



First Annual  
Centennial Strategy for

# Nicodemus National Historic Site

August 2007

CENTENNIAL INITIATIVE



**Site:** NICO

**Year:** 2007

**Vision Statement**

Nicodemus National Historic Site preserves and interprets the history of Nicodemus, Kansas, a town built by and for African Americans in 1877. This town resulted as people, pushed by escalating violence and restrictive state laws, left the Upland and Deep South at the end of the Reconstruction Period. Many took advantage of the opportunity offered by the Homestead Act to gain land and an independent life for their families. Their lives, successes, and failures illustrate the participation of African Americans in the settlement of the West. Nicodemus still exists as an African American community. Family connections to this special place are sustained by descendants who return each year at the end of July for the annual Emancipation Celebration or Homecoming. The historical significance of the town is embedded less in the physical resource and more in the perseverance and continuity of this community.

Their story presents an affirming message for people of all backgrounds. The settlers took control of their lives to shape their own place in history. The community evokes that determination to hold onto the land in the face of droughts, the Great Depression, and rural out-migration. Relationships with American Indian cultures of the West are poignantly referenced through the pride felt about ancestors who served as Buffalo Soldiers, through stories about how gifts of meat from Indians helped the early settlers survive, and through pride in the Indian blood of several families. The Nicodemus story, along with the stories of the many other (but now mostly gone) all-Black towns on the frontier, is part of the Civil Rights historical continuum.

The story offers an immediate emotional connection for visitors. While the current town population is small and many residents retired, there are thousands of descendants located across Kansas and the United States. This extended community presents an opportunity for the park to develop a cadre of volunteer interpreters and supporters, a cadre intimately vested in the message. Park management is working to protect, preserve, and interpret in partnership with this vested community. Park managers focus park operations in ways that sustain and enhance the emotional connection between the place and the story and the extended community of residents, descendants, and visitors.

**Park/ Superintendent/ Program Manager**

Sherda Williams

**SITE:** NICO

**STEWARDSHIP**

**Assure that no compelling chapter in the American heritage experience remains untold and that strategically important landscapes are acquired, as authorized by Congress.**

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

Develop new interpretive media that addresses the significant story of Nicodemus. Make that story accessible to more visitors. Work with local, state, and national partners to sponsor training that enables or facilitates the active involvement of the community in conveying the significance of the park to visitors. Use additional funding in FY08 to hire one seasonal interpretive staff and one seasonal maintenance staff to enhance our capacity to interpret, preserve, and maintain the park's resources.

The work described currently is supported by OFS and/ or PMIS

**SITE:** NICO

**ENVIRONMENT**

**Engage partners, communities, and visitors in shared environmental stewardship.**

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

Work with residents, descendants, and other partners to sponsor training that encourages their involvement in preservation of the National Historic Site properties, cultural artifacts, and oral and folk traditions.

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**SITE:** NICO

**RECREATION**

**Focus national, regional, and local tourism efforts to reach diverse audiences and young people and to attract visitors to lesser-known parks.**

**Increase visitation by 25 percent at lesser-known parks through a national tourism effort aimed at helping people to discover the breadth of parks and experiences.**

Work with regional, local, and state partners to develop tourism efforts that include Nicodemus National Historic Site. Focus on African American heritage tourism, agri-tourism, and ethnic heritage tourism to link to other regional resources.

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**site:** NICO

**PROFESSIONALISM**

**Model what it means to work in partnership.**

**Other Park/ Program performance goal(s)**

Encourage and create opportunities for residents and descendants to participate in telling the Nicodemus story, which is their personal and family heritage.

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