



**STORIES  
ON THE  
LAND**

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**Showcasing  
Black  
History on  
Public  
Lands**

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September 2022

National Religious  
Partnership for the  
Environment



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**"We could do a much better job in our parks—state, local, national—of weaving together a better tapestry of the totality of the American experience "**

***- Rev. Dr. James Victor, Senior Pastor, Mt. Olive Baptist Church***





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As public lands policymakers and conservation professionals seek a more inclusive and equitable public lands experience throughout our nation's parks and lands, there is an acknowledgement that the communities currently underserved need to be at the table for decision-making. To that end, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment undertook an initiative with Black church leaders to bring forth their perspectives, opinions and concerns regarding public lands.

This report, which outlines Black church leader views of public land, seeks to enhance, not supplant, the equity and inclusion work already being done by centering the voice of the Black community in the conversation. By undertaking a robust deliberative process through one-on-one interviews with national and state religious leaders, a two-part survey of 700 black church leaders and a roundtable dialog with millennial pastors, this report provides an overview of Black Americans' perspectives regarding public lands. The data collected and presented in this report serves to enhance the views and perspectives that Black-led conservation groups and Black community leaders have been articulating for quite some time. While the report delves into access and consultation issues, the bulk of the reporting focuses on stories as told through public lands. The report is an initial step in what needs to be a broader deliberation process.

**Religious Leaders as Bridges and Connectors.** Because the Black church is a central cornerstone in Black communities and its leaders are well versed in the communities' needs and perspectives, the process used worked to engage these leaders. Throughout the process, the goal was to tap into the wisdom of Black church leaders and uncover the concerns of Black Americans as it relates to public lands and national monuments in particular.

**Value of Public Lands.** What the deliberation process revealed was a strong sentiment for the value of public land because of its contribution to the health and wellbeing of communities and its ability to tell history. This value is held even in the face of limited access to public lands. It was clear through the surveys and interviews that respondents believe that the story of Black Americans is woefully missing in the nation's parks, playgrounds, recreation centers and national monuments. They argued that public lands can and should be used to tell the full American story, which includes the contributions that Black Americans have made to the building of America.

**Stories that Heal.** The interviews revealed the profound notion that public lands—aside from their inherent health and recreation benefits—could serve as an important salve in countering the organized effort underway to discount and erase Black history. By telling their stories through and on the land, the religious leaders interviewed argued that their history—America's history—could be more rightly and fully told on the land.



**Black Perspectives.** The dialogs with Black leaders uncovered their belief that public lands are important for their communities; reiterated the need for investment in public lands, particularly in communities of color; emphasized a need for significantly more inclusion in the decision-making and planning process; and reinforced the need for greater access, which includes transforming public lands to be more welcoming and inclusive.

**Priority Stories.** When asked which stories and parts of Black history were missing from public lands, the Black leaders interviewed most often named (in priority order):

- Heroes and Pathfinders
- Black Schools and Colleges
- Black Cemeteries
- Slavery and the Slave Trade
- Civil Rights Movement

When asked in a follow-up survey which leaders needed their stories told on public lands, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Colin Powell, Frederick Douglass, Trayvon Martin and Zora Neale Hurston were the leaders most often named.

When asked what stories of slavery needed to be preserved as National Monuments, slave markets and plantations topped the list. Slave markets such as the one in St. Augustine and New Orleans and plantations such as Brattonsville Plantation were specifically named by those surveyed. Slave ships were also named frequently, with ships such as the Alexander and Clotilda mentioned by name.

When asked which civil rights stories should be told on public lands, Black Lives Matter, the March on Washington, the Million Man March and the Alabama and South Carolina bus boycotts were most often named by those surveyed.

