



# TELLING THE STORIES

PROTECTING BLACK  
HISTORY THROUGH  
LAND CONSERVATION



# BRINGING STORIES TO LIFE

The National Religious Partnership for the Environment's 2022 report, *Stories on the Land*, outlines Black church leaders' views on public lands and showcases priority stories that they view as being imperative to preserve through public land protection. *Telling the Stories* follow-up report details places connected to the named priority stories as a way to encourage acknowledgment of their importance and promote their protection. The places identified are but a few of the many sites deserving of our care and consideration in preservation and conservation decisions as a nation.

As public lands policymakers and conservation professionals seek to create a more inclusive and equitable experience throughout our nation's public parks and lands, the need for underserved and underrepresented communities to be at the decision-making table has become abundantly clear. To this end, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment's *Stories on the Land* report, released in fall 2022, undertook an initiative with Black church leaders to bring forth their perspectives, opinions and concerns regarding public lands. These deliberations revealed a strong sentiment for the value of public lands because of their contribution to the health and well being of communities and the history they uncover.

Even in the face of limited access to public lands, Black church leaders argue that public lands can and should be used to tell the full American story; this is a narrative that must include the contributions that Black Americans have made to the building of our nation. This dialogue with Black church leaders revealed the profound notion that public lands—aside from their inherent health and recreational benefits—could lift up under-told stories and counter the organized effort underway to discount and erase Black history.

Some of the stories identified through the *Stories on the Land* report and the places that help tell those stories are detailed in this follow up report. The places highlighted are just a small sample

of the powerful stories that comprise Black history that can be told and upheld through land conservation.

When asked which stories and parts of Black history were missing from public lands, the Black church leaders most often named:

HEROES & PATHFINDERS  
BLACK SCHOOLS & COLLEGES  
BLACK CEMETERIES  
SLAVERY & THE SLAVE TRADE  
CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT  
LYNCHINGS & MASSACRES  
SETTLEMENT & MAROON COMMUNITIES



# HEROES & PATHFINDERS

There is a litany of under-recognized Black leaders: civil rights icons and activists, medical professionals, politicians, educators and professors, sports figures, writers, musicians and religious leaders, to name a few. Black leaders and heroes are, according to Bishop Drew Sheard of Greater Emmanuel Institutional Church of God in Christ Church in Detroit, “people who have worked hard to move us to where we are, to give us a start.”

# MALCOLM X

After a tumultuous childhood, an eventful adolescence, and a stint in prison, Malcolm X, born Malcolm Little, rose to prominence in the 1950s and 60s as a leader within the Nation of Islam and the Pan-African movement. He is most well known for having been an eloquent and charismatic civil rights activist who was openly critical of the mainstream civil rights movement. Malcolm X was assassinated on February 21, 1965 in New York City.

## LITTLE-COLLINS HOUSE

The Malcolm X-Ella Little-Collins House, located in the Roxbury neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, was the home of Malcolm's sister, Ella Little-Collins, an important organizer in the civil rights movement. Currently owned by the Collins family, this home is where Malcolm X resided intermittently during his early life and teenage years and is the only extant house associated with Malcolm X's childhood. This 2 ½ story wood frame house, built in 1865, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and was put on the National Historic Trust's 11 Most Endangered Places list. Current efforts are underway to transform the house into a cultural space for African American history, social justice and civil rights. The house sits adjacent to Malcolm X Park.



## MALCOLM X HOUSE

The Malcolm X House, located in Inkster, Michigan, once belonged to Malcolm X's brother and Ruth Little. Once Malcolm X was released from prison, the house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, became his place of residence.

With the help of the National Park Service Historic Preservation Fund, Project We Hope, Dream and Believe is currently working to resurrect the home from an abandoned building into a museum and community center, with an expected completion date in 2023. The museum will symbolize the life of Malcolm X while he lived in Inkster.

# FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Frederick Douglass, born a slave, escaped to freedom and became a national leader in the abolitionist movement. A writer, statesman, social reformer and orator, Douglass was one of the most influential African Americans of the nineteenth century.

## TWIN OAKS

Twin Oaks, Douglass' summer home, sits on the shore of Highland Beach on the Chesapeake Bay in Annapolis, Maryland. The community of Highland Beach was itself founded in 1893 by Frederick Douglass' youngest son, Charles, when he and his family were turned away from other summer resorts because of their race. Highland Beach became a popular summer vacation spot for African Americans in the Washington, DC, and Maryland area. One unique feature of the home is a second story balcony from which Frederick Douglass could, "look across the Bay to the Eastern Shore" to where he was born a slave. The house, owned by the State of Maryland and Anne Arundel County, is on the National Register of Historic Places and currently serves as a museum.



