE TOWNSHIP HISTORY****Rentiesville is one of 13 surviving Black Townships in Oklahoma. To make a better future black people migrated and increased the black population in OK by a factor of six in the twenty years between 1890 and 1919. Hoping to create a better future for their children, some 50 Townships were formed. Cassandra Gains, Muskogee Tourism at** [**www.cassytours.com**](http://www.cassytours.com) **and Kim from the Tulsa Library System (see contact, bottom of page) both bring people thru, and we are happy to say Rentiesville is on both tours!                                                         Read all about it below!** |
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| The New York Times[In America](http://www.nytimes.com/adx/bin/adx_click.html?type=goto&page=www.nytimes.com/printer-friendly&pos=Position1&camp=foxsearch50a-nyt5&ad=in_america_pf2.html&goto=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Efoxsearchlight%2Ecom%2Finamerica%2Findex%5Fnyt%2Ehtml)February 8, 2004 Oklahoma Towns Born of Struggle and Hope **By JOHN D. THOMAS**

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THE post-Civil War South was a brutal and oppressive place for African-Americans. In a mass exodus, many left the region, compelled northward by floridly worded advertisements for new all-black settlements. One promoter described the town of Langston, Okla., as "Fertile as ever was moistened by nature's falling tears or kissed by heaven's sunshine." The advertisements worked. After the Civil War, there were some 50 all-black towns founded in the Oklahoma Territories (Oklahoma became a state in 1907). The initial settlers were Indian freedmen slaves who had been freed by their Indian masters - but later freed slaves from the Deep South joined them in a quest to prove that blacks could not only govern themselves but also prosper economically if given the chance. And they did. Many of the towns were quite successful, but they were eventually undone by factors including the Depression, Jim Crow laws, intimidation by whites and urbanization. Today, 13 of those original towns still exist in Oklahoma, and they all still have all-black or overwhelmingly black populations. When my parents moved to Oklahoma six years ago, I became a casual student of the state's history. After stumbling upon this unknown chapter of American history, I set out to visit some of these towns last year. It was the centennial of two of three of the most viable remaining all-black towns, more than enough of a reason to hit the road. The best way to visit the towns is through formal tours, which are organized by several groups. The most prominent organizer is Cassandra Gaines, director of multicultural tourism for the city of Muskogee. She has been taking tourists to the all-black towns since 1997, and her success has led to consulting jobs with other states interested in developing African-American heritage tourism. Her groups travel by bus; an expert lectures on board, and local historians meet and guide them. Logistically, joining a formal tour did not work for me, so Ms. Gaines helped me set up a solo trip to Langston (founded 1890), Boley and Rentiesville (both 1903). On a bumpy early-morning flight from Chicago to Tulsa, I flipped through my dog-eared copy of Hannibal Johnson's "Acres of Aspiration" (Eakin Press, 2002), a terrific survey of Oklahoma's all-black towns. I rented a car and headed toward Langston, site of Langston University. The two-hour drive took me down rural highways that crossed Chicken Creek, Polecat Creek and Wild Horse Creek. Cattle grazed lazily next to tiny rusting oil wells that pumped with even less vigor. The school, founded in 1897, was named for John Mercer Langston, the first black member of Congress from Virginia, who served from 1890 and 1891. Sitting on a hill, its red brick buildings are an abrupt change from the pastureland. Ms. Gaines arranged for me to get a tour from the university's historian in residence, Currie Ballard. In the 1890's, Langston was a vibrant place, with several grocery stores, a blacksmith, two physicians and a drugstore. Today, the school, a historically black university, is essentially the town; its 2,500 students account for most of its population. The campus is spacious and immaculate. Mr. Ballard, a fount of knowledge about the town, first took me by the chapel. A pretty, white building, it opened 1996 and is a replica of the little Presbyterian church where the school's first classes were held. From there, we walked to the Melvin B. Tolson Black Heritage Center. A well-known African-American modernist poet, Tolson (1898-1966) taught at Langston, was the town's mayor from 1954 to 1960 and was named poet laureate of Liberia in 1947. Officials at Langston University say that