**Recommendations.** The surveys, interviews and roundtable forum delivered extensive feedback and insights. The following are recommendations for policymakers and conservationists:

- Identify and preserve lands and waters through both the Antiquities Act and other conservation mechanisms that showcase Black leaders and tell the story of slavery and the civil rights movement.
- Support the identification and protection of Black cemeteries, which are important culturally and ecologically, as part of the America the Beautiful initiative.
- Preserve Black schools such as the Rosenwald schools through monument designation and identify HBCUs that can be preserved and protected.
- Increase the visibility of existing and future national monuments that tell the story of Black Americans and ensure adequate funding for these monuments.

Finally, the importance of conducting public lands planning and identification with robust dialog with communities of color cannot be emphasized enough. Only by placing these communities at the center of decision making can public lands truly reflect America.



# AMERICA'S TREASURE

## Defining Public Lands: Conservation, Gathering, Access and History

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Public lands, defined as those lands that are managed by governmental entities at the local, state and federal level, are as varied as they are numerous. From local ballfields, basketball courts, walking trails and picnic areas to state park camping areas, wildlife refuges and national monuments, public lands in the United States are treasured places for recreation and renewal.

**Conservation and Stewardship.** People of faith often describe conservation as the protection of God's creation through land and water stewardship. This stewardship, which includes protection of public lands, provides for ecosystem health that benefits the wellbeing of humans and non-humans. The Biden Administration's America the Beautiful initiative, with the goal to protect 30 percent of America's land and water by 2030, recognizes the conservation value inherent in public lands. How and where public lands are protected is key in ensuring that all can benefit.

**Recreation and Gathering Spaces.** Parks and green spaces are natural gathering places and have been used for both family and community events. There are also countless types of outdoor recreational activities available on public lands. Hunting and fishing are often conducted in national forests. Local parks are home to baseball and basketball games. National parks and scenic trails provide avenues for hiking and backpacking. Horseback riders, boaters, mountain bikers and climbers all find outlets on public lands. However, even with an abundance of recreational and gathering opportunities on public lands, the majority of those that utilize these spaces still tend to be predominately White. Recent studies by the U.S. Forest Service, for instance, show a disparity in racial and ethnic use of national forests. Black people only accounted for 1 percent of visitors but make up 13 percent of the U.S. population. Reversing this trend will require a concerted equity and inclusion effort.



**Showcasing History.** Public lands are not only for recreation, gathering and conservation but are ways to preserve and tell America's stories. However, both the history of public lands and history as told through public lands contain complexity and injustice. The history of public lands, as currently told, often focuses on White men protecting parks and public lands, without acknowledging the acquisition injustices done to Indigenous communities.

Additionally, the stories that are put into focus on public lands seldom lift up the lived experiences of people of color or Indigenous communities. Instead, a majority of images and stories currently portrayed through public lands are predominately White: from the heroes and protagonists featured to the historical events highlighted. From the local to the national, parks and public lands offer

an opportunity to showcase a fuller and more complete American narrative.

**Access and Inclusion.** The value of public lands is indisputable, but not all have ready access or feel included. People of color and low-income communities are likely to be deprived of the benefits that public lands provide. There are fewer natural places where Black, Latino and Asian American people live, impacting their health and wellbeing. Numerous reports and studies have documented this lack of access, attributing it to issues such as redlining, lack of transportation and inadequate investment. Efforts have been taken to not only document these equity, access and inclusion issues, but to work to make public lands more accessible and create green spaces in existing communities of color.





# DELIBERATIONS:

## Uncovering the Black Experience on Public Lands

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The National Religious Partnership for the Environment, which counts among its membership the Black church community, launched a robust deliberation process to unearth the attitudes, perspectives and priorities of Black church leaders as it pertains to public lands. Through one-on-one interviews with senior religious leaders, two separate

surveys with more than 700 Black pastors and lay leaders, and a roundtable dialog with millennial pastors, the process sought answers regarding access, the level of inclusion in decision-making processes, their perceived importance of public lands and the identification of the stories and history that they see as missing from public lands.

Throughout this Black leader engagement process, it was important to not only identify "missing stories" on public lands but to also model how a community-centered, inclusive consultation can be conducted.