# ZORA NEALE HURSTON

Zora Neale Hurston was a renowned writer, anthropologist, and luminary of the Harlem Renaissance. Most of her works focus on Black life in the American South and include four novels and over 50 short stories and essays; her most famous novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, was published in 1937. Before heading to New York, Ms. Hurston spent her childhood in Eatonville, Florida, regarded as the first incorporated Black community in the US. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Eatonville is known for Zora Fest, held each January to honor her life and works. She returned to Florida later in life, setting up residence in Fort Pierce, and remained there until her death.

## THE ZORA HOUSE

The Zora Neale Hurston House is the only known residence of Hurston's left standing. Zora Neale Hurston spent the last part of her life in Fort Pierce, Florida. She moved into what is now known as the Zora Neale Hurston House in 1957, when Dr. Clem C. Benton, Jr., offered her the opportunity to live rent-free while she continued to write. It is in this home that she wrote *Herod the Great*, one of her major works. The Zora Neale Hurston House, a National Historic Landmark, is part of the Zora Neale Hurston Dust Tracks Heritage Trail, which includes Zora Neale Hurston's gravesite and the former St. Lucie County Welfare Home where Ms. Hurston died. The Zora Neale Hurston Florida Education Foundation is working to protect and preserve the Zora Neale Hurston House.



# JACKIE ROBINSON

Jack Roosevelt “Jackie” Robinson was a professional baseball player famous for breaking the sport’s color line. He became the first African American to play Major League Baseball when he was signed to play for the Brooklyn Dodgers. His celebrity status was immensely helpful in the effort to advance human rights in the US; Robinson became a leader in the civil rights movement after he spearheaded the integration of baseball.

## JACKIE ROBINSON BALLPARK

The Jackie Robinson Ballpark, located in Daytona Beach, Florida, is the oldest Minor League Baseball stadium and was the site of Jackie Robinson’s first appearance in 1944 in professional baseball. The stadium marks where baseball broke the color barrier and began its path towards integration. The ballpark, owned by the city of Daytona Beach, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and includes a museum that highlights Robinson’s achievements and legacy. Plaques along the Riverwalk commemorate Robinson’s athletic and civil rights accomplishments. In an effort to preserve Robinson’s history, legacy and the riverfront ballpark, which bears his name, the city of Daytona Beach is in the process of developing a \$30 million renovation project to improve the complex.



# DUKE ELLINGTON

Widely considered one of the greatest jazz musicians and composers of all time, Duke Ellington left a tremendous legacy in his wake. Born in Washington, DC, he started to play professionally at seventeen. Known for his instrumental composition, piano playing, impact on ‘big-band’ jazz, and incredible influence on American music, Ellington was awarded the Medal of Freedom, elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

## ELKTONIA-CARR’S BEACH

Elktonia-Carr’s Beach, one of the places where Duke Ellington performed, was founded by formerly enslaved Frederick Carr and his wife, Mary Wells Carr, in 1926. The 180 acres of waterfront farmland on Annapolis Neck was a place where all were welcome at a time when a majority of vacation destinations were for Whites only. Over the years, Carr’s beach and the adjacent Sparrow’s Beach, owned by Elizabeth Carr Smith’s sister, attracted hundreds of thousands of visitors and became a popular vacation spot for Black families, hosting performers such as Tina Turner, Chuck Berry, Sarah Vaughan, James Brown, The Temptations, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington. Under the leadership of Blacks for the Chesapeake, the property, once thought to have been lost to development, was secured with a commitment by the State of Maryland to restore and preserve the beach.



# BLACK SCHOOLS & COLLEGES

Black schools and colleges were founded to educate Black students because they were excluded from predominantly White educational institutions. Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), established mostly in the South before the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, were and continue to be critical institutions for Black education.

## LINCOLN COLLEGE

Lincoln College, located in Chester County, Pennsylvania, was chartered in 1854 and originally founded by the Presbytery of New Castle as the Ashmun Institute to provide a liberal arts and theological education to Black men. It is considered to be the first degree-granting HBCU and was renamed Lincoln University in 1866.