the Tolson Center is Oklahoma's sole site devoted to African and African-American studies. In addition to numerous pieces of African art donated by alumni, there are also many items related to Tolson, including his glasses, his Remington Quiet-Riter and a photo of him signing books at a ceremony at the White House in 1965. When we left the Tolson Center, Mr. Ballard pointed out a proposed spot for the Oklahoma Museum of African-American History, scheduled to open in 2007, the state's centennial. He explained that the museum, which is being financed with state funds and private donations, will focus on issues including the state's civil rights struggles and black entrepreneurism in Oklahoma. He said the museum would not focus on the Tulsa race riots of 1921 and the rise of Tulsa's prominent, all-black Greenwood district (also known as the Black Wall Street) because the Greenwood Cultural Center in Tulsa already featured extensive exhibits on those issues. From there, we drove to Langston Lake. About a mile outside campus, it is a serene, tree-lined spot with covered picnic tables and barbecue facilities. Tours use it as a dining and relaxation area. My final stop in Langston was the Indian Meridian. The tall, white monument was erected in 1922; it stands outside town on a dirt road. Mr. Ballard explained that it signified not only the former demarcation between Oklahoma and Indian territory, but also that it was the state's surveying center. "Think about it," he said. "The center of this state is in an all-black town." I headed south and then east on the hour drive to Boley, once the crown jewel of the all-black towns. Just before you cross Boley's city line, you'll see a rather disconcerting road sign: "Hitchhikers May Be Escaped Inmates." It signifies the presence of the minimum-security John Lilley Correctional Center, which, including inmates and employees, accounts for about 500 of its 950 residents. There was a time when Boley was a thriving place with more than 50 businesses, including a bank, an ice plant, five hotels, five groceries and even two photo studios. The African-American statesman and educator Booker T. Washington visited in 1904 and called it "the most enterprising, and in many ways the most interesting of the Negro towns in the United States." When I arrived in April, the pretty, mostly red brick downtown was anything but hopping, but every Memorial Day weekend it is packed when some 35,000 people attend Boley's annual all-black rodeo. Dating to 1909, the event takes place on the edge of town at the 40-acre Boley Rodeo Grounds, which has recently been renovated. Boley is a quiet, charming place now, and its primary businesses are the prison and Smokaroma, which makes of industrial barbeque cookers. The founder of the company, Maurice Lee Sr., often cooks up barbeque for visiting tourists, and he treated me to some amazing ribs in the 1918 Boley Community Center. Boley is one of the few all-black towns with a formal museum dedicated to its history. The small collection is in a 1908 home that was named a national historic landmark in 1975. The town is expanding the facility. Displays include historic photos, bricks made by the Boley Brick Company in 1912, soda bottles from the Boley Carbonated Works and an advertisement for the 1921 "baffling western mystery," "The Crimson Skull." According to the ad, the film was "produced in the all colored city of Boley, Oklahoma," with an "all-colored cast" and "30 colored cowboys." Before leaving town, I checked out Boley's other compelling, albeit macabre, attraction. On Nov. 23, 1932, a trio of bandits from Pretty Boy Floyd's outfit tried to rob the Farmers and Merchants Bank. In the ensuing shootout, Boley's mayor and two of the gunmen were killed. The original marble cages are still inside the bank, which has been closed for years, and visitors can still see bullet holes in the walls. During the rodeo and tours, it's a popular stop. A convenient place to stay while touring the towns is Muskogee, and I drove there from Boley and checked into a motel. The next morning I rose early, and after a hearty breakfast at the Speedway Grille ("The Best Little Burger and Chili House in Muskogee"), I headed south down Highway 69 for the short drive to Rentiesville. On the outskirts of town, a sign heralds Rentiesville's favorite son: "Dr. John Hope Franklin Homeplace. Rentiesville, OK. Population 66." A noted historian, and writer and chairman of the advisory board of Bill Clinton's Initiative on Race from 1997 to 1999, Dr. Franklin was born in Rentiesville in 1915 and moved to Tulsa a decade later. One of the town's other famous citizens still lives there. Rentiesville has no real downtown anymore, but toward the end of the bumpy main road is the D. C. Minner Down