After the initial interview and survey process outlined broad priority categories, an additional survey was conducted with 600 Black church leaders to identify specific places that could benefit from designation and protection. By completing a fuller and inclusive deliberative process, this report outlines specific stories that respondents want told.

As religious leaders sat down to discuss their perspectives and views of public lands, they revealed not only a passion for land conservation and protection but emphasized the need to tell Black history—Black stories—through public lands. Most profoundly, they articulated that showcasing Black history on public lands would not only serve as a salve for trauma but would help counter the organized resistance to Black history. Lifting up their stories on the land, they argued, was not just a mere exercise in filling in history gaps. It was instead a methodology for countering racism. The pastors quite accurately stated that Black history is America's history, and that their ancestors and contemporaries were integral in the making and building of America.

**Public lands "help us take our ministry beyond the walls of the church."**

**- Dr. DeWayne Walker, Senior Pastor of Little Rock AME Zion Church**

The interview series and surveys conducted for this report was an invitation for Black leaders to share their perspectives, concerns and priorities regarding public lands.

### **Recognizing the Importance of Parks**

Even though there was a feeling of exclusion and bias in public lands, those interviewed demonstrated a passionate recognition of the importance of public lands. Of note, 70 percent of those surveyed stated that public parks were very or somewhat important, and the same number (70 percent) stated that public parks and green spaces were important during the pandemic. Survey respondents named recreation/sports (72 percent), gathering of community (70 percent), and outdoor play (65 percent) as the main ways that their communities were using public parks and green spaces.

The top reason survey respondents said that parks, public lands and natural areas are important is because they provide recreational

opportunities (90 percent). Other reasons named for why parks, public lands and natural areas are important included: provide place for community activities (90 percent), allow

people to experience God's creation (79 percent), and good for mental health and wellbeing (78 percent).

The senior pastors interviewed most often named family gatherings and events as the reasons why parks were important. According to Rev. David Peoples, 1st Vice-President of Progressive National Baptist Convention, parks provide "a sense of neighborhood, of family," and they are "another resource that can serve our community." Rev. Kareem Bowen, Pastor of The Potter's Touch International Ministries, noted that health and wellbeing are tied to the land, stating "bodies require green space."

A majority of those interviewed stated that public lands were important for their ability to tell history and preserve heritage. Notably, 77 percent of those interviewed stated that parks and public green spaces were important for their communities during the pandemic.

Public green space "was a blessing to us in the immediacy of the pandemic" said Rev. Calvin McKinney, Senior Pastor of Calvary Baptist Church. These parks and green spaces became much needed gathering spaces during the pandemic for worship, fellowship and rallies.

Public lands, stated Dr. DeWayne Walker, Senior Pastor of Little Rock African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, "help us take our ministry beyond the walls" of the church.

**"The African American community has not seen the funds for the preservation of green spaces."**

**- Rev. Staccato Powell, Jr., Senior Pastor, Fisher AME Zion Church**

"Parks are opportunities for the preserving of God's creation to take place," said Bishop Darryl Starnes, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. "Nature can enhance our communion with God. The health of our people are tied to this."

"Most of our gatherings are in a park," stated Rev. Dr. Ronnie Rector, Senior Pastor, Pilgrim Baptist Church.

### **Access: Creating Hospitality and Avenues for Entry**

Just over half of survey respondents stated that they thought that their community had adequate access to parks, public lands and green spaces. Thirty-four percent said that their community did not have adequate access with 12 percent stating that they weren't sure. These results were somewhat more positive regarding access than the responses obtained during the interviews with senior religious leaders.

While some senior Black leaders interviewed acknowledged that there was access to public parks in their communities, more than half stated that access to public lands contained barriers including fees/permits, transportation to get there, and rundown facilities. Of the barriers to access listed, lack of transportation to public lands was most often cited. Several Black leaders interviewed noted the cumbersome and prohibitive permit process to use public lands for gatherings.