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Lincoln University's Historic District comprises nearly 30 mid-19th and 20th century residential and institutional buildings within the university. Notable alumni include US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall and poet Langston Hughes.

In the mid 20th century, the school actively challenged Jim Crow laws, established one of the first African studies programs in the US, and championed civil rights for its students and staff.

The college, which has a largely intact collection of late 19th century and early 20th century architecture, has been actively working to preserve campus buildings and sites such as the Amos House, important as a marker for the aspirations for African American freedom. Preservation efforts include working with the National Park Service through the African-American Civil Rights Grant Program.





# BLACK CEMETERIES

To remember ancestors and hold burial grounds as sacred is common across race, culture and religious affiliation. Black cemeteries, too often endangered by development, are sacred grounds in desperate need of preservation and can serve as important conservation spaces.

## PIERCE CHAPEL AFRICAN CEMETERY

Located in Harris County, Georgia, on private land owned by the descendants of the former plantation owners, Pierce Chapel African Burial Ground is the sacred burial place of more

than 500 African Americans and enslaved people. The graves, which were recently uncovered, date back to the 1800s and include enslaved persons, landowners and military veterans. West African burial traditions are evident at the cemetery. Like too many other Black cemeteries, Pierce Chapel African Cemetery was not well known or marked as a cemetery until recently. A community of descendants and the Hamilton Hood Foundation are working to reclaim and restore this African American burial ground.







# SLAVERY & THE SLAVE TRADE

The full history of slavery and the slave trade, which saw close to 400,000 enslaved people shipped from Africa to North America, is a story that has been missing from public lands. “Slave culture is not adequately told,” said Rev. Dr. Greg Williams, of Power Good News Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in Atlanta. The slave trade is begrudgingly acknowledged in places like the Old Slave Market in Charleston, currently operating as a museum; the St. Augustine Slave Market, located in historic St. Augustine with minimal reference to and interpretation of the selling of enslaved people; and the Old Slave Market in New Orleans, an essentially unmarked location that is now a hotel.

# THE CLOTILDA

The *Clotilda*, which was burned and abandoned near Mobile, Alabama, is the last known ship to have carried people from Africa to the United States in bondage. After the Civil War, the survivors of the passage of the *Clotilda* came together to form a community, known as Africatown, in Mobile. The native languages and cultural traditions of the original founders remain there today, preserved in part by direct descendants of those brought aboard the *Clotilda* who still live in Africatown.

The story of the *Clotilda* was famously chronicled in Zora Neale Hurston's book *Barracoon*, based on interviews with one of the last known survivors of the *Clotilda*. In 1984, nine descendants of the original 110 people enslaved on the *Clotilda* came together to form the *Clotilda* Descendants Association and today

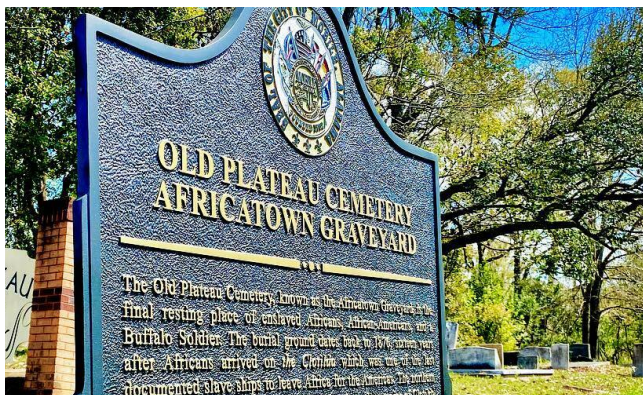


## AFRICATOWN

The Africatown Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, lies north of Mobile and is mostly residential; it includes a small number of businesses, a school, a church, and a cemetery. The Old Plateau Cemetery is particularly meaningful and relevant to the culture and history of Africatown.

work to preserve the history and well-being of the Africatown community.

The wreckage of the *Clotilda* was found in 2019 and is one of the best preserved and most intact ships from the slave trade that has been discovered. Together with the National Park Service Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, the Mississippi State University Landscape Architecture School, and the Africatown Connections Blueway team, members of the Africatown community are working to design and create a system of trails that preserves and connects the natural, historical, and cultural resources of Africatown. The project would highlight 14 points of interest, including the *Clotilda* wreck site.