Home Blues Club. A veteran blues guitar ace and member of the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, Mr. Minner and his bass-playing wife, Selby, have been holding their Dusk 'til Dawn Blues Festival there every Labor Day weekend for 13 years. The three-day affair attracts some 7,000 fans. Mr. Minner's club is basically a rambling old country juke joint, with a scattering of mismatched tables and dinette chairs and aging pictures of blues artists lining the walls. When people visit on tours, he and his wife open the club and play a set. Mr. Minner was born on this spot in 1935 and moved back in 1985. Now getting too old to tour, he hopes to expand the place and add a museum. Mr. Minner said the all-black towns should be preserved as an inspiration to black people. "This is one of the few places where this history is still left," he said. Actually, there is another place nearby where black history is well preserved. Just down the road from Minner's house is the site of the Battle of Honey Springs, also called the Gettysburg of the West. The battle, which took place July 17, 1863, involved the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry and was the first time black troops figured prominently in a major Civil War conflict. Some of those black soldiers went on to help found Rentiesville. Honey Springs Battlefield, administered by the Oklahoma Historical Society, is a beautiful, sprawling place, with well-marked trails, an information center and monthly reenactments of Civil War life; every three years there is a re-enactment there using black troops. At the last one, about 11,000 people visited. The next is scheduled for September 2005. At one end of the park stands a tall pink granite monument dedicated to those black soldiers. It reads in part, "At the Battle of Honey Springs, the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers wrote a stirring page in American history becoming one of the first black units of the Civil War to play a key role in a Union victory." Standing alone in that battlefield at the end of my trip, I tried to come to terms with what I had seen. Like most Americans, I had had no idea these all-black towns had ever existed. The trip was fascinating and the people I met were full of hope for the future, but the dominant theme was struggle - a struggle to escape the Deep South and to found the towns, and now a struggle to save them. **Visitor Information** **Tours and Information** For information on Cassandra Gaines's tours call (888) 687-6137, extension 25. One-day tours cost $75 a person and include breakfast, lunch and dinner. The **Tulsa City-County Library** offers a bus tour of the historic all-black towns on June 12. Tickets are $25. For more information call (918) 596-7205. The **Battle of Honey Springs Historic Site** is at 1863 Honey Springs Battlefield Road; (918) 473-5572; see [www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/mus-sites/masnum02.htm](http://www.ok-history.mus.ok.us/mus-sites/masnum02.htm). The visitor center is open 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; open to 1 p.m. Sunday. The access road to the six interpretive trails is open 8 to 5. Closed Monday. The **Boley Historical Museum** can be visited by appointment; call (918) 667-3711. For information on Langston University, visit [www.lunet.edu](http://www.lunet.edu). **Events** Boley's annual all-black rodeo takes place May 29 and 30 this year, starting at 8 p.m. Admission is $7. Information, (580) 320-0031. Clearview, another of the remaining all-black towns, also holds a yearly all-black rodeo the first weekend in August; it is Aug. 7 and 8 this year. Information, (918) 583-4096. D. C. Minner's **Dusk 'til Dawn Blues Festival** takes place Sept. 3 to 5. 30 bands on three stages, Information: [www.dcminnerblues.com](http://www.dcminnerblues.com); dcminner@mytownisp.com On March 20, the Oklahoma Historical Society will sponsor a **Civil War Candlelight Tour** at the Honey Springs Battlefield with tours every 15 minutes from 7 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.; $3. Reservations, (918) 473-5572. JOHN D. THOMAS is editor of Playboy.com and a contributing editor of Playboy magazine.   [Copyright 2004](http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/help/copyright.html) [The New York Times Company](http://www.nytco.com/) | [Home](http://www.nytimes.com/) | [Privacy Policy](http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/help/privacy.html) | [Search](http://query.nytimes.com/search/advanced/) | [Corrections](http://www.nytimes.com/corrections.html) | [Help](http://www.nytimes.com/membercenter/sitehelp.html) | [Back to Top](http://www.nytimes.com/2004/02/08/travel/#top)  |

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