"The hoops you have to go through to have (worship) services there," said Rev. Dr. Cardes Brown, Senior Pastor, New Light Missionary Baptist Church. "You get the feeling that it really

isn't for us." Further study would be needed to determine if the prohibitive process for church use on public lands is uniquely a faith-based issue or if other community of color-led organizations experience the same type of barrier to access.

The results from both the surveys and interviews indicated that an improvement in public lands access is sorely needed. "When it comes to parks, public lands, green spaces, walking trails, and monuments, we really have not had those privileges extended to us," said Rev. Brown.

Communities of color, stated Rev. Dr. Alvin Edwards, General Secretary, National Baptist Convention USA, Inc., "need to have parks in their neighborhoods."

### **Investment: Local Communities and Public Lands**

Of those interviewed, an overwhelming majority (87 percent) said that, as a country, we needed to invest more in our public lands and parks. Every senior religious leader interviewed insisted that there should be an investment in parks and green spaces.

During interviews, several religious leaders noted the disparity between parks and green spaces in their communities versus other communities. Rev. Dr. Bruce Datcher, President of the Texas State Missionary Baptist Convention, articulated the sentiment well: "In too many of our communities, areas and lands that could be used as parks are dilapidated."

"The African American community," stated Rev. Staccato Powell, Jr. "has not seen funds for the preservation of green spaces."

**"In too many of our communities, areas and lands that could be used as parks are dilapidated."**

**- Rev. Dr. Bruce Datcher, President, Texas State Missionary Baptist Convention**



## **Making Room at the Table: Reversing Course**

In describing the level of consultation policymakers and conservation professionals at the local, state and national level had with their communities regarding public lands, the pastors interviewed used words like “never” and “not at all.”

More than 60 percent of the religious leaders interviewed had never been consulted by policymakers or conservation professionals regarding public land issues, with an additional 20 percent stating that they were seldom

Only four percent of those surveyed stated that they had been consulted often, with one-third of those surveyed stating that they had never been consulted. Rev. Dr. Carey Grady stated that there is “a need to have the right voices at the table” for decision-making regarding public lands.

One survey respondent stated “Our perception is that we are shown plans that have already been constructed and our input is politely ignored.” This lack of deliberation has not only shaped their perspectives about local, state and national parks but also has shaped the parks themselves.

## **A Glaring Inequity: A History Gap on Public Lands**

Human stories abound on the land; nevertheless, some stories, like those of African Americans, remain under-told. Of the 2,600 Historical Landmarks, only about 180 of them are considered African American Historical landmarks. Of the 129 National Monuments, dating back to 1906 and designated by U.S. Presidents to permanently protect nationally significant lands and waters, only 12 honor Black history and stories. Eight of those were designated within the last ten years.

“We are clearly underrepresented in national monuments and historic designations,” said Rev. Courtenay Miller.

**“We are pretty much an afterthought with respect to land usage. A lot of the policy meetings for input are held on Wednesdays, when churches hold activities.”**

**– Rev. Dr. James Victor, Senior Pastor, Mt. Olive Baptist Church**

consulted. The survey results were slightly more positive when it came to policymakers and conservation professionals reaching out to them.



"We need markers and designations that tell the story of black history," said Rev. Dr. James Perkins, President, Progressive National Baptist Convention.

Of those surveyed, 81 percent stated that Black history was not adequately told through local and national parks, and of those senior faith leaders interviewed, the resounding answer stated by all those interviewed was "no" when asked if African American history was adequately told.

"These stories are vitally important to our journey," stated Bishop Drew Sheard, Presiding Bishop of Church of God in Christ.

It is a "rich history that is part of the fabric of our nation," said McKinney.

"Our history is entwined with the entire history," said Rev. Dr. Gregory Moss, Former President of the Lott Carey Missionary Convention. "And should be honored not just in Black communities."