# PLANTATIONS

Plantations were an instrument of colonization and wealth acquisition that relied primarily on enslaved labor. Plantations and the culture they embodied were prominent in the United States South and included such sites as Kingsley Plantation and Brattonsville Plantation. Kingsley Plantation, owned by Zephaniah Kingsley who was known for his *Treatise* on slavery that advocated for the rights of a free Black population, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, is part of the Timucuan Ecological and Historical Preserve and is protected by the National Park Service.



## BRATTONSVILLE PLANTATION

Historic Brattonsville, located in South Carolina, comprises nearly 800 acres of land, includes a Revolutionary War battlefield and features over 30 18th and 19th century structures. The Brattons were one of the most prominent planter families in the area and owned a total of 139 enslaved people by 1843. Operated by the York County Cultural and Heritage Commission, it is one of the few living history sites interpreting African American history.

Along with the ongoing conservation strategies of historic properties at Brattonsville, the Culture & Heritage Museum of Brattonsville continues the interpretive research that uncovers forgotten chapters of York County's past. In May 2021, Historic Brattonsville was accepted to the National Park Service's National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom Program.

The Brick House made its inaugural opening to the public in November 2021 with the new exhibit "Liberty & Resistance: Reconstruction and the African American Community at Brattonsville 1865-1877." The exhibit tells the story of Capt. James Williams, a South Carolina civil rights

leader who was formerly enslaved on the Bratton Plantation. In authenticating the exhibit's narrative, CHM teamed up with local historians, scholars, and descendants from Brattonsville's enslaved community, including the family of Williams. In April 2022, the restoration project's exhibits led to the site's inclusion in the National Park Service's Reconstruction Era National Historic Network.





# MASSACRES & LYNCHING

Lynching was used to terrorize and control Black people in the 19th and 20th centuries. This often public execution of individuals without due process by lawless individuals or mobs was, by design, brutally violent. 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 being Black. While lynching usually targets one victim, massacres are a deliberate killing of a large number of people and include attacks on entire communities or groups. Like lynching, massacres were designed to suppress and intimidate. One of the more notorious and devastating massacres was the Springfield Race Riot of 1908, in which a mob of white residents attacked the Black community in Springfield after attempting to capture and lynch two Black men who had been arrested for alleged assault. The riot, which left 8 African Americans dead and destroyed numerous Black-owned properties, demonstrated that racism and violence was pervasive throughout the country, not only in the South, and served as a catalyst for the founding of the NAACP.

# MOTHER EMANUEL AME CHURCH

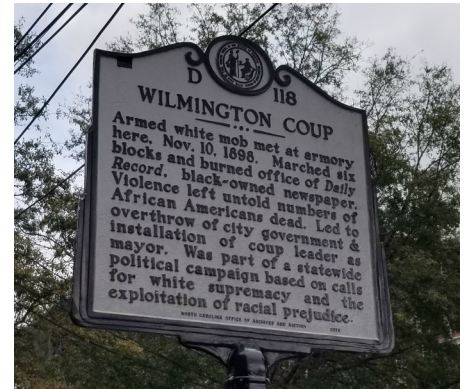


Founded in 1816 in Charleston, South Carolina, Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church is the oldest AME church in the South and is home to the longest standing Black congregation south of Baltimore, Maryland. The church has a rich history that tells the story of Black religious congregations and the struggles that they faced, alongside all people of color, throughout the South.

Because of its role in providing space for both enslaved and free African Americans and its pushback against slavery and racism in the community, the church was burned down in the 1830s and rebuilt in 1834; the congregation was forced to meet in secret until 1864. The church was rebuilt again in 1891 after sustaining hurricane damage and the same Gothic Revival style structure still remains today. In 2015, while attending religious education at the church, 9 Black men and women were killed by a white supremacist. Remarkably, members of the congregation chose to publicly forgive the shooter. The shooting increased public awareness of racially motivated violence, hate crimes, and white supremacy/nationalism and prompted the removal of a Confederate flag on South Carolina State House grounds. The church is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a part of the African American Civil Rights Network. Currently, the congregation is working on a memorial to those killed during the massacre.

# WILMINGTON COUP

In 1898, in Wilmington, North Carolina, a White mob seized the reins of the city government and, in so doing, destroyed *The Daily Record*, a local black-owned newspaper. The White mob numbering 2,000 people marched throughout the streets of Wilmington and began to attack Black citizens. The true number of casualties are still unknown and range from the coroner's report of 14 to potentially hundreds, all African American. Eventually, the group marched to the city hall and successfully took over the city government, making it the only successful coup d'état in American history and terminating the participation of African Americans in the local government. Prior to the coup, Wilmington had a thriving Black community and a racially diverse local government.



