

Soaring Above Segregation: The Story of Bessie Coleman

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Junior Individual Website

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When I was researching topics for my 2020 NHD project, I knew I wanted to focus on women breaking barriers. I considered Amelia Earhart, but when further researching her I stumbled upon Bessie Coleman - Coleman's story surprised and intrigued me, and I truly felt as though I had found the perfect topic for NHD 2020.

I soon realized that conducting research on this topic would be harder than expected - largely because Bessie Coleman's story is not widely known. As expected, it proved difficult to find a balance of primary and secondary sources. One of the most valuable secondary sources I found was not about Coleman's life (although many biographies I discovered were extremely helpful, and they provided many details about her life that were truly surprising and were useful in my final project), but about segregation. The scholarly journal on segregation in Texas throughout history helped me understand the hardships Bessie Coleman faced throughout her life just for being African American/Native American.

A valuable primary source I discovered was an interview of Bessie Coleman. This interview helped me understand how Bessie felt about her accomplishments and experiences in her own words, which was helpful in constructing my final project.

This year, I chose to do a website because I felt it was the best way to display the connections I had made during the research process. The website was an easy way to let the user explore these connections their own way and discover relationships between various historical topics. One connection I made during research is the connection between the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand and Bessie Coleman wanting to learn to fly - the assassination of the Archduke was a primary cause of WWI, and because of stories from Coleman's brothers about women in this war, Bessie Coleman was inspired to learn to fly. Therefore, the assassination of the Archduke was a long term cause of Coleman's achievements.

When constructing my website, I did experience some difficulties with the website creator. NHD WebCentral is a new program, and I did my best to explore the new creator without bias from last year, when I created my NHD website with Weebly. There are some features that Weebly had that I wish this program did, and this program deleted my work a few times throughout the process. However, in the end I constructed a final website that I am proud of. Creating this website most definitely taught me that perseverance and creativity are life skills that will be very helpful in the future.

Bessie Coleman undeniably fits this year's theme of breaking barriers. Even though Coleman faced many barriers, such as gender-based, socioeconomic, and segregational barriers, she persevered through the hardships in her life, becoming the first African American woman to hold

an international pilot's license. Beyond this, Coleman was able to inspire others to break barriers by proving her worth as an African American woman pilot during a time of extreme segregation in America.