"We need to tell our story," said Rev. Terry Alexander, Retired Pastor from Wayside Missionary Baptist Church. "We need to use these parks and start teaching our young folk about our history and

make sure our history goes on and on."

A theme that ran throughout the interviews was the concept that the building of America was done in no small measure through the efforts of African Americans. "We could do a much better job in our parks—state, local, national—of weaving together a better tapestry of the totality of the American experience," stated Rev. Dr. James Victor, Senior Pastor, Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

The religious leaders interviewed highlighted the significant contributions of Black Americans. "It is not just our story, it is America's story," said Rev. Michael McClain, National Outreach Director for the National Religious Partnership for the Environment.

Of note, during the interviews with senior religious leaders, several determined that Black history told through public lands could be a counter to the organized efforts to erase Black history. "With organized opposition to Black history, the need to have history told in the land is prevalent," said Rev. Dr. Bartholomew Banks, President of Progressive Missionary and Educational Baptist State Convention of Florida.

**"We have a wonderful story to tell."**

**– Rev. Dr. Keith Evans, President, Wisconsin General Baptist State Convention, Pastor, Greater Mount Eagle Baptist Church**

# THE UNTOLD STORIES

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Many places that are ripe with stories of Black experiences are awaiting adequate protection or better educational interpretation. These places lift up Black leaders, celebrate Black achievements, recall the Civil Rights journey, mark places of trauma, commemorate the resilience of the Black community, honor ancestors, and house sacred sites. The senior pastors interviewed were posed with the question: what Black stories are missing from our public lands? The answers, which identified a multitude of types of stories, shared an overwhelming consistency. The stories of heroes—those that helped pave the way for other Black Americans to achieve and succeed—were the most longed for and those most in need of recognition through public lands.

The next most frequent category of place named was the need to highlight, through land protection, the contribution that Black schools, both primary, secondary and post-secondary, have made to their journey as a people. Other stories that those interviewed named as being missing from public lands included (listed in stated priority order): Black cemeteries, slavery and the slave trade, civil rights movement, lynching and massacres, settlement and maroon communities, Black business, military contributions, the Great Migration and sports.

## A Salve to the Wounds: The Telling of Tragedy

You don't have to venture far to locate land that holds stories of tragedy for Black Americans. From slave trade markets to massacre sites to places where lynching events were held—these sites tell a particularly gruesome history of race relations that is ripe with trauma.

When asked if the story of African American trauma should be told through public lands with official preservation and education in places where trauma to the Black community has occurred, the overwhelming response by both survey respondents and those interviewed was yes. A compelling 94 percent of survey respondents and 100 percent of senior religious leaders interviewed affirmed the need to tell the story of pain. Some of those interviewed viewed it as a warning for the future. Rev. Dr. Cleveland Mason supported the need to tell the story of Black trauma “so that we hopefully don't repeat the errors of the past.”

“We are tired of not addressing the trauma and our stories being confined to a meta-narrative that eases white and euro-centric consciousness,” said Rev. Dr. George Parks, Jr. “Trauma is not only associated with the pain and injury but it is a point of reference that will inform subsequent thoughts and actions.”

“It would give us therapy to hear our own stories,” said Rev. Gregory Williams, Holsey Temple CME in Atlanta. “It would give us some sense of solace to know that the larger culture is concerned about hearing our story and has the courage to be able to listen and hear these stories be told.”

“As we look at the resiliency of our people against intense unimaginable and horrific trauma it is a lesson for the whole country,” concluded Rev. Victor.



## Paving the Way: Leaders and Pathfinders

When asked what stories are missing from public lands, interviewees most frequently named Black leaders and heroes, those that have paved the way for future Black leaders. They are, according to Bishop Sheard: "People who worked hard to move us to where we are, to give us a start in the direction we are going."

Those interviewed sounded off a litany of underrecognized Black leaders: civil rights icons and activists, medical professionals, politicians, educators and professors, sports coaches and religious leaders.

