



Student Name:
Class Period:
Date:

Meet the Originals

Texas Originals is a radio series about people who made an impact on Texas. You can hear it online and on radio stations around the state. Read or listen to the episode on Bessie Coleman. Then, answer questions about it.

Bessie Coleman 1892–1926

Born to a sharecropping family in northeast Texas in 1892, Bessie Coleman became the world's first female African American aviator.

Coleman spent her childhood in Waxahachie, Texas. After moving to Chicago in her twenties, she heard thrilling stories about World War I pilots and decided she too wanted to fly.

Coleman's race and gender barred her admission into American flight schools. Undeterred, she learned French and attended aviation school in France. In 1921, the same year Amelia Earhart began taking flying lessons, Coleman earned her international pilot's license.

Coleman returned to America and quickly became a sensation. Her daredevil feats in air shows captivated crowds and earned her the nickname "Brave Bessie."

An advocate for equal rights, Coleman encouraged young African Americans to fly. She dreamed of opening a Black aviation school and refused to participate in air shows that didn't allow Black people to attend.

In 1926, Coleman died in an accident while taking a test flight at a Florida air show. But her example remained a powerful inspiration for others. In 1929, a flying school for Black aviators was founded in Coleman's honor in Los Angeles, ensuring her legacy as a pioneer in aviation and civil rights.

Today, you can find roads named for Bessie Coleman at airports in Chicago, Illinois; Oakland, California; Frankfurt, Germany; and Atlanta, Texas, the town where she was born.

Check for Understanding: Answer the questions below based on evidence from the episode on Bessie Coleman. Refer to the text included above if needed.

1. What inspired Bessie Coleman to become an aviator?
2. Why was Coleman prohibited from attending flight school in the United States?

Going Further: Write or discuss your answer to the question below, supporting your answer with evidence from the episode or additional information you have learned in class.

3. **Making Inferences.** According to the episode, Coleman's nickname was "Brave Bessie" because she liked to perform daredevil feats in the air. How else might that nickname fit her?