The Wilmington coup was the first major race riot since Reconstruction and was noted in the National Park Service's Tulsa Race Riot reconnaissance study as "the harbinger of the racial violence that would engulf many urban centers in the United States during the pre-World War I period." The location of *The Daily Record* is now on a vacant lot owned by the St. Luke AME Zion church and members of the congregation are working to preserve the story of the Wilmington Coup and highlight its impacts.



# THE ROSEWOOD MASSACRE



Rosewood, located in North Central Florida, was a majority Black community that was founded in the mid 1800s. Racial violence erupted in January 1923 when a White woman accused a Black man of assaulting her. Many Rosewood residents sought refuge in the nearby woods and swamp and in the home of White merchant John Wright. The town itself was permanently destroyed and at least 5 Black residents were killed. The story and history of Rosewood was buried until the early 1980s. More than a decade later, in 1994, the Florida legislature awarded reparations to the survivors of the Rosewood Massacre.

The John Wright House, the place of shelter for many of the Black residents fleeing the violence, is the last house standing in the community. The Real Rosewood Foundation is working to preserve the house to ensure that the story of Rosewood is preserved.

# THE ELAINE MASSACRE

The Elaine Massacre, which occurred in the Red Summer of 1919, was a conflict between Black sharecroppers and White residents of Elaine, Arkansas. False rumors of an insurrection prompted White mobs to indiscriminately kill any Black person they came across, resulting in the deaths of around 237 Black men, women, and children. The

heavily biased prosecution of the Elaine 12, in which 12 Black men were tried for participating in the fabricated insurrection, resulted in the landmark Supreme Court case *Moore v. Dempsey* in 1923 regarding due process under the 14th Amendment. The case recognized the rights of Black people and was a major victory in the advancement of civil rights. Both the Phillips County Courthouse, where the Elaine 12 and 122 other African Americans were convicted and Centennial Baptist Church, led by Rev. E.C. Morris, are highlighted in the National Park Service's *Reconnaissance Survey of Selected Civil Rights Sites in Phillips County, Arkansas*.

**The Centennial Baptist Church** in Helena, Arkansas, was led by the Rev. E.C. Morris, the National Baptist Convention's first president and one of the most influential persons in the history of the Black church. The church, listed as a National Historic Landmark, functioned as the headquarters of the National Baptist Convention where Rev. Morris advocated for Black advancement and self-determination. Rev. Morris was appointed to the interracial Commission on Race Relations convened by the then Arkansas Governor in the wake of the Elaine Massacre. The commission recommended that the Elaine 12 appeal to the state supreme court. Throughout the events associated with the Elaine Massacre, Rev. Morris encouraged cooperation between races.




# SETTLEMENT COMMUNITIES

Whether they were communities where Black people resettled to gain freedom and a better life or maroon communities tucked away in hard-to-reach places to escape persecution, the lands where Blacks resettled tell their story of perseverance and adaptation.

## CHUBBS CHAPEL

Chubbs Chapel United Methodist Church, built in 1870, is one of the oldest African American churches in rural Georgia. It is the only surviving structure of what was once Chubbtown, a community founded by Isaac Chubb, a Black man born in 1797 in North Carolina. The town consisted of its own post office, a general store, blacksmith shop, grist mill, syrup mill, saw mill, wagon company, cotton gin, and casket factory, many of which the Chubb brothers helped to operate. Chubb Chapel United Methodist Church, listed on the National Register of Historic Places with an active congregation, is a Gothic Revival style church.





Together, these places in need of preservation and conservation highlight under-told stories, as identified by leaders in the Black community. By prioritizing these and other stories that chronicle Black history, we can change how history is told and thus ensure that public lands are both accessible and truly reflective of America.

If American history is to be told in its entirety, the call of Black church leaders to preserve historic sites such as these must be heeded, for the key to understanding America's troubled past lies in wood-frame building skeletons and in the voids created by acts of erasure. The structural integrity of some of these time-worn buildings and the enduring stories embedded within African American communities is a testament to the spirit of African American resistance. These buildings and lands, which hold deep scars and showcase Black agency, must be properly cared for in order for our nation to properly heal. These stories deserve to be told, and through increased accessibility to public lands, they can be. They *must* be, for American history does not truly exist without Black history.

Produced by: National Religious Partnership for the Environment, 2023

Research/Writing Team: Brigitte Bazie and Katie Glenn