"We are still discovering prominent people who made advances, discoveries," said Rev. Dr. Mason.

In the follow up surveys of 600 Black church leaders, the following leaders were most often named in an open-ended question that asked which Black leaders stories should be preserved on public lands (listed in order of frequency named): Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Colin Powell, Frederick Douglass, Trayvon Martin, Zora Neale Hurston, Jackie Robinson, Duke Ellington and Langston Hughes. Of note, several leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Medgar Evers and Harriet Tubman were named as those needing national monuments to tell their stories. Since these leaders already have existing monuments named in their honor, this indicates that the

awareness and promotion of national monument designations is sorely needed.

## Black Schools and Colleges

When asked what stories were missing from public lands, schools and colleges were cited a significant number of times during the

**"There are so many Black leaders that if it weren't for them the country would not be where it is today."**

**- Rev. Dr. Cardes Brown, Senior Pastor, New Light Missionary Baptist Church**

interviews, second only to heroes. These educational institutions, which are located in rural, suburban and urban areas, are places where Black students came to learn because of their exclusion from predominantly White educational institutions.

"Schools and colleges (for African Americans) were developed in the 1800s across the US," stated Bishop Lawrence Reddick, Presiding Bishop of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. These early Black colleges served as the stage to educate Blacks. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), established mostly in the South before the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were often named by the religious leaders as critical places for the Black community. Those named in interviews and during surveys included some of the older HBCUs including Homer College (Louisiana), Lincoln University of Pennsylvania, and Spelman College, and Miles College (Alabama).

"We live in a time where we have lost the sense of recognizing how valuable those institutions were to our longevity and our survival," stated Rev. McKinney.

"Black schools," according to Rev. Dr. Warren Stewart, Senior Pastor, First Institutional Baptist Church, Phoenix, "contributed to some of the great leaders in America." And, these schools weren't just colleges and universities. Schools such as Ashburn Colored school, built in the 1800s and cited by Bishop Chadwick Carlton,



pastor, Temple of Healing Waters Church of God in Christ, Dulles, Virginia, during the interviews, is an example of the myriad of one-room African American schoolhouses built in response to segregation and discrimination. The Ashburn school joins other schools for Blacks people including the nearly 5,000 rural schoolhouses, known as Rosenwald Schools, which were established to serve more than 700,000 Black children over the course of four decades.

In the follow-up survey to black leaders, HBCUs were most often cited as educational places in need of protection. Respondents named several HBCUs including Lincoln University, the first degree granting HBCU.

### **Black Cemeteries**

To remember ancestors and hold burial grounds as sacred is common across race, culture and location. Perhaps this is why the Black leaders interviewed named the need to protect Black cemeteries almost as often as they named the need to tell the stories of Black leaders/pathfinders.

As Rev. Dr. Kisha Agard noted, cemeteries are “stories that lay in the grave.” Black cemeteries of enslaved and freed Blacks, as Rev. Dr. Thomas Farrow, pastor of Reeder Memorial Baptist Church in Charlotte, noted during the

Roundtable dialog, are often in danger of being lost or desecrated as development attempts to eradicate these sacred lands. Black cemeteries in particular have the ability to help enhance the ecological integrity of an area. Black cemeteries such as Pierce Chapel African Cemetery in Georgia are prime examples of how ecological and sacred concerns can come together to protect undertold Black stories.

Rev. Dr. Carl Washington, President, Empire Baptist Missionary Convention, noted that many cemeteries, like the ones located in Harlem “have nothing at all that indicates that it ever existed.”

“A lot of Black history has been lost because of the lack of space to allow it to stay,” said Rev. Washington. “Cemeteries have been built over; lands that should have been allocated as historic have been dismissed.”

