

YOU OUGHTA KNOW | Offering a passport to the past

Sometimes it seems Colorado's appreciation of black history begins and ends in Five Points. So why would an Oxford-educated historian with an expertise in African-American studies settle down here? Like so many Colorado transplants, Labode, chief historian of the Colorado Historical Society, was looking for a life change. Whether it's the struggles of Colorado's black miners or the cross-town busing memories of Denver school children, Labode seeks out personal accounts of history as her favorite resources. She then retells stories in the Historical Society's magazine *Colorado History NOW*. — *Rebecca Landwehr, special to The Denver Post*

Why Colorado? Colorado has always been a crossroads for people. And it's exciting to see just how many stories come out of these crossroads. A historian once said 'the past is like a foreign country,' I'd like to help people get a passport into that country.

EXTRA CREDIT READING

Historians Modupe Labode, Tom Noel and Kristine Slaughter have compiled a bibliography of African Americans in Colorado and the West, which is available in PDF form at coloradohistory.org/publications/afam_bibliography.pdf. Many, but not all, of the books, articles, dissertations and sound recordings are available in the Stephen H. Hart Library of the Colorado Historical Society, 1300 Broadway, Denver.

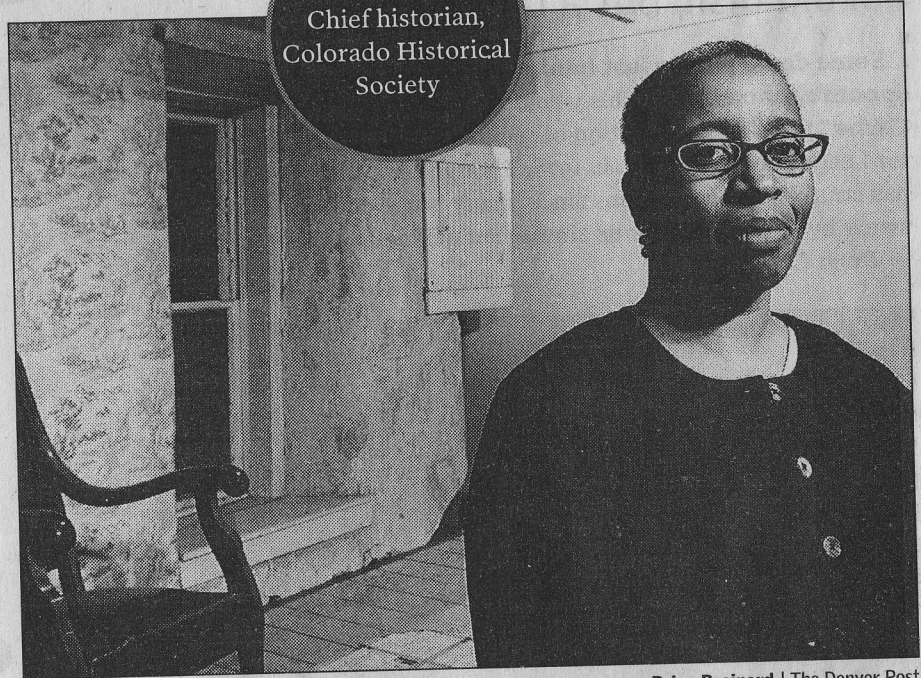
You've spent time in South Africa and written about black missionaries in Angola. How does your international background influence your work here? I think it has enabled me to ask broader questions than I would have otherwise. The history of the West is not unlike the history of settlers all over the world.

How is that? I've become more alert as to how individuals play into these larger issues. Obviously in South Africa race relations were huge issues, and while the issues in Colorado between the settlers and the Native Americans weren't the same, there were parallels. I'm interested in the stories of Coloradans; some show similar trends to around the world and some show things that are quite different.

What are some of the big misconceptions about Colorado's black history? First, that there weren't blacks in Colorado. And after that, the blacks who were here only lived in Denver.

Why is that? Denver was very important because of the trains; this is where

Who:
Modupe Labode
Chief historian,
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Brian Brainerd | The Denver Post

people coming through the West arrived. And of course we've also had some really good people who've looked at the Five Points community. But there could be comparable stories about black miners in Trinidad or in the small mining company towns.

What do you think was the most important era for black Coloradans? I love all the eras for different reasons. But the period from the 1940s to the 1970s hasn't received as much attention, and there was a lot of significant legislation being passed — fair housing, civil

rights — things were shifting as more newcomers arrived. And Denver's desegregation of the schools is nationally significant. There are still a lot of people alive who experienced that all first hand and it hasn't been explored significantly. I think there's plenty of room for more historians of black Colorado.

What should every Coloradan know about the state's black history? That Colorado has been diverse from its origins. That African-Americans, though small in number, were never considered marginal in the state's history.