### **Slavery and the Slave Trade**

Almost as often as they named the need to protect Black cemeteries, the senior pastors interviewed cited slavery and the transatlantic slave trade as a missing story from public lands. The transatlantic slave trade, which saw close to 400,000 enslaved people shipped from Africa, contributed to the thriving system of slavery in the US, which began in the 17th century and lasted until the Civil War. Although it became illegal to import enslaved people from Africa





into the US in 1808, slavery itself continued for another 50 years, and the number of enslaved African Americans increased and became increasingly prominent economically with the rise of the cotton industry in the South.

The senior pastors interviewed noted the importance of telling the full story of the slave trade through public lands. “Slave culture is not adequately told,” said Rev. Dr. Williams.

The religious leaders noted how the implementation of slavery was also the making of America. Their comments honed in on the fact that a fuller picture of slavery as an American institution has been missing from public lands including more stories about slavery itself, including the underground railroad’s extensive network throughout the U.S.

In the follow up survey with Black church leaders, slave markets such as those in St. Augustine and New Orleans and plantations such as Brattonsville in South Carolina were most often named as places to preserve as a way to tell the story of slavery. Slave ships such as the Alexander and Clotilda were named almost as frequently. Other types of slavery sites named included (listed in preference order): underground railroad locations, slave uprisings, slave trader sites and slave roads.

## Civil Rights

The struggle for social justice for Black people, the civil rights movement, took place primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. Although there have been several civil rights national monuments designated, the need to tell the story of civil rights through public lands was cited by the senior pastors almost as often as they noted the need to tell the story of slavery.

The fight for freedom, they noted, could be told by commemorating civil rights meeting places, highlighting civil rights leaders, and acknowledging civil rights events through public land designations.



“It is important to know where we come from; it is important to know the struggle,” said Rev. Dr. Peoples.

In the follow up surveys, the 600 respondents most often named the Black Lives Matter movement, March on Washington, Million Man March and the South Carolina and Alabama bus boycotts as stories that most needed to be told through land protection.


## Lynchings and Massacres

The need to tell the stories of lynching and massacres was mentioned by the senior religious leaders interviewed a number of times. “The lynching of Black youths impacted our struggle,” said Rev. Dr. Walter Solomon, Deputy Director General, National Baptist Congress of Christian Education, National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.

Lynching was used to terrorize and control Black people in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This often public execution of individuals without due process by lawless individuals or mobs was by design brutally violent. These lynchings were often done as public spectator events, with some commanding audiences of thousands of people. According to the NAACP, from 1882 to 1968, 4,743 lynchings occurred in the US in almost every state with about 72 percent of the victims of lynching being Black.

“Lynching has become more modern,” said Rev. Datcher. “They don’t just have to use ropes anymore.”





While lynchings usually target one victim, massacres are a deliberate killing of a large number of people and include attacks on entire communities or groups. The 1898 Wilmington massacre, which killed as many as 60 people, destroyed a once thriving Black community and overthrew the integrated city government, was one example noted during the interviews of a massacre inflicted on Blacks in the US. Like lynchings, massacres were designed to suppress and intimidate.

In the follow up surveys, when presented with an open-ended question about which lynching/massacre sites needed to be preserved as stories on the land, respondents most often named (listed in order of named priority): 2015 Charleston massacre at Emanuel AME church, 1906 Atlanta race riot, 1873 Colfax massacre, and 1923 Rosewood massacre.

### **Settlement and Maroon Communities**

Whether they were communities where Black people resettled to gain freedom and a better life or were maroon communities tucked away in hard-to-reach places to escape being found, the lands where Blacks resettled tell the story of perseverance and adaptation. The pastors interviewed named these types of communities as needing their stories told especially, as Rev. Kylon Middleton, pastor at Mt. Zion AME Church in Charleston noted, because these sites are being developed and lost.

Several specific settlement communities were listed by the Black leaders interviewed including: Mississippi's Freedom City, founded by former cotton field workers with the help of the Delta Ministry; Mount Bayou, Mississippi, founded in 1887 by former slaves; and Lake Lanier, a North Carolina Black community flooded over to make room for a recreational lake.

### **Black Business**

Telling the story of Black business through land designations was mentioned as often by the Black leaders interviewed as settlement communities. Those interviewed, such as Rev. Dr. Kia Moore, pastor at Church of the Well in Memphis, prescribed the need to highlight the success of Black businesses and their contributions to America. This was not just as a way to mark Black history but to give, as Rev. Solomon noted, "greater expression to the importance of Black business to our success."

### **Black Military Service**

Dating back as early as the Revolutionary War, Blacks (including enslaved Blacks), fought for the US and served in the US military. Perhaps this is why using public lands to tell the stories of Blacks in the military was mentioned often by the senior Black pastors.

"African Americans contributed to the American experience even though upon their return they were treated as second class citizens after fighting for the democracy and freedom they were often denied." said Rev. Dr. James Victor, Senior Pastor of Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

Several senior religious leaders stated that those who, as Dr. Talib Shareff, Imam, Masjid Muhammad mosque, describes them, "made sacrifices despite the treatment they endured" needed to be honored through land protection. Cathay Williams, a female Buffalo Soldier, and Colin Powell were two such individuals who was named in the follow up surveys.

# CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

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The goal of this report is to help inform both policymakers and conservation groups of Black American priorities and perspectives regarding public lands in order to guide and transform decision-making. Through surveys, interviews and a roundtable dialog, we identified untold stories that could be highlighted on public lands (in emphasized order): Black heroes/pathfinders, Black schools/colleges, Black cemeteries, slave trade/slavery, civil rights movement, lynching/massacres, settlement communities, Black businesses and Black military service.

Our consultation with Black leaders uncovered their belief that public lands are important for their communities; reiterated the need for investment in public lands, particularly in communities of color; emphasized a need for significantly more inclusion in the decision-making and planning process; and reinforced the need for greater access, which includes transforming public lands to be more welcoming and inclusive. Specifically, those interviewed highlighted how telling Black history through public lands could counter organized efforts to negate Black history.

Recommendations from this deliberative process include:

- Prioritize national monument designations for sites that tell stories of communities of color as a way to combat organized and concerted efforts to erase and discount the history of communities of color.
- Identify sites through a process that centers Black voices that can preserve public lands that lift up the stories of Black leaders, tell the fuller story of slavery and the slave trade, and embody important civil rights stories such as those identified through surveys.



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- Support the identification and protection of Black cemeteries as part of the America the Beautiful initiative.
  - Preserve Black schools such as the Rosenwald schools through monument designation and identify HBCUs that can be preserved through monument designation and other land protections.
  - Increase the visibility of existing and future national monuments that tell the story of Black Americans and ensure that they are adequately funded.

Throughout this Black leader engagement process, we wanted to not only identify “missing stories” on public lands but also model how a community-centered consultation can be conducted. The process undertaken serves as a roadmap for shifting the decision-making process to be more inclusive. Equity and inclusion on America’s public lands can only be achieved through regular, repeated and robust consultation and deliberation with communities of color, where communities of color lead the conservation efforts.

Future public lands planning and identification, whether that be a local community park or a national monument, should be done in and with robust consultation with communities of color. Engagement of any community of color should not come after decisions have already been made; instead, the decisions of what and how public lands are protected, particularly those lands that hold their stories, should be made primarily by the communities of color themselves.

To build upon the insights that were gained through this deliberation, it is recommended that in addition to enhancing the access and inclusion work being done by local, state and national entities, that a follow-up process be conducted to identify specific locations for designation and protection. These places, which could include national monument designation and 30x30 recommendations, should be identified by conducting a process that puts Black community and stakeholder voices at the forefront. This next step is needed to help actualize the vision of inclusive public lands that tell the fuller American story. By completing a full and inclusive deliberative process, of which this consultation was an initial piece, we can change how history is told and thus ensure that public lands are truly accessible.

## INTERVIEW AND ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

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